

This article was downloaded by: [North West University]

On: 02 October 2012, At: 02:24

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/recq20>

### The rise and demise of Scope magazine: A media-historical perspective

Johannes Froneman

Version of record first published: 03 Mar 2011.

To cite this article: Johannes Froneman (2011): The rise and demise of Scope magazine: A media-historical perspective, *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 32:1, 49-65

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2011.545565>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# The rise and demise of *Scope* magazine: A media-historical perspective

Johannes Froneman

## Abstract

During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, *Scope* magazine became a South African publishing icon. It challenged the censorship laws of the time with pin-up pictures of bikini-clad girls and star-covered breasts. During the 1990s, when the apartheid regime was on its way out, other magazines pushed the boundaries much further. To defend its circulation, *Scope* became more risqué, to the point where full-frontal nudity was published. Something gave and circulation slumped. In reaction, the publishers repositioned *Scope* as an up-market magazine for males in 1995. Its circulation all but disappeared, leading to the magazine's closure in 1996. The article records this history by noting the changing content of the magazine and the role played by *Scope*'s editors and a succession of censors. Answers are sought to the question why the magazine could not survive the press freedom it fought for. It is concluded that *Scope*'s demise could be attributed to various factors, but it is suggested that a pending empowerment deal may well have been a decisive reason.

**Keywords:** apartheid-era censorship, press freedom, *Scope*, skin magazine, tabloids

## Introduction

During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, *Scope* magazine became an anti-establishment South African cultural institution, if the press coverage it generated during its years of publication and after its closure, as well as subsequent Internet postings are reliable indicators (cf. Ostendo 2010). But more important was *Scope*'s consistent challenges to the strict censorship regime of the time. This refusal to accept the prevailing socio-political restrictions represented an important libertarian, anti-establishment position during a period of National Party (NP) government hegemony (cf. Murray 1996). Ironically, the dawning of political liberty for all citizens in the 1990s contributed, possibly significantly, to the quiet demise of *Scope* in 1996.

In this article, the often tumultuous history of *Scope* will be situated within the changing South African socio-political context of the period 1966–1996. This context included an authoritarian approach to the media by the government of the time. Therefore, a brief overview will be provided of how a succession of 'censors-in-chief' implemented the statutory regulations pertaining to publications such as *Scope*.

On an empirical level, this article will explore how *Scope* evolved from a newsy pictorial magazine in the pre-TV era, to a top-selling magazine best known for its pin-up centerfolds and run-ins with apartheid-era censors. The prime intention, however, is to construct a media-historical narrative which will contribute to the still lean South African media-historiography.

## The beginning

*Scope* first appeared in July 1966, with Sophia Loren on the cover. It was published by the Hyman brothers, who had an eye for populist tastes and built a small publishing empire in Durban on the back of ‘picture books’ (i.e. pocket-sized photo books) such as *Tessa, Ruiter in Swart* and *Mark Condor* (Golding-Duffy 1996).

*Scope* was only a few months old when Prime Minister H.F. Verwoerd was assassinated in parliament. The magazine, which then was very much a news-orientated publication, covered the event and its consequences in detail (as most newspapers and magazines did), but also had the courage to add some caveat. Its main story on the funeral, accompanied by huge photos, was headed: THE ENTIRE NATION MOURNS ... AND A CRITICAL WORLD PRESS PASSES CAUSTIC COMMENT (*Scope*, 23 September 1966). One of the critical comments published was that of Peregrine Worsthorne of the London *Daily Telegraph*, who opined as follows on Verwoerd: ‘Although excoriated in his own lifetime, history may judge him less evil than tragic. It was not that he served the Devil, but that he served the wrong gods at the wrong time.’

*Scope*’s first years also saw the first moon landing and the first ever heart transplant, performed by Dr Christiaan Barnard in Cape Town (cf. Golding-Duffy 1996). These were eventful times, which South Africans experienced without the benefit of television coverage – this medium was only introduced in the country in 1976, leaving opportunities for a lively picture-orientated news magazine to exploit in the period sans TV (cf. Van der Walt 1996).

The publishing world also experienced its share of turmoil. The publisher of *Scope*, Republican Press, was taken over by one of the Afrikaans publishing giants of the time, Perskor. *Scope* thus became a publication of a company that had National Party cabinet ministers as directors and sided with the more conservative elements in government (cf. Richard 1986, 147–158). Being owned by Perskor was a factor which eventually proved to be crucial, if not decisive.

## Political and social environment

The period 1966–1996 includes two phases in South Africa’s political history. From 1966 to early 1990 the National Party ruled with an ever-tighter fist, as black protest flared up in the mid 1970s and endemically in the 1980s (cf. Giliomee and Mbenga 2007, 346–394). After F.W. de Klerk’s 2 February 1990 speech the country changed markedly, culminating in the 1994 general election which brought the ANC to power and ended white rule (cf. Giliomee and Mbenga 2007, 396–408).

During the period prior to 1990, important newspapers were generally free to criticise apartheid laws (although a few were banned). Restrictions with regard to ‘defense and broad national security’ (Barker 1998, 283), however, made it impossible for newspapers to write freely (cf. Burns 1990, 69–137; Grogan and Barker 1993, 229–244). Editors thus came under increasing pressure from government, as a substantial body of evidence proves. This is described in some detail by editors such as Harvey Tyson (1993) of *The Star*, as well as Joel Mervis (1989) of the *Sunday Times*, Irwin Manoim (1996) of *The Weekly Mail* (later to be named *Mail & Guardian*) and Hennie van Deventer (1998) of *Volksblad*.

Editors were indeed faced by pressures both political and financial, which were often intermingled (cf. Gibson 2006). Even reformist Afrikaans editors such as Schalk Pienaar (Mouton 2002, 86–95) had to fight on two fronts: within the Afrikaans political and cultural establishment and for economical survival, although Afrikaans papers were part of larger companies which could afford to cross-subsidise them from other revenues. Financial pressures increased markedly after the introduction of advertising on television in the late 1970s.

