

Winston Mano and Wendy Willems

Emerging communities, emerging media: the case of a Zimbabwean nurse in the British Big Brother show

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Mano, Winston and Willems, Wendy (2008) *Emerging communities, emerging media: the case of a Zimbabwean nurse in the British Big Brother show*. [Critical arts](#) , 22 (1). pp. 101-128. ISSN 0256-0046

DOI: [10.1080/02560040802166300](https://doi.org/10.1080/02560040802166300)

© 2008 The Authors

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/51149/>

Available in LSE Research Online: July 2013

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Emerging communities, emerging media: the case of a Zimbabwean nurse in the British *Big Brother* show

Winston Mano

Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster, London

Wendy Willems

Centre for Media and Film Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Original citation:

Mano, W. and Willems, W. (2008). Emerging communities, emerging media: the case of a Zimbabwean nurse in the British *Big Brother* show. In: *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 22(1): 101-128.

Abstract

*Research on media and diasporic communities has often either focused on representations of ethnic minorities in mainstream media or looked at use of media by diasporic communities. By exclusively focusing on media coverage, the first approach has denied agency to how those represented in mainstream media interpret, accept or challenge representation of themselves. The second approach constructs its object of study as diasporic media and hereby neglects the way in which these interact with and respond to mainstream media. This article argues that a combination of these two approaches is fruitful as it allows for a more interactive and dynamic approach to mainstream and diasporic media which highlights the way in which one shapes the other. This argument is illustrated through an analysis of debates among diasporic Zimbabweans in internet chatrooms about the participation of Zimbabwean nurse Makosi Musambasi in the British *Big Brother* 6 series broadcast on Channel Four in 2005.*

Keywords:

Big Brother, diasporic media and the Internet, mainstream media and ethnic minorities, virtual communities, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Research on media and diaspora has often focused on media coverage of ethnic minorities or diasporic communities in mainstream media¹, on how these groups have used and consumed media², and on the ways in which they have established their own media.³ However, an exclusive focus on media representations has denied agency to how those represented in mainstream media interpret, accept or challenge representation of themselves. On the other hand, studies which have looked at 'minority media' or 'diasporic media' have often neglected the way in which these interact with and respond to mainstream media. This article therefore looks at the

¹ See Cottle and Ismond 1997; Ferguson 1998; Gabriel 1998; Cottle 2000, 2004.

² See Gillespie 1995; Ogan 2001; Thompson 2002; Christiansen 2004; Madianou 2005; Shi 2005.

³ See Riggins 1992; Husband 1994; Camauër 2003 for accounts of 'minority media' and for 'diasporic media', please refer to Cunningham et al. 2000; Cunningham 2001; Dudrah 2002; Karim 2003; Georgiou 2005.

interaction between mainstream and diasporic media in the particular case of diasporic Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom.

The medium of the internet plays a particularly important role in the lives of many diasporic communities, including those of Zimbabweans who have recently migrated to Britain.⁴ Much has been written about the role of the internet in creating ‘virtual communities’ (Jones 1994, 1997, 1998; Rheingold 1993; Smith and Kollock 1998; Wood and Smith 2001) and networking societies (Castells 1996). However, apart from the role of the internet in linking up members of diasporic communities, the internet should more importantly also be considered as a space in which different diasporic identities are articulated, imagined and contested. Mandaville (2001: 169) has argued that:

Diasporic media can and should be understood as much more than simply a means by which information of interest to a given community can be exchanged, or a means for communicating images of that community to the wider society. [...] [W]e need to understand these media as spaces of communication in which the identity, meaning and boundaries of diasporic community are continually constructed, debated and reimagined.

As anthropologists have highlighted, studies on collective identities often end up in essentialist accounts or overtly homogenous and coherent descriptions. To avoid such a situation, it is therefore crucial to study “the way collectivities describe, redescribe and argue over who they are” (Dominguez 1989, in Werbner 1997: 228). Rather than viewing identity as clear-cut and ready-made, it must be considered as performed and constructed (Butler 1993). The formation of identities should be regarded as a dynamic and complex process that can be explained in terms similar to those outlined by Hall (1996: 4):

[...] because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity – an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation).

