

Disrupting nature? A critical analysis of the genderless toilet drive represented in South African newspapers

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ABSTRACT

Global cultures and imperialist Western ways of being and doing pervasively penetrate and influence societies and individuals, overarching the nations at the bottom of development. This globality operates unidirectionally, biased toward the Western gravity of power, excluding, disenfranchising, erasing, and debasing the values of the global South's peripheries. Consequently, the theory of globalization has focused on how localized groups in subaltern developing countries respond to the weighty forces of globalism. This paper presents a critical analysis that explores the omnipotent ideological-hegemonic power of the media to cultivate, enculturate, and superimpose values normative to the ethos of global culture. We employ critical discourse analysis to analyze seven selected newspapers that reported on a draft proposal by the Department of Basic Education that envisions the eradication of gender labels through the imposition of genderless toilets in South African schools. Critical reading of the newspaper articles demonstrated clear Afrocentric pushbacks; other counternarratives displayed the societal incongruity of such a vision. The media frames corresponded to audience frames that vehemently rejected the unisex toilet proposition. The frames continue to invite readers to question the redefinition of gender identities and performances that promote global cultural values that supposedly disrupt nature.

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Introduction

In late 2022, the South African media was inundated with a developing story about the leaked draft proposal allegedly written by the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) to abolish gender labels in school toilets and adopt gender neutrality across the board (Simelane, 2022; Mahlokwane, 2022; Bhengu, 2022; Dlamini, 2023). This emerging debate and/or evolving narrative has cultivated interesting observations on the long-deliberated media frames and the ever-fluctuating media effects, more so how these theories influence the global culture of citizens. We employ discourse analysis to critically read this unfolding story, drawing on Teun van Dijk's (1998) core argument that opinions and ideologies, in their complexity, involve beliefs or mental representations of social phenomena. Our analysis focuses on media framing/agenda setting and cultivation, all of which are derived from the parent theory of media effects. Effects are experiential, said to occur in the process where recipients focus on features of a message emphasized by the sender and interpret it based on values promoted by the frame (Igartua & Cheng, 2009). We use observational data to determine newspaper agenda setting and framing and infer cultivation effects from those interviewed by journalists.

We examine the view that citizens who lack prior object-specific beliefs become "heavily dependent on media cues" (Crocker et al., 1984). Our strong belief is that audiences, through the influence of convergent media, repeatedly consume global cultural products charged with global cultural values; our analysis elucidates whether such consumption consequently frames dominant global cultural values. To frame is "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text in such a way as to

promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993). In our analysis, we determine which aspects of the reconceptualization of gender labels have been emphasized by the media and evaluate the justification provided by the responses of the interviewed sources.

When frames in communication influence an individual's frame of thought, it is referred to as a framing effect (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2019). We agree that media framing has the power to influence and change people's values and beliefs, and even society (Entman, 1993). We are aware that if frames lack relevance, there is a chance that audiences will reject them (Yioutas & Segvic, 2003), which could undermine the credibility of the media. In our research, we tap into the journalistic agency of selected news stories in the news frame-building process based on journalists' "individual roles, opinions, and values, their organizational and professional autonomy, their beats or biases, and macro-level factors such as their regard for elite hegemony, their correspondence, and audience feedback" (Bruggman, 2018). Importantly, long-term effects may depend on contextual factors surrounding the news exposure situation (Crocker et al., 1984; Matthes, 2008; Sehata et al. (2021). The foregoing argument is consistent with recent media effects dispositions that societal beliefs can gradually shift, leading citizens to accept different belief positions, either negative or positive (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2019; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), and that ideology, lifestyle, and religion can influence the selection and interpretation of facts (Slater, 2015).

The view that global capitalist production is uneven may be the reason why many parts of the world, despite their sovereignty, are vulnerable to new forms of power (Rajagopal, 2019), which may have a cultivating effect.