The SABC was fully under government influence during these years and only gained a measure of independence in the run-up to the 1994 elections (Teer-Tomaselli and De Villiers 1998, 160–167). That left the general magazines market as the only media not placed under constant political pressure, but probably only because consumer magazine editors were generally not interested in strong political stories. (One notable exception was Dene Smuts, who lost her editorship at *Fair Lady* for following a political line not acceptable to the Naspers board [*Die Burger* 1987; Steyn 2002, 317, 318].)

*Scope*, on the other hand, increasingly published material of a sexual nature, deemed problematic by a censorship regime that generally focused on movies, books and magazines with ‘undesirable’ political and sexual content (cf. Burns 2001, 138, 144–150). In so doing, the magazine transgressed a basic assumption of the prevalent authoritarian media model, namely that the press should avoid acting in contravention of prevailing moral values (cf. McQuail 1989, 85, 86).

## Statutory framework

The 1960s into which *Scope* was introduced, was a publishing environment fraught with dangers. The Cronjé Commission of Enquiry into ‘the evil of indecent, offensive or harmful literature’ (including magazines) resulted in ‘draconian’ recommendations being published in 1957 (McDonald 2009, 23). During 1960, the government responded with draft legislation which came in for very sharp criticism. Verwoerd’s government eventually put the Publications and Entertainments Act, 1963, on the statute book. It was to serve as the ‘cornerstone of the apartheid bureaucracy’ (McDonald 2009, 32). The act stated, *inter alia*:

A publication or object shall be deemed to be undesirable if it or any part of it –

- (a) is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals;
- (b) is blasphemous or is offensive to the religious convictions or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic;
- (c) brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt;
- (d) is harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic;
- (e) is prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare or the peace and good order.

McDonald (2009, 33) notes that during the period 1964–1974, ‘over ten thousand publications were banned, fewer than thirty appeals were heard (and many of these concerned *Scope*, a popular, mildly titillating local weekly)’. Thus *Scope* was born into a restrictive environment in which ‘undesirable’ materials were punishable by fines or prison sentences. The magazine certainly did not escape the censors’ attention.

Jannie Kruger, a former newspaper editor, played an important role as chairman of the Publications Board. He was, according to some critics, an ‘autocratic buffoon’ who was neatly in step with government’s ‘general hardening’ of attitudes regarding ‘new forms of culture and political resistance’ (McDonald 2009, 53). Later he made way for J.L. Pretorius, who headed the new directorate of publications (McDonald 2009, 61, 62). Yet another player entered the arena in 1974: Judge J.H. (Lammie) Snyman, who as chair of the new Publications Appeals Board, would also play a prominent role in *Scope*’s long-running battle with the censors.

In 1974 the censorship legislation was updated, and recourse to the courts ‘all but abolished’ (Burns 1990, 228–283; McDonald 2009, 34; cf. Van Rooyen 1987, 27, 28). The key provisions, quoted above, were kept intact (cf. Van Rooyen 1987, 7). The censors were now required to determine what was ‘undesirable’ in relation to the ‘median of standards in the community’ as ‘represented by the average decent-minded, law-abiding, modern and enlightened citizen with Christian principles’ (McDonald 2009, 61). During the 1970s *Scope* was often banned, but according to Claassen (1998, 132), ‘just as often unbanned after appeal’. These well-publicised bannings probably did more to stimulate *Scope*’s circulation than any advertising. Readers who heard of the banning on the radio could purchase a copy at the local store long before the magazines could be removed. Prof Kobus van Rooyen, who took over as chair of the Publications Appeals Board in April 1980, adopted a ‘progressive and open-minded censorship policy’, which led to publishers becoming ‘more venturesome’ (Claassen 1998, 132, 133). A few months later a new director of publications, Abraham Coetzee, was appointed. Van Rooyen and Coetzee were to play a significant role in the transitional years after 1990, culminating in the demise of apartheid censorship (Claassen 1998, 132, 133). In 1996, the Publications Act of 1974 was replaced by the Film and Publications Act (Barker 1998, 283), but by then *Scope*’s last rites were being read.

In the 1990s, Louis Pienaar, a politician and advocate, and a law professor, Dan Morkel, chaired the PAB (McDonald 2009, 76, 82). Under the latter's chairmanship *Scope* finally succumbed – but not as a result of censorship, as we shall see. However, the various directors and chairpersons each played a part in interpreting the law and thereby acted as gatekeepers that infuriated *Scope*'s editors and readers. *Scope* and its contemporaries could not publish without taking constant cognizance of the prevailing censorship climate which, in turn, was influenced by individuals' perspectives (cf. Van Rooyen 1987, 17) – not least those of the leading figures mentioned above.

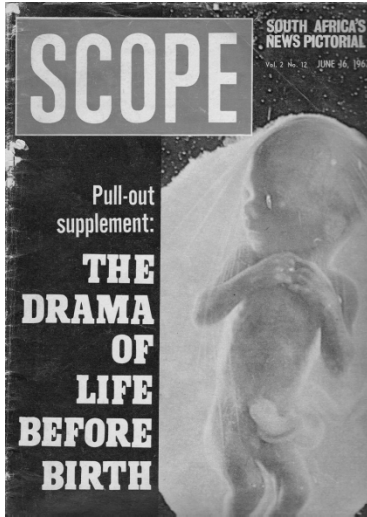
These censors were all male Afrikaners who supported the NP government of the time and its adherence to strict Calvinist moral views, which were enforced on the whole population. They thus acted within a particular paradigm which, in time, would expire. Prof Van Rooyen, who was to become a dominant figure in the pre- and post-1994 external and internal regulation of the media and played an important role in moving censorship away from said paradigm, explained the rationale of the Publications Appeal Board and Supreme Court decisions as early as 1978, updated in 1987 under the title *Censorship in South Africa* (Van Rooyen 1987).

