

Pagad and the sisters

IT'S not an easy task covering the conflict between People Against Gangsterism and Crime (Pagad) and the reformed gangsters, Community Outreach (Core), on the Cape Flats for SABC TV.

The Cape Flats is situated on the outskirts of Cape Town. Thousands of people stay in different areas such as Mitchell's Plain, Bonteheuwel and Hanover Park. These areas have for years been known for the highest crime rate in the Peninsula. These are also some of the areas where vigilante attacks between gangsters and Pagad have hurt and maimed many innocent people.

In September alone there have been 24 shooting incidents, 27 bombings, 11 people killed and several people injured.

As a young journalist just starting out on a career, covering this conflict has been exciting – being able to bring the story to millions of South Africans – but I have faced several dilemmas.

Firstly I'm a young woman from the Cape Flats. I'm assertive and want to tell the story no matter what – this is what I've been taught and been reading about all my life. It is this assertiveness that opens me to verbal and sexual harassment.

In September, I was covering the funeral of a Pagad martyr, Noor Boolie, one of the co-accused in the slaying of Hard Living gang boss Rashaad Staggie. Who can forget 4 August 1996 when millions of people all over the world watched in horror as Staggie was mobbed by Pagad, shot in the head and then set alight – all in technicolour television footage?

The funeral of Boolie was attended by about 500 people, mostly men. Islamic tradition allows the men to go to the cemetery while the women stay behind. According to tradition the "bier" (coffin) must be carried by the men for quite a few kilometres.

So here I am, walking close to six kilometres in the sticky heat. I must run around and check that nothing is happening at the back of the huge crowd, get an interview with one of the leaders of Pagad and make sure the cameraperson gets all the pictures needed for the story.

There was a sudden hype and I ran to the scene. Then one of the Muslim brothers suddenly shouts: "Oh, your tits is shaking" and his other brothers are just looking and laughing.

As a woman journalist this can only mean that there is no respect for you as the reporter covering the conflict for thousands of viewers. There's no other woman in sight so you're more open to this kind of harassment.

What I've seen at rallies is that the Pagad women take a fairly traditional role. They stay behind when the funeral procession moves to the cemetery, but then they're always the ones who fill up the court rooms when a Pagad member has been arrested. They refuse to speak to a reporter because they must first consult the leader. This means they view their opinions as not important enough and therefore unnecessary.

Verbal abuse, I suppose, is an everyday occurrence, but at events like marches or funerals it gets out of hand.

The latest was the funeral of little Sadicka Toffar.

Sadicka was only one month old when her house was bombed in Surrey Estate. The attack left her brother with an amputated leg and her sister badly injured. At her funeral I could understand why some of her family came outside the mosque to tell us not to take pictures. As they put it: "Try to take pictures and you'll see what we'll do to you." Television is a picture-driven medium and a story is lost without visuals.

As a journalist I feel I have a right to instruct the cameraperson to get pictures, but if he's also being abused and threatened he'll just stop filming.

Is it not our duty to show the public what is happening on the Flats and that innocent people are dying? Should we not tell the stories of the communities who are suffering? Well, they don't think so.

The other party involved in the conflict is Community Outreach – or the reformed gangsters who call themselves Core. Former murder-

ers and rapists now have the higher standing of the two parties involved in the conflict.

In this scenario I'm not verbally abused but instead looked at as a sex object.

How I dress and conduct myself is carefully scrutinised. I often face glaring looks and in this situation I ask myself: why do they behave in this manner?

Is it because I'm a woman from the Cape Flats and I understand the stereotype of how women are portrayed? We are normally seen as their girlfriends, mothers or their kids: women there for them – to visit them when they're in prison.

Taslina Viljoen from KFM Radionews in Cape Town agrees with me. She says although she's not been attacked verbally she feels very uncomfortable because she comes from the Flats and feels like a target.

The victimisation from both parties must stop. As a journalist I have the right to tell people's stories and to be objective, and this type of abuse is unjustified especially towards female journalists. Why should I feel guilty for covering these stories? Why should I back down from asking questions just because I'm a woman and I'm from the Cape Flats?

By CRYSTAL ORDERSON



Silent women

1 Deline Beukes, executive director of the Advertising Standards Authority, delivered a stinging challenge to the women attending the gender seminar. All day there were comments about the sexist nature of advertising and the stereotypical use of pictures in newspapers and on TV.

"All we need is a simple complaint in order to investigate an offending advert," she said, "but we get more complaints from sensitive people worried about animals than we do from people worried about the way women are portrayed. But, two complaints alone are a personal opinion and not a societal view," she added.

Beukes said the ASA comprises "all the key players in the media industry" and binds about 4000 South African organisations to a code of conduct that stipulates advertising must be: legal, decent, honest and truthful. Gender issues are quite adequately covered by the code, she said. The ASA has the power to withdraw offensive advertising and broadcasters in particular are bound to obey an advert alert.

She pointed out that the Steers advert based on the movie *Thelma and Louise* had been referred to the ASA for questionable content.

Beukes herself was "personally concerned because of the sexual innuendo in a society with high rape figures". But the advertising agency had found a prominent woman to review the advert and taken it to 11 major women's groups who had decided it was "innocuous and inoffensive".

"There was very little response from you yourselves as females in the market place," Beukes said, "and the advert was made by an all-female team."

"My question to you today is: everything is in place, when will South African women make their voices heard?"



2 Press ombudsman Ed Linington (who points out that the word is Swedish and therefore has no sexist connotations) says in his three months in the job "there has been not one gender-related complaint" about newspaper coverage.

This despite the fact that the Newspaper Press Union has included a new paragraph in its code of conduct dealing specifically with the issue.

"There is very much a mindset that just doesn't see this issue," Linington said, adding that he sees his job as "proselytising" on gender sensitivity to newspapers.