Gender, which is the subject of the current analysis, is a cultural indicator that is crucial in defining societal roles. Since Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal Norwegian study, it has been established that journalists tend to favor cultural proximity by favoring stories that are close to their own and their audience's perceived cultural background (Fursich, 2010). In this analysis, we ask from their frames how journalists perceive gender roles. We ask from the audience frames of the citizens interviewed whether there is a perceived threat in the proposal to undo gender labels. Despite evidence of a purely market-driven global media environment (Hamelink, 2002), other cultures are excluded in this media-saturated culture, and this silencing is referred to by cultural scholars as "symbolic annihilation" (Fursich, 2010). Wani (2011), in agreement with the above authors, laments the uneven global cultural flow, arguing "...a divided world, thrown together rather than integrated, in a way that is heavily skewed in favor of rich, dominant countries". This axiomatic front of Western capitalist ideology against local cultures prompts us to analyze how selected South African newspapers represent and frame capitalist ideology in terms of gender identity.

We discuss and evaluate van Dijk's (1998:6) view that reading editorials involves not only what is said (event model) but also how it is said (context model), such as the writer's opinion or the newspaper's point of view. To reiterate, the core of our research problem would be that scholarly discourse within international communication theory and research has consistently and unwaveringly valorized Western industrialized countries as the epitome of intellectual and cultural virtue. These "developed" countries have been understood as possessing abilities and potentials to enchant global audiences and cultivate trajectories of cultural globalization, often referred to as "global

culture" (Kraidy, 2002:3). Theory on globalization has mostly focused on how groups respond to the forces of globalization in the local context (Pieterse, 2004). Theorists excited by the idea of globalization have measured how various media, symbols, value systems, and attitudinal tendencies are transmitted or diffused across national neighborhoods and borders. Lifestyle identifications and classifications within a global culture are de-territorialized across space, place, and temporality (Featherstone, 2002). Global cultures constitute hybrid *mélanges* of cultural blends unapologetic about the glorification of capitalist ideals (Pieterse, 2004), thus promoting complex connections between societies, cultures, and individuals worldwide. Relevant to our context, traditional African societies have, in the main, seemed somewhat resistant to emerging global cultural conventions: homosexuality, individualism, and the nuclear family. These Afrocentric values often espouse contrasting values of heteronormativity, communitarianism, and polygamous arrangements.

In our analysis, we show how global cultures, often antithetical to Afrocentric value systems, are framed through the lens of mainstream media, in our case newspaper opinion pieces on a selected topic. The selected topic in question is the alleged genderless/unisex toilets proposed by the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE). Our aim is to show how the values, systems and norms of global culture are superimposed and belief systems are cultivated through the hegemonic power of the media. Importantly, media forms should take into account that consumers are simultaneously producing and consuming as "prosumers" and can resist and accept discourses at their own pleasure. The study will contribute to the body of knowledge on media framing effects and global culture. To this end, we ask the following questions: 1.

How do selected English-language South African newspapers frame and represent the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) proposed genderless/unisex toilets? 2. How do these newspaper frames correspond to the frames of citizens about the alleged proposal? 3. What ideologies and discourses emerge from the ways in which the newspaper opinion pieces represented the genderless/unisex proposal? 4. What larger questions about global culture, contemporary media prosumers, and media cultivation do these emerging ideologies speak to?

Method

This critical discourse analysis, viewed through the prism of global culture, reads how the English-language newspaper media frames debates emanating from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa when it purportedly proposed gender-inclusive toilets in South African primary schools, an ideal consistent with global culture but antithetical to Afrocentric norms. Ideological Critical Discourse Analysis (IDA), a critical discursive model developed by Teun Van Dijk (1998) to demystify ideological investments and representations as cultivated through news media representation, will be employed. In this case, we select seven newspaper opinion articles from the English media that write about and represent the "Genderless Toilets Proposal" and sample the ideologies and meanings that emerge through the newspaper's media representation of this burning issue. We employ media framing theory to conceptualize how media implicitly or explicitly shape and cultivate the minds of audiences through ideologically charged and framed opinion pieces. Traditionally, the analysis of lexical items is best known in the study of ideology and language, and thus the application of discourse analysis in our study. In discourse, words may be

chosen that generally or contextually express values or norms and are therefore used to express a value judgment. Opinions can also be expressed in many other, much more complex ways in text and conversation, such as in headlines, story structures, arguments, graphic arrangements, syntactic structures, semantic structures of coherence, or overall themes (van Dijk, 1998). Our interest in analyzing newspaper stories is partly driven by the transformation of newspapers into online platforms with interactivity, the prosumer era. We answer all four research questions by discussing each of the seven news stories.