Although *Scope* is mentioned a few times in this book (e.g. regarding the 'stricter rules' which were applied to the outside cover of a publication with mass appeal [Van Rooyen 1987, 60]), the references are somewhat cryptic and therefore shed little additional light on *Scope*'s ongoing battle with the censors. (The interested reader will thus have to examine the original findings – something which falls outside the scope of this article.)

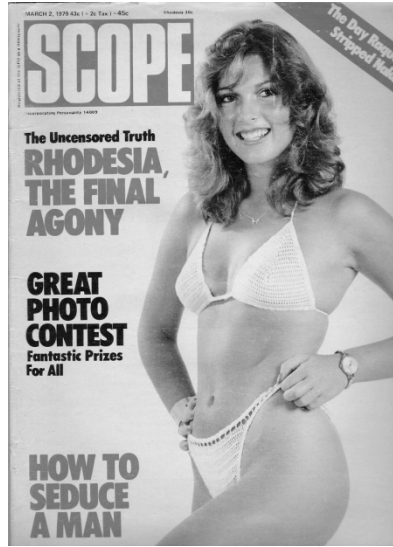
However, an important point relevant to understanding the censors' dim view regarding some of *Scope*'s issues is made clear enough by Van Rooyen (1987, 72). He explains that the PAB changed its view of the term 'harmful' so as to imply 'more than the mere treatment of the immoral as normal and natural, satisfying and right' (Van Rooyen 1987, 55). With reference to 'sexual advice' offered by *Scope*, the 1980–1985 board 'altered its interpretation of "harmful" so that "harmful" is now taken to describe matters which is (sic) likely to make a substantial number of normal likely readers more prone to imitate the immorality portrayed' (Van Rooyen 1987, 72). This, Van Rooyen argues, represented a 'more pragmatic' approach. But *Scope* still ran afoul of the censors on a rather regular basis, even in the 1990s, when the writing was on the wall for old-style censorship.

In 1994, the Minister of Home Affairs appointed a task group to draft a new act to replace the Publications Act of 1974. Van Rooyen (cited in Burns 2001, 145) noted that the task group came to the conclusion that the old act 'intruded upon freedom of choice of adults in an unreasonable manner in that it makes bannings widely possible by employing vague terminology; generally regulates the privacy of an adult too strenuously; gives preference to the Christian religion ...'

A new act, the Film and Publications Act, 65 of 1996, replaced the act which had resulted in *Scope* being banned so often in the past. But by then *Scope* was fighting for survival against a number of international titles which tried to seize the moment (see below).



**Figure 1:** *Scope*, 16 June 1967:  
A news-orientated cover before the bikini-clad models were introduced



**Figure 2:** *Scope*, 2 March 1979:  
A typical bikini-girl cover

## **Scope's migration to bikini-girl pin-ups**

Founding editor Jack Shepherd Smith described *Scope* as a 'pioneering magazine' with 'real good reports and entertaining reads'. Twice-editor Dave Mullany agreed with this view and insisted that the magazine was misunderstood. 'It always contained quality reports and well-written articles, but readers and media people alike seem to remember the magazine as a tits-and-bum porn magazine, which it was not,' he argued (Golding-Duffy 1996). Mullany also stated, however, with some ambivalence, that *Scope* was 'never into meaningful, save-the-world journalism' and even in the darkest years of apartheid 'gave rebellion a voice' (Murray 1996).

In its early years *Scope* was indeed much more than a magazine crammed with pin-ups; it could then rightly be described as a 'mild family type publication aspiring to be a local version of *Life* magazine' (Granger 1996). *Scope* then featured strong news reports and prominent photos of local and international events which grabbed the attention. This included coverage of the wars in Rhodesia and later on the Angolan border, which were defining the period and enjoyed extensive prominence (cf. *Scope*, 8 August 1975; *Scope*, 2 March 1979).<sup>1</sup> Many young white South African soldiers sent to fight the war were avid readers of *Scope*, to such an extent that when the war in Angola ended in 1989, circulation took a marked knock (Granger 1996).

The dramatic photos of life before birth – on the cover and splashed all over a pull-out supplement (*Scope*, 16 June 1967) (see Figure 1) – were quite daring as pictures of this nature were never published before – certainly not in magazines available to the general public in South Africa. Other stories in the same issue (also) had a mild tabloid feel to them, i.e. stories with a real-life (or death) flavour presented with large pictures and strong headings, a touch of celebrity, sport and an article which described what it

felt like to die, founding-editor Jack Shepherd Smith later recalled. Essentially it was a populist news magazine without pin-up girls.

While *Scope* started off as a general news magazine with strong news pictures, the magazine began to 'migrate towards female flesh' as early as September 1966, as Dugmore (2006) described the content 40 years on, referring to an article on the international model Jean Shrimpton (including some slightly revealing photos). Shepherd Smith later recalled that *Scope* also published pictures of Jackie Onassis sunbathing in the nude (with black strips covering strategic parts) (Golding-Duffy 1996). When Shepherd Smith made way for David Mullany in 1978, *Scope*'s 'migration was well on its way to Misses March, April and May' (Dugmore 2006). So while *Scope* may not have started off as a 'skin magazine' in the *Playboy* and *Penthouse* tradition (cf. Claassen 1993, 112), it did not take long to become one, albeit a milder version.

An issue from the 1970s (*Scope*, 2 March 1979) confirms what the magazine had become. The cover featured a wholesome-looking girl in a bikini (see Figure 2) as well as the following front-page teasers:

The Uncensored Truth RHODESIA, THE FINAL AGONY

GREAT PHOTO CONTEST

HOW TO SEDUCE A MAN and

The Day Raquel Welch Stripped Naked.

The 'skin' content of *Scope* was strengthened by the substantial number of glamour pictures of young women in bikinis, including a centrespread. Furthermore, the inside cover carried a full-page advertisement for the next issue, which was to feature 'Another *SCOPE* Special Report: THE A to Z OF SEX'. (The word 'sex' was printed in very large letters.)