By focusing on the specific online community of *NewZimbabwe*, we argue that discussions in internet chatrooms provide an ideal opportunity to study identity formation processes. Most studies on diaspora and (new) media have focused on Asian diasporas⁵ and relatively little work has been done on the relation between media and African diasporas.⁶ This article looks at the way in which diasporic Zimbabweans debated the participation of a Zimbabwean nurse, Makosi Musambasi, in the British *Big Brother* series, broadcast on Channel Four in 2005. Via the ‘Makosi case’, the article discusses how diasporic Zimbabweans defined themselves and articulated their individual and collective identities in internet chatrooms. The first part of this article provides background to the ‘new’ Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain and the emerging diasporic media at its disposal, with specific reference to the website *NewZimbabwe*. The second part of the article focuses on Makosi and the ways in which she was represented and discussed

⁴ See for studies on diasporas and the internet, Mitra 1997, 2006; Jeganathan 1998; Mandaville 2001; Kaldor-Robinson 2002; Adams and Ghose 2003; Hiller and Franz 2004; Anyanwu 2005; Wenjing 2005; Ignacio 2005; Hanafi 2005; Hirji 2006; Bernal 2006.

⁵ See Gillespie 1995; Mitra 1997, 2006; Cunningham 2001; Cunningham and Sinclair 2001; Gillespie 2002; Thompson 2002; Gillespie and Cheesman 2002; Adams 2003; Durham 2004; Wenjing 2005; Shi 2005; Sun 2006.

⁶ See Ackah and Newman 2003; King 2003; Gow 2004; Anyanwu 2005; Bernal 2006; Adeniyi 2007; Tynes 2007.

within the *NewZimbabwe* discussion forums.

The ‘new’ Zimbabwean diaspora

The deployment of the term ‘diaspora’ in our study is an attempt to contribute to debates on its meaning and use in a particular context (cf. Cohen, 1997; Safran, 1991). In this article, we use the term ‘diaspora’ primarily because this is how Zimbabweans increasingly began to refer to the rising numbers leaving the country after 2000. While there has been profound disagreement about the nature and causes of the ‘crisis’ in Zimbabwe, a “consensus that ‘all is not well in Zimbabwe’ emerged soon after the parliamentary elections of 2000 leading to increased use of ‘crisis’, ‘anarchy’, ‘meltdown’, ‘chaos’, ‘point of no return’ and other doomsday terminologies” (Mbiba 2005: 27).⁷ Land occupations and the killing of several white farmers in early 2000 quickly made Zimbabwe a prominent topic in international newspapers and on television screens. With the rapidly deteriorating economic and political situation in Zimbabwe in the 2000s, a large number of Zimbabweans opted to leave the country in order to settle in South Africa, Botswana and also the United Kingdom.

A survey among 900 skilled Zimbabweans conducted in 2001 by the Southern Africa Migration Project (SAMP) concluded that the United Kingdom (20.1%) was the most preferred destination for emigrants after the United States (26.9%) (Tevera and Crush 2003: 20). It was not only after 2000 that the United Kingdom became a major destination for Zimbabwean emigrants. Because of the historical colonial links between Zimbabwe and Britain, the United Kingdom had been a key destination for Zimbabwean migrants ever since the country achieved independence in 1980, as is demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Emigrants from Zimbabwe and Country of Destination Declared on Departure as South Africa and United Kingdom, 1980-1997 (%)

Year	South Africa	United Kingdom
1980-1981	62.4	11.0
1982-1983	52.6	11.4
1984-1985	40.9	14.2
1986-1987	16.3	20.1
1988-1989	20.4	17.8
1990-1991	13.1	23.8
1992-1993	7.7	26.8
1994-1995	12.5	25.3
1996-1997	15.7	22.1

Source: CSO Migration and Tourist Statistics (from: Zinyama and Tevera 2002: 13)

Among diasporic Zimbabweans who arrived in the United Kingdom in the 2000s, a large number found work as nurses and doctors in the health and care sector. Britain’s publicly funded health care system, the National Health Service (NHS), actively recruited nurses from abroad. With

⁷ For different constructions of the crisis, see Freeman (2005). For analysis of the ‘Zimbabwe crisis’, please refer to: Bond and Manyanya 2002; Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen 2003; Darnolf and Laakso 2003; Campbell 2003 and Raftopoulos and Savage 2004. For the role of the international media in the ‘Zimbabwe crisis’, see special issue on Zimbabwe of *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* (<http://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/page-1123>).

respect to Zimbabwe, two types of health workers can be identified. First of all, school leavers and non-health professionals who enrolled on nursing courses in Britain or who began working as carers with training provided on the job (Mbiba 2005: 32). Shift work in the care sector obtained a bad reputation among Zimbabweans at home and in the diaspora and care workers were often derogatorily referred to as BBC or “British bottom cleaning”. However, nursing was considered by many as a ‘stepping stone’ towards other professional careers in the United Kingdom (Mbiba 2005: 30-31). The second group comprised qualified nurses and doctors who only were required to do a short ‘conversion’ course and were then able to work as full professionals in the NHS (Mbiba 2005: 32). According to Chikanda (2005: 670), the poor working conditions, low remuneration and the increased workload as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic strongly motivated health workers to leave Zimbabwe and find employment elsewhere.