Results and Discussion

The findings are categorized and discussed according to each newspaper story analyzed. The framing theory, globalization theory and critical discourse analysis underpin the discussion of the proposal of removing gender labels in school toilets by the South African DBE.

Framing the proposal of gender label removal in The Star Newspaper

This section engages seven selected articles that are opinion pieces on the leaked genderless toilets draft proposal: the media effects, cultivation and framing of the stories, more so the ideologies that emerge from the strategic representation of the burning issue of the unisex toilet's proposal in South African schools. The Star Newspaper article titled "Unisex Toilets Plan Slammed" (Rall, 2022) is the first news item used to represent the media's sentiments on the proposed unisex toilets controversial campaign. The lexical choices (words chosen) in the title blatantly show a clear rejection of the unisex design proposal. Discourse analysts Machin and Mayr (2012:17) argue that language can be used to create and curate society. Therefore,

language has a constructive-creative impulse. As such, the author instrumentalizes the lexical/linguistic structures to satisfy his or her own ideological interests (Kress, 1985, Machin and Mayr, 2012), which ascribes certain meanings to the world. The selected article, through its ideological stance, openly presents pitfalls, dismissals and arguments for non-appreciation of the proposed unisex toilet drive that transgresses gender assimilation and norms in South African schools.

The lexical choice for the headline “Unisex Toilets Plan Slammed” suggests that the proposed plan for unisex toilets has been rejected outright, hence the choice of the word “slammed,” which evokes images of the violent and stern rejection of the draft proposal for unisex toilets in South African schools. The wording is strategic in that it emphasizes representatively and discursively that the proposal is vehemently, energetically, and enthusiastically rejected. To further argue and advance the case for the rejection of unisex toilets, the author’s article foregrounded two South African organizations, the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and the Freedom Front Plus (FF+), which are conservative and anti-globalist political parties (Southern, 2008). The ACDP remains in the organizational realm of Christian fundamentalism (Naidu & Manqele, 2005). Alternatively, the Freedom Front Plus is an organization fixated on white nationalist conservatism (Southern, 2011). These two political groups are framed as critiquing the alleged co-option of globalist values, such as the genderlessness/gender neutrality represented by the proposal of unisex toilets in South African schools. On reflection, however, this positionality is inherently ironic, for everything religious and fundamentalist carries globalist-imperialist-colonialist impulses, attitudes and practices with it.

The article’s author invokes ACDP president Kenneth Moshoe’s Twitter

engagement, which disparages and discourages the prospects of unisex toilets in South Africa. Moshoe is portrayed as a pious cleric. Such a characterization works ideologically to legitimize his fundamentalist anti-globalist value position underpinned by Christian ethics. Moshoe argues that the unisex toilet campaign will move communities away from gender norms in society. The ideological implications of the message frame gender as fixed and determined. Moreover, heteronormative gendering is the only one that is subscribed to, acceptable, and commonplace in Moshoe’s Christian ethics. By heteronormative gendering, Peake (2016:1) refers to a colloquial term for normative heterosexuality. Heteronormativity is a powerful global ideology that is deeply ingrained in how we view ourselves and how we live our daily lives. A person who is sexually attracted only to someone of the opposite sex is said to be practicing normative heterosexuality (Katz, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Farvid 2015), which is the assumption that this is a normal and universal aspect of being human. This ideology of sexuality informs Moshoe’s beliefs that the proposed interventions will move communities away from societal gender norms, heteronormative norms, and ways of being. He further animates that genderless toilet, far from solving gender problems in South Africa, will exacerbate and complicate them. The author’s frames are clear, foregrounding the anti-global cultural norms of gender flux that genderless toilets seek to advance.