However, most pages were reserved for an extensive report on the war in Rhodesia, supplemented by some 25 photos, many in colour and some of a disturbing nature, e.g. slaughtered 'terrorist' victims lying prostrate in the grass. The feature was the first in a series. These articles may well have been a redeeming factor in the eyes of the ruling establishment: although the skin content was frowned upon (and often enough acted upon), significant space was allocated to 'anti-terrorism' copy and pictures which praised the then-government's support for Rhodesia and its own border wars. In so doing, *Scope* was to an extent complicit with the government's security policies of the time, although the parties were engaged, ironically, in a low-intensity war on the moral front. Notwithstanding its views on the border wars, Mullany preferred to describe *Scope* as a counter-cultural magazine which gave a 'tangible presence to that sense of healthy rebellion and distaste for petty authority'. Of *Scope*'s heyday, he said: 'Thousands of young South African males were living in a Calvinist, repressive society with an almost Nazi-like voice articulating what they could and couldn't do and they felt like saying f\*\*\* y\*\*\*' (Granger 1996).

Another noteworthy aspect is the fiction carried by *Scope* in the 1970s, which goes back to 1966, when the magazine inter alia serialised Heinz Konzalik's *In Siberia a girl*



*is waiting*. A serial featured in 1979 reflected the Cold War reality of the time, while others had strong adventure themes.

Then, in the early 1980s, the publisher of *Scope*, Republican Press, was taken over by one of the Broederbond-influenced Afrikaans publishing giants of the time, Perskor, leading to Mullany being fired in 1983 (Dugmore 2006; cf. Richard 1986, 115–117). However, the magazine did not do that well under three subsequent editors, and Mullany was brought back five years later (Dugmore 2006).

*Scope* had dropped the glamour centerfold poster in Mullany's absence, but it returned with fanfare after a readers' survey indicated that this was what *Scope*'s readers indeed wanted (*Scope*, 24 April 1987). Christopher Backeberg, one of the editors who replaced Mullany, explained in some detail in a *Letter from the editor* why the magazine's square back was dropped, and *Scope* reverted back to a saddle-stitched (stapled) magazine. The reason was simple: it was impossible to print a fold-out centerfold when the magazine was glued together at the spine and had a square back.

Naturally those readers who had deserted *Scope* due to the lack of the glamour poster, were informed on the cover that *Scope* was back to its old ways: 'You asked for it – you've got it! RETURN OF THE GLAMOUR POSTER.' The fold-out poster featured a blonde in underwear, but the magazine now went big and announced: 'To mark the historic return of the legendary all-conquering *SCOPE* glamour poster, we take great pleasure in presenting six gorgeous girls who have graced our centre spreads in the past ...'

The issue of 24 April 1987 carried other typical *Scope* fare: 'WOULD WIFE-SWOPPING PEP UP *YOUR* LIFE?' as well as an article on a popular actress of the time: 'Moonlighting's Cybil Shepherd talks about what it's like to be the most lusted after woman in Hollywood.'

*Scope* was not a magazine in which one would expect any balanced treatment of orthodox religious beliefs. A 'sensational' presentation (on its cover) resulted in a banning by the censors in 1982 (Van Rooyen 1987, 98). A review of a book, *The holy blood and the holy grail* (containing similar claims made famous years later by Dan Brown in his *The Da Vinci code*), was found to be 'offensive because of its sensational treatment of the alleged findings of a group of historians' regarding Jesus. The book itself was not banned, as the Publications Appeals Board found that it had a 'much smaller likely readership than that of the magazine'. The magazine thus ran afoul of the censors for different reasons, not only for its sexual content.

## New freedom, new opposition

When President F.W. de Klerk announced in February 1990 that fundamental political changes were to take place, it was seen as a green light for a more liberal policy regarding censorship. Previously banned magazines, such as *Penthouse*, appeared in 1991 and *Playboy* some two years later, providing significant competition for *Scope*. These competing publications were willing to push the boundaries much further (cf. Goldstuck 1992; Vanderhaeghen 1996). *Scope* also became more daring and discarded the infamous stars on models' nipples.

The 24 July 1992 edition of *Scope*, with Dave Mullany as editor, addressed the censorship issue head-on. A white-on-red button on the cover warned: 'STRICTLY ADULTS ONLY'. An article punted on the cover with the teaser 'CENSORSHIP IN THE NEW SA: You're in for a shock', only appears on page 84 under the heading 'See no evil, hear no evil, speak no ...'. The article attacked the affirmative action policies of the ANC and painted a very gloomy picture of what freedom of speech might become under an ANC government. The article pointed out that the new government would have 'a rich tradition of censorship to draw on' and quoted a *Weekly Mail* article that suggested that pictures of naked women may in future be banned for 'progressive' (i.e. 'politically correct' reasons). This was quintessential populism with a right-wing tone, not unknown in the world of tabloid journalism. It also fits with the anti-ANC discourse found at the time in mainly Afrikaans newspapers about the perceived threat to freedom of speech under an ANC government (cf. Scholtz 1992, 155).

Meanwhile, *Scope* pushed the somewhat unclear boundaries of sexual content. After warning potential readers in previous issues that no one should open the magazine unless 'you are a free-thinking adult', the magazine went all the way with a tongue-in-cheek publicity stunt (doubling as a genuine attempt at warning readers who might be offended and/or an attempt at placating the censors [cf. Grobler, 1992]) with its cover of the 18 September 1992 issue: it did away with a pin-up cover for once and stated in stark white-on-black letters (see Figure 3):

A Message to 'The Likely Reader'

This magazine is wrapped in ozone-friendly, user-discretion, pervert-proof plastic. It is marked, as you can clearly see, for the consumption of Adults Only.