Zimbabweans who migrated to the United Kingdom as nurses were reliant on their work permit for their employment and were limited in their freedom to change jobs, as it would require new employers to apply for a new work permit. Until November 2002, Zimbabweans did not require visas to enter the United Kingdom but faced with large numbers of Zimbabwean migrants entering the country, the British government established a stringent visa regime in November 2002. Subsequently, the Zimbabwean government retaliated by imposing its own visa requirements on British citizens wanting to visit Zimbabwe. As a result of the large number of migrants, London informally became known as Harare North in the Zimbabwean popular imagination, the United Kingdom as Unit K⁸, and Slough in South-West London as kwaChirau⁹, denoting the high concentration of Zimbabweans in the area.

Emerging diasporic media

Increased emigration from Zimbabwe after 2000 saw a corresponding increase in the emergence of different types of media that catered for the growing numbers of Zimbabweans abroad. In order to keep Zimbabweans posted about news events in their country, several websites were set up that brought together news from different sources, such as *The Zimbabwe Situation* (<http://www1.zimbabwesituation.com/>) which is managed from Australia, *Zimdaily* (<http://zimdaily.com>) which according to the website is “an initiative of former Zimbabwean professionals now based in the UK, US and Canada”, *NewZimbabwe* (<http://www.NewZimbabwe.com>) and *ZWNews* (<http://www.zwnews.com/contact.cfm>). The latter website also began to run a free daily email newsletter which provided news on Zimbabwe from different news sources.

In February 2005, Wilf Mbanga, a well-known figure in the Zimbabwean media scene who relocated in 2004 to the United Kingdom after a brief stay in the Netherlands, launched a new weekly newspaper, *The Zimbabwean*. A press release announced the paper as follows:

More than a million Zimbabweans live in exile in the UK and more than two million live outside Zimbabwe in Southern Africa. The newspaper will, for the first time, give a voice to these Zimbabweans, who constitute some 25% of the total population. It will build links and encourage readers to tell their own stories and those of their families, as well as articulating their fears and frustrations about the issues concerning them.¹⁰

⁸ Unit K refers to a section of Chitungwiza, a satellite town close to Harare.

⁹ kwaChirau refers to “an area in Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe, whose name rhymes with the pronunciation of ‘Slough’” (Mbiba 2005: 31).

¹⁰ Press release by Wilf and Trish Mbanga, *The Zimbabwean - a voice for the voiceless*, 30 January 2005.

The Zimbabwean did not only cater for those in the diaspora but the newspaper was also distributed within Zimbabwe. Similarly, the above-mentioned websites were frequently also read by Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe as their choice of news sources became increasingly less diverse due to the targeting of private newspapers by government and the government monopoly on broadcasting. These new media initiatives can therefore not be named ‘diasporic’ in the true sense of the word as they explicitly sought to address Zimbabweans ‘at home’ as well.

With the closing down of the popular private newspaper *The Daily News* in September 2003 and just a handful of private weekly newspapers available in the country, Mbanga was keen to supplement Zimbabwe’s media landscape with a critical voice and to offer news relevant to both Zimbabweans ‘at home’ and abroad. As he stated in a press release:

We believe the paper can play a role in drawing attention to so much that is offensive to basic human decency and hostile to peace in our beloved Zimbabwe. Such exposure may help the country to return to the path of wisdom, democracy and the rule of law. We believe those in positions of authority and power should be held accountable to those they are supposed to serve and that a free media is fundamental to ensuring such accountability.¹¹

The head of the Zimbabwean government’s Media and Information Commission (MIC), Tafataona Mahoso, referred to *The Zimbabwean* in a subsequent press release as “a gigantic media fraud” and accused Mbanga of “media dumping”, suggesting that the newspaper was funded by foreign donors, offered at a price that was highly subsidised and therefore threatened to “undermine national, duly registered and truly sovereign publishers who are making an honest and transparent living by informing their audiences”.¹²

Apart from Wilf Mbanga, other Zimbabwean journalists were involved in establishing new media initiatives in the United Kingdom such as former journalists of the state broadcaster Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) who set up a radio station *SW Radio Africa* in December 2001. The station operates from a studio in North-West London and broadcasts on the shortwave in Zimbabwe as well as on the internet. Due to the relatively large number of Zimbabwean journalists present in the United Kingdom, a group of them decided to set up their own association in January 2005, the Association of Zimbabwean Journalists. The association brings together around forty journalists and also established its own news website in 2006 (<http://www.zimbabwejournalists.com>).