The author of the article goes on to quote the sentiments of Wynand Boshoff of the Freedom Plus Front, a right-wing political party in South Africa. Boshoff is quoted as arguing that pernicious ideologies of radical individualism are engulfing the education system, categorically inferring that global cultural norms are running amok in the South African societal context. Radically

individualistic societies, according to Hofstede (1980), place a strong emphasis on “I” consciousness, autonomy, emotional independence, personal initiative, the right to privacy, pleasure-seeking, financial stability, the need for friendship, and universalism. On the other hand, communal societies place a strong emphasis on “we” consciousness, collective identity, emotional dependence, group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations, the need for reliable and present friendship, group choice, and particularism. Boshoff contends that this ideology of radical individualism envisions people who are free-floating, even in terms of gender. He further refutes radical individuals who claim that an ordered society cannot thrive without community norms. Boshoff acknowledges that there could be exceptions to community norms (as in the case of the proposed genderless bathrooms), but imposing minute exceptions to the norm would be an act of totalitarianism, control, and draconian attitudes. Boshoff concludes by suggesting that community standards should not be reconceptualized as if the exception were the norm. This article, as penned in the *Star Newspaper*, frames the audience’s mind to ponder the gravity and implications of the proposal.

Framing the proposal of gender label removal in the Sunday World

The second article, from the *Sunday World*, by Shona Buhr, entitled “Proposal to introduce unisex toilets irks parents” (Shona Buhr, 2022), presents parents as angry about the leaked proposal from the Department of Education (DBE). The lexical choice “irk” posits the connotation that parents are angry, irritated, and upset by the unisex toilet proposal, providing images of a deeply affective backlash. Teun Van Dijk (1993:249) has shown that the analysis of discourse in texts is central because it reveals power

relations in texts, both explicit and implicit. In this case, language becomes less a vehicle of communication but a means of social domination. Following this line of thought, it is interesting that the author locates the resentment of the proposal as expressed by parents. Parents, in this case, are ideological symbols of authority in the life of the child. The headline attempts to give the unwavering impression that such a proposal is being opposed by the family, the microcosm of society and the most sacrosanct organization in African life.

Buhr’s invocation of “family” is ideological and succinct, underscoring the point of those who oppose the draft proposal. For contrast, the author quotes the Department of Education (DBE) spokesperson defending the unisex bathroom proposal. The spokesperson insists that the draft guidelines, developed in 2022, are intended to improve safe environments for students of different sexual orientations. By quoting the DBE spokesperson, the author frames the contrast of the unisex bathroom debate as an issue of inclusivity. Diverse lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex (LGBTQI) communities, as represented by the DBE spokesperson, need inclusivity. This position is consistent with what eminent South African scholars have suggested about the inclusivity of LGBTQI communities in South African schools (Reygan, 2021). The department, through the insights of the spokesperson, suggests that gender non-conforming students drop out or worse, commit suicide because they feel unwanted. This affective response has been assessed by scholars as a “microaggression” (Brown et.al, 2020). Scholarship insists that public toilets in South Africa have a long history of being contested sites where gender identification is enforced. For example, Robsin (2014) argues that despite the widespread misconception that toilets are places of solace and comfort, they still

bear enduring signs of racial and gender segregation, sexism, surveillance, and body-based discrimination. Gender segregation in bathrooms has traditionally been justified by discourses of morality and safety that subtly conscript heterosexual identities (Sander, 2017). Therefore, non-heterosexual identities in public restrooms can be a source of anxiety (Brown, 2018). The spokesperson concludes by suggesting that the draft document still requires consultation with stakeholders, and will be published in 2023.

In essence, the Sunday World newspaper has set an agenda for parents to consider the policy under consideration. The media can be seen skillfully attacking policymakers for dereliction of duty in informing end-users concerned with the policy from its conceptualization. The author's framing attempts to cultivate in the minds of the audience that the policy is doomed to failure due to lack of consultation. The author of the article provided an excerpt of the contents of the leaked draft proposal. The leaked draft guidelines, as included in the article, recommend that Schools will soon be required to provide "genderless/unisex toilets and changing rooms, as well as individual cubicles; gendered bathroom signs and more cubicles are touted as a solution; the policy guidelines include the abolition of gender-specific pronouns; teachers are to be told they must avoid gender segregation by dividing classes, lines or groups into boys and girls; the provision of gender-neutral uniforms must also be made available to all students who require them; dead naming will also be outlawed. This means that a student who identifies with a different gender cannot be called by his or her former name.