Thus:

STRICTLY ADULTS ONLY

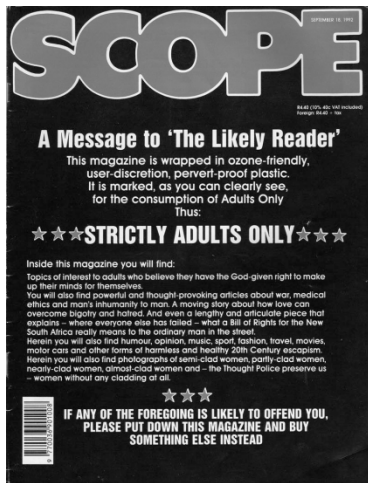
Inside this magazine you will find:

Topics of interest to adults who believe they have the God-given right to make up their minds for themselves.

You will also find powerful and thought-provoking articles about war, medical ethics and man's inhumanity to man. A moving story about how love can overcome bigotry and hatred. And even a lengthy and articulate piece that explains – where everyone else has failed – what the Bill of Rights for the New South Africa really means to the ordinary man in the street.

Herein you will also find humor, opinion, music, sport, fashion, travel, movies, motor cars and other forms of harmless and healthy 20<sup>th</sup> century escapism. Herein you will also find photographs of semi-clad women, partly-clad women, nearly-clad women, almost-clad women and – the Thought Police preserve us – women without any cladding at all.

IF ANY OF THE FOREGOING IS LIKELY TO OFFEND YOU, PLEASE PUT DOWN THIS MAGAZINE AND BUY SOMETHING ELSE INSTEAD



**Figure 3:** *Scope*, 18 September 1992: Readers are 'warned' of its content



**Figure 4:** *Scope*, 24 June 1994: The final step is taken ... but not quite yet

It was a good summary of what *Scope* offered at the time, but the sheer number of topless women in most issues was attracting the censors' attention. Early in September 1992, Arthur Goldstuck reported in the *Weekly Mail* that five of the last seven editions of *Scope* had been banned (Goldstuck 1992). The reason offered by 'legal sources' was what censors supposedly called a 'cumulative effect'. In short: too many nipples and not enough editorial copy. *Scope*'s main rival, *Penthouse*, also carried a large number of bare-breasted women, but it had 'a high level of editorial, which balances the impact of photos', lawyer Mark Rosin suggested (Goldstuck 1992). He added: '*Scope* only has breast nudity, but there is picture after picture showing nudity, and no balance of editorial.'

*Scope*'s editor and publisher would naturally have disagreed. Earlier in the year, editor Dave Mullany expressed his bewilderment at the banning of the 10 July issue. He stated: 'I received no explanation, only a telegram. I presume too many nipples are corrupting our society again' (Hurry 1992).

Notwithstanding (or because of) the frequent bannings (which often only became effective after the magazine had been on the shelves for a day or more), *Scope* was doing very well during 1992. The publication director of Republican Press and also a previous editor of *Scope*, Christopher Backeberg, strongly refuted suggestions that *Penthouse* had usurped *Scope* as the country's most successful men's magazine. In a letter to *Business Day* he pointed out that for the six-month periods ending June 1991, December 1991 and June 1992, *Scope*'s ABC circulation figures were 105 906, 124 731 and 145 425. *Penthouse*'s respective figures were 71 018, 68 670 and 66 960. In conclusion Backeberg argued that '*Scope* comes out tops on circulation, reach, editorial excellence and recognition by the magazine industry' (Backeberg 1992). Editor Mullany was acknowledged within his company as a huge success, receiving the in-house awards of Republican Press Editor of the Year and Republican Press Achiever

of the Year in 1992, as well as Republican Press Editor of the Year in 1994 (Mullany 2010). In the six months subsequent to the last figure quoted by Backeberg, *Scope* did even better (152 000) (*Finance Week*, 5 February 1993).

*Penthouse* was, however, drawing strong advertising support and seemed to 'break through the stigma traditionally surrounding mens' interest magazines'. The publisher of *Penthouse*, Ralph Boffard, claimed that his magazine was 'very profitable', while a media director of a large advertising agency, Harry Herber, argued that *Scope* was 'down-market', which left *Penthouse* with a lack of competition (*Finance Week*, 25 February 1993) – presumably in the up-market men's magazine market. However, a reader of *Scope*, writing under a nom-de-plume, complained that some 33 per cent of the magazine was occupied by advertisements, which he/she thought was too much (*Scope*, 18 September 1992).

In reaction to critics who identified themselves as Christians and expressed strong disapproval of *Scope*'s covers and content, letter writers strongly suggested they merely refrain from reading the magazine (e.g. *Scope*, 24 July 1992; 18 September 1992). But during the eventful 1992 *Scope* was removed from the shelves of a supermarket chain after hundreds of clients complained, according to managing director Hugh Herman (*Die Burger*, 18 January 1992). Changes in 'contemporary community values' were perhaps not that widespread, as argued by Ralph Boffard of *Penthouse* (cf. *Finance Week*, 5 February 1993), or conservative Christians were merely making a concerted attempt at opposing the more liberal attitude towards female nudity.

By 1994 *Scope* had taken the final step in publishing full-frontal pictures 'by popular demand'. The pictures, however, had strategically placed silver fig leafs (*Scope*, 24 June 1994). The sexual nature of much of the magazine's content was still being promoted prominently on the cover, e.g. 'PICTURE BONANZA: WE GO TO THE PORN OSCARS Where naughty girls come first' and 'GIRLS How to drive a man wild in bed'. And for a change female readers were treated with a 'Super Macho Hunk' (*Scope*, 24 June 1994) (see Figure 4).