The growing number of Zimbabweans abroad also became visible in Zimbabwe-based media. For example, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, a national private weekly newspaper, began to feature columns written by Zimbabwean correspondents resident in the United Kingdom and the United States. These columns gave Zimbabweans a flavour of what it entailed to live in the ‘diaspora’, a term which was increasingly being used. Newspaper reports also pointed towards the less glamorous aspects of the new lives of Zimbabweans in Britain and columns narrated stories about women who had been forced into prostitution and reports highlighted the numerous Zimbabwean professionals now trapped in demeaning shift-work in British care homes.

The emergence of new media catering for emerging diasporic communities of Zimbabweans abroad fulfilled multiple roles both abroad and ‘at home’. Firstly, they provided critical perspectives on the ‘Zimbabwe crisis’ to Zimbabweans ‘at home’ in the context of the

¹¹ Press release by Wilf and Trish Mbanga, *The Zimbabwean* - a voice for the voiceless, 30 January 2005.

¹² Press release by Tafataona Mahoso, Media and Information Commission, *The Zimbabwean* is a gigantic media fraud, 17 February 2005.

increasing repression of private media and the monopolisation of public debate by government. Secondly, they covered issues of relevance to Zimbabweans in the diaspora, e.g. legal issues to do with asylum applications and carried political activism aimed at exposing the injustices perpetrated by the Zimbabwean government. Most of these emerging media provided news, information, entertainment and advertisements, and offered discussion fora on current affairs and the challenges that were part of living in a foreign country. These newly emergent media therefore aimed to connect 'the homeland' and 'the diaspora' in multiple and imaginative ways.

Imagining a 'NewZimbabwe'

Of specific interest in this article is the website *NewZimbabwe* (<http://www.NewZimbabwe.com/>) which advertises itself through various slogans such as "the Zimbabwe news you trust", "the biggest name in Zimbabwe news" and "breaking news as it happens". The website features news items, both written in-house and compiled from other sources, as well as showbiz news, sports, columns and opinion articles. Prominent Zimbabweans have contributed pieces, including the previous Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, businessman Mutumwa Mawere, young academics, intellectuals and novelists such as Chenjerai Hove. All share critical perspectives on the situation in Zimbabwe and aspire for a *NewZimbabwe* beyond the 'official' version of Zimbabwe as imagined by the ZANU-PF government. The website was set up by Mduduzi Mathuthu in June 2003.¹³ Mathuthu is a Zimbabwean journalist who used to work for *The Daily News* as correspondent in Bulawayo, which is the second biggest town in Zimbabwe, located in the western part of the country. Like many other Zimbabwean journalists, Mathuthu came to the United Kingdom to embark on postgraduate education. He enrolled for an MA degree in Journalism at Cardiff University and started the website after he completed his degree

As one of his major sources of inspiration, Mathuthu names Piers Morgan, the previous editor of the British tabloid *The Daily Mirror*. In an article on the website, Mathuthu said to be "drawn to editors with a sense of mischief, who want to make waves, and who take risks", even though these editors "occasionally drop clangers - but that's the nature of taking risks: you have to push the envelope".¹⁴ The front-page of *NewZimbabwe* is indeed modelled along the lines of a British tabloid, with headlines in big capital letters and bold and provocative headlines. For example, when Makosi's application for asylum was accepted by the British Home Office, *NewZimbabwe's* front page featured a close-up picture of Makosi's bare breasts, taken in the *Big Brother* house, and the headline read: "They can stay".¹⁵

NewZimbabwe is supported by a large number of advertisements and banners on the front page, addressing diasporic Zimbabweans, mainly those based in the United Kingdom. Money transfer companies present their services to transfer money to Zimbabwe against 'parallel' exchange rates. HIV/AIDS anti-retroviral medicines, groceries and fuel can be bought for relatives in Zimbabwe. Phone companies offer cheap calling rates to friends in Zimbabwe and other companies advertise affordable flights to Zimbabwe. Announcements of events featuring

¹³ In mid-2007, *NewZimbabwe* also launched a tabloid newspaper which was circulated in branches of the Nandos restaurant chain and African shops across the United Kingdom. This article strictly focuses on the *NewZimbabwe* website.

¹⁴ Mathuthu to edit new Zimbabwe paper in UK, *NewZimbabwe*, 22 September 2004, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/fusion3.11665.html> (last accessed: 21 February 2008).