Machin & Mayr (2008:21) argue that individual semiotic choices made by authors can encourage us to place events and ideas within broader frameworks of interpretation, referred to as discourses,

which carry ideologies, a way of thinking about a particular subject. By leaking these proposed guidelines, the media is trying to warn stakeholders, especially parents, that the guidelines point to a larger socio-cultural discourse. The guidelines imply a shift in societal norms by reconceptualizing not only gender identity and its labels (he/she pronouns), but also dress and names, which are cultural indicators. The proposed policy guidelines have larger implications than denotatively implied, for example, the abolition of pronouns implies the rewriting of textbooks and other learning materials, which seems like a mirage in South Africa's already struggling economy. Therefore, by presenting the leaked guidelines, the media frames the audience to analyze and reckon with the complexity of the idea of abolishing gender labels.

The article seems to position the parents and the DBE as disagreeing with the new norms proposed in the leaked draft document. To support this view, the author foregrounds a petition conducted among parents. One of the parents mentioned the following words. The petition states: "Toilets are private, and the suggestion that girls and boys share toilets will cause many social ills. As a responsible parent, I cannot condone or approve of this. Schools are supposed to be a safe haven for everyone. Therefore, reforming these private/safe spaces to accommodate both boys and girls simultaneously will bring about social ills. To understand why the parent invokes the justification of social ills, one would need to understand the South African context and society: a society engulfed by astronomical levels of gender-based violence, murder and sexual assault unparalleled in the world. Khauhelo Mile (2020:3) reminds us that the apartheid era's contribution to the development of aggressive masculinities in South Africa has often been cited as the creator of the gender-based violence pandemic.

Another parent's comment confirms the South African situation of violence in terms of the safety of women and children. "Girls are not safe as it is. Inviting boys into what should be a safe space like a toilet is not okay. And if it happens, I will send my girls to school with diapers," said the parent. In another case cited, a parent posited that the government's emphasis on accommodating LGBTQI+ communities will confuse children. This parent promotes beliefs of heteronormativity, anything beyond that is transgressive. The parent also advanced the notion that gender reforms have the potential to exacerbate rape statistics in South Africa, in the context of already astronomical rape cases and convictions, a predicament that pioneering South African feminist Pumla Gqola (2015) describes as a serious 'South African Nightmare'.

Other sentiments expressed by parents were that the Department does not have the prerogative or responsibility to dictate "our gender" to parents, implying that "the family" must deal with gender issues. The responsibilities of the family as it relates to the advancement of society should not be hijacked by the state/government. Another issue raised by parents was the fact that the South African government should focus on providing adequate services that are constitutive of a functioning state, rather than engaging in projects to reform gender normativity in society. The core framework of this article was a consideration of the problems and complexities of the country as expressed in the form of rape culture and gender-based violence, and more so, how these complexities/problems need to take precedence over the supposedly inconsequential gender issues.

Framing the proposal of gender label removal in the Daily Maverick

The other article we analyzed is titled "Gender-neutral bathrooms at schools - draft guidelines spark 'robust' debate" (Simelane, 2022), which was written in the South African Daily Maverick Newspaper. The article frames the draft guidelines as sparking a "debate. This lexical choice and frame insists that there are multiple views, constructive arguments, and conversations about the draft genderless toilet proposal. The author foregrounds the frame that projects uproar over the proposed draft guidelines. The author represents the South African government setting the record straight, through its Department of Education spokesperson, denouncing the narrow focus on unisex toilets rather than the larger, vexing issue of gender discrimination in all aspects of society and the creation of a socially conducive school environment in South Africa. By emphasizing that unisex toilets should start a conversation about dismantling discrimination everywhere, the speaker appeals to values of universality to legitimize his argument. The ideology of universality, in this case, is the belief in fundamental human rights that served as the basis for the founding of the United Nations Organization in 1945. In addition, it vowed to promote worldwide respect for and observance of fundamental freedoms and human rights for all people without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion (Van Der Vyver, 1998:43). Essentially, what the speaker was suggesting was that the abolition of gendered toilets would be a clever ideological and representational work, tasked with reimagining South African society in order to ultimately create and promote socially conducive and inclusive societies. The author of the article demonstrated that there were other actors

who agreed with the content of the leaked draft proposal, three prominent academics.