In the same issue, a reader, Z. Karmos, challenged the editor to state whether he would publish explicit pictures of sexual intercourse, child pornography and bestiality. If he were to say no, he had to admit that he only drew the line somewhere else. Should he therefore not take a more moderate approach to the issue of censorship? The editor offered a long reply (in contrast to his usual very brief put-downs), arguing that *Scope* would not publish pictures of the said acts simply because the majority of its readers 'would reject them'. Furthermore, it would not merely be 'against the law of censorship, but the criminal laws of the land'. He added that censorship was not a law 'in the classic sense' as its parameters such as 'indecenty', 'obscenity' and 'tolerance levels' (his inverted commas) were part of the 'nebulous jargon of the prescriptive Calvinist misery ethic' and were 'vague and insubstantial terms liable to inconsistent interpretation by a group of shadowy autocrats seeking to impose their notions of morality on people like you'.

But *Scope* was coming under huge pressure from *Hustler*, which was creating a new market which eschewed any covering of genitalia. Observer Luke Tagg (2003) noted:

Mullany had kept many a gent happily entertained for years with his combination of humor, cars and coquettish models photographed by Suze Randall, but you didn't even get a nip – it was all covered up, and all nips were tastefully draped in numerous inventive ways. Finally Mullany acquiesced and threw in a token nip, but only because Joe Theron's *Hustler* was rocketing up the charts, just one step away from a silver fig leaf.

Editor Mullany explained *Scope*'s reaction to the 'feeding frenzy' which followed the demise of old-style censorship as follows:

*Scope* didn't want to go that way (i.e. publishing full nudity as *Hustler*, *Penthouse* and *Playboy* did – JDF). I said, let's keep what makes us so popular; the humor, the irreverence, the news features, but I was obliged to play the new game of trying to out-*Hustler Hustler*. At first we tried to do it with humor: we placed fig leaves over the pin-ups' naughty bits and invited readers to scratch them off if they wished. This way, if the sight of a woman's pubes offended any of our readers, we advised them not to scratch. It was nice and playful but the publishers wanted me to go harder; to show full gynaecological shots, which I absolutely hate. (Dugmore 2006)

Thus, Mullany was 'forced' to publish what he would have preferred not to. When asked by a reporter to explain his decision to run a picture feature about a sex-mad woman 'having sex with 251 men in one session', Mullany replied somewhat incoherently:

It was awful, as awful as the newspaper picture ... of the child killed in the Oklahoma bomb blast. We used the pictures because it was news and sensational. I was saying 'look at this, it's weird', and perhaps people would laugh, but it was distressing to some ... I have to give the market what it wants. (Van der Walt 1995a)

*Scope* was now sailing close to the wind. By succumbing to pressure and becoming more and more risqué, Mullany picked a fight he could hardly win: magazines such as *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Hustler* were prepared to publish much more explicit material, while *Scope* was restricted by its own ambivalence and, possibly, the fact that it was still owned by the Afrikaans publishing house Perskor.

But the more explicit approach was a turning point in the magazine's history, as it gave its critics more ammunition. The anti-*Scope* lobby was reporting success in its efforts to remove *Scope* from store shelves. One parish newsletter quoted circulation figures which reflected a substantial drop in sales of all prominent South African sex or skin magazines, including that of *Scope*, that dipped substantially by 66 000 during the first half of 1995 (Wysheid 1995). The newsletter quoted Mullany as follows: 'The reason for the slump ... is the refusal of cafes and small *platteland* (rural) outlets to stock the magazines because of intimidation by vigilante [pro-family] groups.' *Scope* was now between a rock and a hard place.

## Another turning point

The next turning point came in 1995, when it was decided to reposition *Scope* as 'a general interest men's magazine minus the girlie photograph' (Bierbaum 1995). 'Good journalism, for too long sandwiched between endless pages of cleavage, is to be the new diet', Van der Walt (1995b) wrote. An internal document (probably written by



**Figure 5:** Cover of the final issue of *Scope*, June 1996

editor David Mullany and quoted by Bierbaum [1995]), said that *Scope* had to ‘shed the image of a sensationalist fortnightly flesh magazine and turn the title into an upbeat publication for discerning South African males who do not need a regular dose of mammaries and/or female genitalia to make it through the week’.

The document added that it was ‘time for the magazine to grow up ... and to address itself not merely to schoolboys and middle-aged voyeurs, but to the as yet untapped body of discerning South African males who are desperate for something decent to read’. This view, although not public knowledge at the time, could be seen as an insult to *Scope*’s traditional readers.

Various reasons could be offered for this decision, the main one being that *Scope*’s

circulation plunged substantially in the first half of 1995 (from 169 000 in the last six months of 1994 to 66 000 in 1995)(Caple 1997). ‘Industry sources’ suggested that Republican Press acknowledged that they could not compete with *Hustler*, which was described as ‘hardcore porn’ (Younghusband 1995). Furthermore, the ‘male market’ had become, in Mullany’s words, ‘hopelessly overtraded’ (Zaina and Giliomee 1996), while former editor Jack Shepherd Smith suggested that publication of soft porn disappointed the magazine’s female readers (claimed to represent some 48% of the total) (Uys 1996).

The new *Scope*, printed on better paper and with an up-market square back, aimed at an initial circulation of 80 000, increasing to 120 000 by the end of 1996. The first of the new-style *Scope* appeared in December 1995 and was ‘crammed with some excellent stories’ (Van der Walt 1995b). But *Scope* never got to see the end of 1996. The final issue appeared in June 1996 – the magazine was by then a monthly – with its cover featuring a woman’s shapely legs and a single teaser (‘WHY MEN LOVE LEGS’) (see Figure 5). But *Scope* no longer carried pin-ups and featured no blatant nudity. The catastrophic sales of the previous months’ issues probably encouraged the editor to include a few photos of girls in underwear (as part of the cover feature story) as well as articles (with revealing, but not nude pictures) on Sandra Bullock and Catherine Zeta-Jones.