The first academic interviewed suggested that the contents of the leaked bill were cause for celebration. The academic stated that “transphobic legislation continues to proliferate in the US. This statement shows a clear global cultural ethic as it comes from and is rooted in the Western ethic, the logic of the United States of America. The scholar goes on to argue that decisive action is needed to achieve the transformation imperative that will ultimately assert care and protection for a generation of transgender youth. The second academic quoted asserts that educational institutions are in a “permanent state of transition” and argues that transformation will only occur if people are willing to confront uncomfortable and disruptive ideas. However, the big question to ask would be, “Whose interests, values, and beliefs do these disruptive ideas serve?” Tanner Mirrlees (2020:124) suggests something devastating about global cultures that involve the universalization of a way of life by an empire, or the trans nationalization of a way of life into a global way of life at the expense of others, and that this constitutes the second definition of global culture. And, of course, Africa is always the unfortunate platform on which Western ideas are superimposed.

The third scholar interviewed by the author argued that genderless/unisex toilets are a response to the gendered responses of learners in schools and an expression of the inclusivity promised by the South African Constitution. In essence, the proposed unisex toilets were intended to promote ideologies of fluid gender representation and visibility. The author also showed other quarters that complained about the proposed draft guidelines, namely school governing bodies and parents. A representative of the governing body complained that there had been no thorough consultation. A parent

interviewed lamented that children would feel less comfortable if this intervention ever succeeded. Another parent was reported as saying, “Gender fluid and non-binary student groups are being catered for at the expense of far too many other students,” and the education department is failing to make this key consideration. The ideology of non-gender fluidity argued by parents suggests that the minority is being served at the expense of the overwhelming majority. According to the representations, the media seems to be directing the audience to think about discussions on other ways to accommodate exceptional learners in this regard, rather than developing a whole policy for such exceptional cases.

In the latter parts of the article, the author cites that the Department of Basic Education’s draft guidelines are part of ongoing consultations on the socio-educational inclusion of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, expressions and gender characteristics in schools. The author identifies three issues, according to the DBE, that prompted the drafting of the guidelines: Human Rights, Gender-Based Violence, and Sexual Misconduct. Regarding human rights, the department argued that children of diverse sexual and gender identities were being discriminated against, both intentionally and otherwise. Multiple lawsuits against the department over the human rights issue are one motivation for moving forward with the draft policy. Gender-based violence was another motivating issue, which was said to actualize the harassment of LGBTQI+ communities. Those who opposed the justification of gender-based violence were also represented in the article, questioning whether there was a place for gender-neutral bathrooms in South Africa.

Other parents further argued that it would be wrong and naive to suggest that gender-specific and/or gender-neutral

bathrooms could stop the scourge of gender-based violence because most gender-based violence occurs in the home, not in public. The author invites the audience to further explore this seemingly problematic proposal. If school is only one of many social settings, what happens when students are in the other settings where gender labels exist? How does this solve the implied problem of gender insensitivity? These crucial questions do not seem to be addressed and clarified. The Ministry of Basic Education's third justification for promoting genderless toilets is sexual misconduct. The author quotes a response by the MEC of Education to political opponents that seems incoherent and lacking in logic. The author, by providing the MEC's response to the Democratic Alliance's concerns regarding the genderless/unisex toilets campaign, is attempting to evoke in the reader a critical mind to question the MEC's misguided rationale in proposing genderless toilets. This may imply a proposal that has not even been adequately discussed among the relevant leaders, as evidenced by the seemingly irrelevant response from the MEC.

Framing the proposal of gender label removal in the Daily News

The fourth article dealt with "Mixed reactions to unisex toilets in schools" (Vuso, 2022) published in the Daily News. The framing is such as to suggest that there is a plethora of attitudinal predispositions regarding the issue of implementing the proposed unisex/genderless bathroom bill. The author initiates the conversation by stating the rationale/motivation of the proposed guidelines as outlined by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). Furthermore, the author shows the mixed reactions of contrasting social actors in response to the draft document. He does this to support his narrative that the proposal is

controversial and under deep scrutiny. The first "mixed reaction" evoked is the religious backlash to the potential implementation of genderless toilets in South African schools.

The author quotes the Muslim Judicial Council of South Africa, a vanguard movement for the preservation and maintenance of Islamic values. The council's response outlines that while they respect diverse opinions, they see the new trend of imposing the LGBTQ narrative, liberalism and modernity as a violation of their rights as Muslims and the rights of all religious denominations. In essence, the Council laments the gravity of Western imperial influence. The world order is being reorganized by the core states to advance their own interests at the expense of others (Hamelink, 2002, Rajagopal, 2019). The Muslim Judicial Council further added that these narratives are being forced down the throats of a 21st century society that questions the basic existence of all things, or in technical language, "the natural order of things". The author's insight is to advance a clear framing of global cultural critique, framed from a conservative religious voice. The author also draws from the discontent of the political realm when he cites the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), which criticizes the non-consultative nature in which the draft proposals were developed. SADTU noted that LGBTQI people are present in schools. However, they stressed that more needs to be done to improve basic human needs such as ablution facilities, as there are still learners who relieve themselves in the bush. It is argued that there are bigger problems before building unisex toilets.

Framing the proposal of gender label removal in the Cape Argus

The fifth article commissioned for this paper was titled "Petition against unisex

toilets in schools: close to 50 000 signed” (Thebus, 2022) and was published in the Cape Argus newspaper. The article reports on an online petition against the possibility of unisex toilets in South African schools. The author cleverly crafts the title to mobilize readers against the proposal. To that end, he provides statistics on the number of people who signed the petition, a significant number (50,000) given that the story was just developing at the time. The petition is said to have been initiated by parents, religious and political groups. The groups are obviously against such initiatives. According to the author, the petition gained a lot of traction and influence. The author gives some key reasons why the petition was initiated. The first reason given was that parents were unhappy and unimpressed with the proposed bill. Secondly, children were deemed unfit/unready for such drastic changes involving different genders sharing toilets. Thirdly, safety, as expressed in previously engaged articles, was foregrounded based on the understanding that South Africa is rife with violent activities and problems.

Although South Africa has made significant progress in reducing violence in the post-apartheid era, it remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world (Willman et.al, 2019:1). Parents were concerned that unisex toilets would be prioritized in a context where youth violence in South Africa is high and where rape, unsafe sex, drugs, and bullying have become normalized. Therefore, the author plays with the idea of preference and the tendency to think that South Africa faces more serious challenges that must take precedence over the implementation of unisex toilets. Critical issues such as improving the quality of education, developing infrastructure, and adequately preparing learners for tertiary education should be prioritized. Therefore, as the article suggests, the introduction of unisex toilets fails to grasp the seriousness

of teenage pregnancy in schools and is tone deaf to the lived realities of teenage hormones and the hyper-sexualized era in which we live. The author frames the article to discursively demonstrate that South Africa cannot prioritize unisex toilets in schools when there are more pressing and serious issues affecting the country.

Framing the proposal of gender label removal in the News24

In a News24 article titled “Unisex toilets at schools will help prevent bullying of gender diverse education” (Bhengu, 2022), the framing of the article represented both supporters and opponents of the draft document for the implementation of unisex toilets. On behalf of the proponents, the speaker outlined that incidents of bullying against students of different gender expressions were widespread and that the South African Constitution and the DBE were inadequately equipped to address these issues. The document, according to the spokesperson, would provide a safe environment and space free from discrimination. Critics, on the other hand, argue that the proposal, if adopted, would lead to an increase in cases of sexual assault and gender-based violence. Therefore, for them, it was morally reprehensible to promote calls for genderless toilets at the expense of the material deprivation of the majority of poor black South African children. The author also represents a gentleman in the article named Rasool, a native of Cape Town, a major city in South Africa. Rasool initiated a petition that had gathered 90,000 signatures by the time the article was published. Rasool argued that the idea of girls and boys sharing toilets is wrong because toilets are private places. These words also stand out in a context where many institutions are embracing the design of gender-neutral bathrooms to reduce the

prejudice caused by gender-segregated bathrooms (Cavanagh, 2010; Kogan, 2010). The goal is to create an environment that is inclusive of people of all gender identities and sexual orientations (Sander, 2017). Others who signed the petition emphasized issues of privacy and advocated for boys and girls to use different bathrooms, essentially maintaining the heteronormative order of things.