Was *Scope* rethinking its shift away from nudity? If these pictures were any indicator, it was too little, too late. The ‘schoolboys and middle-aged voyeurs’ had deserted *Scope*. Readers also reacted in no uncertain terms to the new trend. Writing under the nom-de-plume ‘Just an idea’, one reader took Mullany to task for his reply to a reader (in the February issue) which claimed that *Scope* had not ‘abandoned’ the struggle against censorship, ‘simply because the fucking struggle has been won’ (*Scope*, June 1996). The reader opined that *Scope* had become so mild that it was amazing that some Christian critics were still finding offensive material in the magazine. He/she

added that it seemed Mullany had not been rewarded for ‘turning *Scope* into a boy scout magazine’, but it could still not be found on the shelves of Pick n Pay and other stores that had boycotted the magazine earlier for its sexual content. These comments indicate that conservative critics may well have had an impact on *Scope*’s circulation.

Another ‘ex-reader’ noted that ‘most of your ex-*Scope* readers ... never wanted *Scope* to become like *Hustler* ... But it was a bad move to go the way you have now, as there is nothing wrong with men wanting to look at sexy, naked women.’ This sentiment was reiterated by a number of readers.

While some readers supported the new approach (cf. *Scope*, June 1996), they were far in the minority and potential new readers did not catch on to *Scope*’s new offering. Its circulation fell to some 25 000 (Van der Walt 1996). Although its staff expected it, it still came as a shock when the magazine’s board of directors decided to terminate the publication. The once provocative magazine went without so much as a whimper; the editorial staff were not given the opportunity to go out with a celebratory last issue.

The demise of *Scope* was, however, given wide coverage in the press. Headlines included: ‘*Scope*: The end of an era’ (*Mail & Guardian*, 6 June 1996); ‘End of the road for *Scope*’ (*The Natal Witness*, 4 June 1996); ‘Grand old dame of South Africa’s girlie magazines closes’ (*The Star*, 29 May 1996). *Scope*’s failure was due to a ‘combination of things’, as Republican Press’s editorial director, Roy Minnaar, noted (Golding-Duffy 1996). He added: ‘Even though it has been squeaky clean since the beginning of the year (1996), the perception that it’s a girlie magazine remained. This caused enormous problems in getting it on to the market, past the fierce anti-porn lobby.’

Editor Mullany agreed that the conservative Christian lobby had played a decisive role: ‘The fundamentalists have made it impossible for *Scope* to relaunch itself’ (Golden-Duffy 1996; see also *Christian News*, 1997). But he added in the same breath: ‘It would have cost more than R5-million to remarket *Scope* and even then we would not be sure of the results. The company realized that it should cut its losses and it did.’ The lack of an adequate marketing budget thus has to be added to the reasons for *Scope*’s unsuccessful relaunch. Launching a totally different type of magazine under the old title did not help, as Mullany acknowledged (Murray 1996). In fact, the old *Scope* was dead, but not buried. It died ‘six months ago’, Mullany remarked (cf. Vanderhaeghen 1996). But it certainly was not what he had in mind when he predicted in April 1995 that ‘the proliferation of rubbish on the market ... will die down’ (Van der Walt 1995a).

A crucial fact not mentioned in reports at the time, was that Perskor, *Scope*’s owner, had a much bigger fish to fry: it was putting together an empowerment deal with ANC-aligned Kagiso, eventually resulting in Caxton picking up the considerable spoils and adding the Perskor (and therefore also the Republican Press) titles to its own stable (cf. Fallon 1996; Froneman 1997; Sikhakhane 1996; Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001, 134). Perskor was a spent force and disappeared from the scene, but its controlling shareholder, Dagbreek Trust, walked away with substantial capital which is used to support Afrikaans-language projects (cf. Fourie 2010).

## Conclusions

The history of *Scope* is at once a study of brave, irreverent and ethically dubious journalism, depending on your point of view. It certainly had its supporters over many years and represented a libertarian protest against what was regarded as an unacceptable repression of freedom of speech. As such, it contributed to the widespread media protest against the apartheid regime. Its coverage of the border wars in southern Africa was, however, supportive of the minority government. This fed into a white populist culture – particularly a male culture which was determined to a significant extent by compulsory military service. Its sexual content (which was unexceptional by today's standards) provided entertainment not readily available elsewhere, but it kept away from the taboo of interracial contact. It could well be described as a lightning rod in a highly charged (white) culture.

The story of *Scope* is also a study of a cultural icon that came to an abrupt end due to political and market forces. Nevertheless, one also has to factor in the role of *Scope*'s conservative (Christian) critics and their success in having the magazine removed from shop shelves. This was much more successful than the intervention by state censors over many years.

In the final analysis one has to marvel at the irony of *Scope*'s demise: how a once profitable magazine lost its readers overnight in a climate much more conducive to publishing a sex-oriented magazine; how an award-winning editor (and *Scope*'s publisher) misread the market so badly; and how a media company allowed a once profitable title to go to ruin. Given the subsequent success of *FHM*, *Men's Health* and other glossy publications not shy of publishing pictures reminiscent of *Scope* in its glory days, the irony is compounded.

This brief history of *Scope* invites other researchers to further investigate aspects of this publication. An obvious topic is the depiction of females, and feminist and other perspectives on it. The magazine's contribution to the development of an indigenous tabloid press can also be explored. As pointed out, its style often mimicked the British tabloids in an era when it was still largely unknown in South Africa. A third topic is the possible correlation between *Scope* and black populist magazines of the time.

While *Scope*'s place in media history should not be overrated, it does provide a very specific glimpse into an era often described in stark political terms. This version of reality is somewhat more complicated.

## Biographical note

**Johannes Froneman** is a professor of Communication Studies at North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa. He holds a Master's degree in Journalism from Stellenbosch University and a PhD in Communication Studies from Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. His main research interests are South African media history and the value dimensions of journalism. He is a past-president of the South African Communication Association. Email: [jd.froneman@nwu.ac.za](mailto:jd.froneman@nwu.ac.za)



## Note

- 1 Only selected available copies of *Scope* from different periods are examined in this article. They do, however, give a good indication of the type of content the magazine offered.