The spokesperson for the Department of Basic Education expressed regret that the leaked draft proposal had been watered down to a toilet issue/story, arguing that they wanted to address more serious social issues beyond the narrow focus on toilets. The author quotes prominent academics who support the spokesperson's position. One policy expert asserted that the department was acting in accordance with its mandate to protect LGBTQIA+ students. The implementation of unisex bathrooms would be symbolic in normalizing sexual and gender diversity and thus act as a representational tool. The experts exhibit a clear global cultural discourse, an ideology that the author supports according to the framing. Global cultural consumption has become increasingly widespread through new media technologies that transcend national boundaries, although this consumption is unidirectional, from North to South, with little counterflow (Thussu, 2009). The author seems to invite readers to question whose hegemonic values are being protected in the attempt to redefine gender identities and spaces. If the draft document is meant to find ways to make the school a safe space for all learners, as the DBE spokesperson implies, why such significant statistics of petitions? The author draws the reader's attention to this apparent controversy.

Framing the proposal of gender label removal in the Pretoria News

The last and seventh article used is titled "Pupils speak out on planned unisex toilets in schools" (Mahlokwane, 2022) in the Pretoria News. The article is framed to promote the views of the students who are directly involved and implicated. This framing differs significantly from the perspective that has often focused on parents, ignoring the vulnerable and focusing on the articulate: academics, lobby groups, the DBE and prominent political parties. The author of the article, by framing the conversation to the students, lets the subaltern speak. When it comes to issues of domination and power, democracy and citizenship, resistance and transformation, "subaltern" is best understood in this context. Gramsci (1971) employed the term in its original meaning to describe and analyze the political and historical dynamics of subordinate social classes, using the examples of slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, people of different races, and the proletariat as subaltern social groups, in this case the students. Students emphasized that same-sex bathrooms would increase sexual impropriety and problems in schools. One student commented by questioning why the status quo should be reformed by adding gender-specific bathrooms. The student also criticized gender bending and fluidity by suggesting that she did not think boys should wear skirts in school. Another student pointed out the danger of misbehavior when boys and girls mix in toilets, although the student supported smaller solutions such as gender-neutral clothing. According to six students from a particular Christian school featured in the article, unisex bathrooms are unnecessary and would exacerbate sexual assault because teenagers and young adults know how to game the system. Some

students expressed the opinion that they see nothing wrong with alternative sexual orientation, that people should dress how they want and that schools should not lock them up. This is a clear agenda to show that students disagree - disagree - with this proposed transformation of the gender norm and the natural enculturated way of doing things.

A student at an all-girls school brought up the fact that even though there were no boys there, she did not feel comfortable using the restroom with boys. Another student said that the introduction of unisex bathrooms should not lead to the elimination of the existing toilet system, as people would be extremely afraid if it became the new standard. The author also quotes a school board member who emphasized that they discussed that their schools will be welcoming to students of fluid and changing gender expressions and that no child should feel unwelcome. The author of this article took a very important angle to include those directly affected by this proposal, the students. The author pacified the looming conflict, and the responses he received indicate mixed feelings among students about this proposal to remove gender labels in school. While some are skeptical, others accept it with some reservations. In this article, the author draws the reader's attention to the interesting observation of the difference in values between the older and younger generations, where the latter's inclination towards this overarching issue remains fluid.

Conclusion

It is clear from the discussion that the proposal by the South African Department of Education to remove gender labels from toilets has been largely rejected by the framing of all seven newspaper articles. The minority voices in support of this proposal

were overwhelmed by the overwhelming statistics of the parents' petition presented in the Cape Argus newspaper. The media frames the DBE negatively for its controversial proposal, which was met with backlash from most stakeholders. Thus, the media frames correspond to the audience frames. We conclude that while the unidirectional capitalist global cultural flow from the developed West to the developing South is pervasive, it does not translate directly into the cultivation of values. The message sent by the media to policymakers is that they should consult adequately with stakeholders from the conception of policies, because policies fail due to lack of consultation, as evidenced by the leaked policy document that caused much uproar.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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