## References

- Backeberg, C. 1992. Letter. *Business Day*, 28 October.
- Barker, G. 1998. Media law. To tread cautiously with newfound freedom. In *Mass media towards the millennium*, ed. A.S. de Beer, 267–288. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Bierbaum, N. 1995. Broaden your *Scope*. *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 20–26 October.
- Burns, Y. 1990. *Media law*. Durban: Butterworths.
- Burns, Y. 2001. *Communications law*. Durban: Butterworths.
- Caple, L. 1997. Give men things to read, and they might eye the porn again. *Saturday Star*, 18 January.
- Christian News*. 1997. Christians for truth. <http://www.cft.org.za/news/1997/15-1-1997.htm> (accessed 11 September 2010).
- Claassen, G. 1993. Magazines: *Life's* own story. In *Mass media for the nineties*, ed. A.S. de Beer, 101–124. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Claassen, G. 1998. Magazines: *Life's* own story. In *Mass media towards the millennium*, ed. A.S. de Beer, 119–146. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Die Burger*. 1987. *Fair Lady*-redakteur bedank oor politiek [*Fair Lady* editor resigns over politics]. <http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/dieburger/1987/04/04/2/7.html> (accessed 12 October 2010).
- Die Burger*. 1992. Tydskrifte na klagte van rakke verwyder [Magazine removed from shelves after complaints]. *Die Burger*, 18 January.
- Dugmore, H. 2006. Forty years on, legend of *Scope* lives. *The Sunday Independent*, 26 November.
- Fallon, I. 1996. The bust of Verwoerd glowered, but it couldn't stop Molobi nailing Perskor down. *The Sunday Independent*, August 8.
- Finance Week*. 1993. Of pets and men. 5 February.
- Fourie, M. 2010. Oud-Perskor-baas dood ná hartaanval [Former Perskor boss dies after heart attack]. *Beeld*, 12 February. <http://www.beeld.com/Suid-Afrika/Nuus/Oud-Perskor-baas-dood-na-hartaanval-20100212> (accessed 12 October 2010).
- Froneman, J.D. 1997. Mediätransformasie dek tafel vir nuwe joernalistiek [Media transformation sets scene for new journalism]. *Literator* 18(3): 199–220.
- Froneman, J.D. 2006. In search of the *Daily Sun's* recipe for success. *Communitas* 11: 21–36.
- Golding-Duffy, J. 1996. *Scope*: The end of an era. *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, 31 May to 6 June.
- Goldstuck, A. 1992. Too many tits, not enough text. *Weekly Mail*, 4–10 September.
- Granger, D. 1996. A symbol of the white male bows out. *The Cape Times*, 21 June.
- Grobler, H. 1992. Sensors uitgedaag – volwassenes geprikkel [Censors challenged – adults titillated]. *Tempo*, 25 September to 1 October.
- Hurry, C. 1992. *Scope* banned, but it doesn't get the point. *The Star*, 11 July.
- Mail & Guardian*. 1996. *Scope*: The end of an era. 6 June.
- McDonald, P.D. 2009. *The literature police*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Mouton, A. 2002. Voorloper: Die lewe van Schalk Pienaar [Pathfinder: The life of Schalk Pienaar]. Kaapstad: Tafelberg.
- Mullany, D. 2010. Journalism. <http://www.freelance-net.co.za/journ/mullany/#cv> (accessed 11 September 2010).
- Murray, M. 1996. No place for tits 'n bums. *The Sunday Paper*, 29 June.
- Ostendo. 2010. Various comments. <http://www.ostendo.co.za/?p=278> (accessed 11 September 2010).
- Richard, D. 1986. *Tussen bid en droom* [Between prayer and dreaming]. Pretoria: Constantia.
- Scholtz, J.J.J. 1992. *Oor grense heen* [Beyond borders]. Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel.
- Scope*. 1966. 23 September.
- Scope*. 1967. 16 June.
- Scope*. 1975. 8 August.
- Scope*. 1979. 2 March.
- Scope*. 1987. 24 April.
- Scope*. 1992. 24 July.
- Scope*. 1992. 18 September.
- Scope*. 1994. 24 June.
- Scope*. 1996. June.
- Sikhakhane, J. 1996. Anton Rupert behind the deal that joined business arm of apartheid and liberation. *The Sunday Independent*, 8 August.
- Steyn, J.C. 2002. *Penvegter: Piet Cillie van Die Burger* [Fighter with the pen: Piet Cillie of *Die Burger*]. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Tagg, L. 2003. The Daily Smoke. <http://www.thedailysmoke.co.za/smokes/article023.asp> (accessed 11 September 2010).
- The Natal Witness*. 1996. End of the road for *Scope*. 4 June.
- The Star*. 1996. Grand old dame of South Africa's girlie magazine closes. *The Star*, 29 May.
- Uys, S. 1996. *Scope* sonder kaal meisies stort in duie [Without naked girls *Scope* implodes]. *Beeld*, 27 May.
- Vanderhaeghen, Y. 1996. End of the road *Scope*. *The Natal Witness*, 4 June.
- Van der Walt, T. 1995a. What's up, Mullany? *Sunday Tribune*, 23 April.
- Van der Walt, T. 1995b. Macho SA men have a surprise in store. *Sunday Tribune*, 3 December.
- Van der Walt, T. 1996. There was no vision at *Scope*. *Sunday Tribune*, 26 May.
- Van Deventer, H. 1998. *Kroniek van 'n koerantman* [Chronicle of a newspaperman]. Welgemoed, Cape Town: Tarlehoet.
- Van Rooyen, J.C.W. 1987. *Censorship in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Wysheid*. 1995. Nuus. <http://members.fortunecity.com/ligstryders/wysheid/95augwh.htm> (accessed 11 September 2010).
- Younghusband, T. 1995. No *Scope* in porn. *Sunday Tribune*, 24 September.
- Zaina, J. and A. Giliomee. 1996. Rethink in the male magazine market. *Business Day*, 16 January.