¹⁵ *NewZimbabwe*, "Makosi update": <http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=zimele&action=display&thread=1118907878> (last accessed: 29 May 2006).

Zimbabwean musicians or DJs are made as well as notices of BBQ gatherings in Luton, which are known in Zimbabwe as 'braai' or 'gochi gochi'.

Apart from news articles and advertisements, visitors are also encouraged to join 'the debate' on the discussion forum section of the website, which has proven very popular with 8,152 members registered in May 2006.¹⁶ New members can join by simply choosing a username and password which provides them access to the forums. The forum section has been divided into debates on different categories of topics: general discussion, high school reunions, audience with a politician, talking sport, hot gossip, humour, relationships, technology, music and entertainment, religious corner and health and lifestyle. The 'general discussion' and 'relationships' sections are the most popular with the highest number of postings. The discussion forums on *NewZimbabwe* particularly address what can be called the 'interpretative community of in-group members' (Mitra 1997), given that active participation in the chatrooms requires some knowledge of local languages in Zimbabwe. Discussions are mostly held in English and Shona, or Shonglish, which refers to the mixture of Shona and English that is common among Zimbabweans, and sometimes Ndebele is also used.

The issue of 'tribalism', as it is referred to in the chatrooms, is a popular discussion topic in the forums and moderator Mathuthu, a Ndebele-speaker, has occasionally been accused of stirring up 'tribal' divisions on the forum and for promoting tribalism and advocating 'Mthwakazi', which refers to the call for self-determination of the 'Ndebele nation'. One participant in the forum even suggested introducing a special section on the forum for discussions on tribalism in order "to keep the main page 'venom' free".¹⁷ As the same contributor argued: "Those with an itch to post some tribally or racially stuff, would then simply click on that link and post their anger, frustration dreams hopes and lies. If you dont want to read the tribal crap then you will keep off that thread! Summarily let birds of the same feather fly together".¹⁸

Although this would require further offline research, it appears likely that a significant number of participants in the *NewZimbabwe* forums are Zimbabweans based in the United Kingdom. This is demonstrated not only by the language that participants use but also by the topics they discuss in the chatrooms which strongly relate to everyday life situations of Zimbabweans in Britain. For example, in a thread entitled, "Nzondoro in the UK", participants discussed where to buy chicken feet, a Zimbabwean delicacy, and Palmers Butchery in Bletchley, Milton Keynes was recommended as the best place. According to one participant, at Palmers Butchery, Zimbabweans queued in lines that resembled the "Agricultural show days with zimboz coming as far as Leicester etc for the meat".¹⁹ The question about "why the fuss? Aren't there any other butchers which have right about the same quality of meat" was dismissed by those who appreciated the supreme taste of meat from the famous Palmers Butchery.²⁰ The participants were familiar with most places in the United Kingdom as shown by the way in which they tried to help each other in identifying the exact location of Palmers Butchery.

Both the front page of *NewZimbabwe* and the forum section often carried lively debates on a range of issues, and particularly on the 'Zimbabwe crisis'. While the front page mainly gave

¹⁶ A count of members was conducted in the forum section on 29 May 2006, see <http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?action=members>.

¹⁷ Post by nygent on 26 June 2006, 10.58am, part of thread 'Start a Tribalism Section'.

¹⁸ Post by nygent on 26 June 2006, 10.58am, part of thread 'Start a Tribalism Section'.

¹⁹ Post by Valerie on 12 May 2006, 09.09am, part of thread 'Nzondoro in Uk'. The Agricultural Show is one of the most well attended annual events in Harare.

²⁰ Post by Valerie on 12 May 2006, 09.09am, part of thread 'Nzondoro in Uk'.

space to opinion pieces from Zimbabwean academics, intellectuals and politicians, the forum section was accessible to ‘ordinary Zimbabweans’, i.e. all members who had registered with the website. As the title of the website suggested, *NewZimbabwe* aimed to establish a new version of Zimbabwe with new possibilities and challenges and to imagine a different country from beyond the physical borders of the nation. Mathuthu played a crucial role in triggering debates and provoking responses, in line with his motto to ‘make waves’ and ‘to push the envelope’. As will be demonstrated later in this article, a particularly interesting debate took place on *NewZimbabwe* around the participation of Makosi Musambasi, a Zimbabwean nurse who migrated to the United Kingdom, in the 2005 British *Big Brother* television show, broadcast on Channel Four.

Makosi Musambasi: A Zimbo in *Big Brother*

The inclusion of Makosi Musambasi in the 2005 *Big Brother* television show was a milestone for Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom, and to some proved that Zimbabweans had now managed to occupy a place in the British nation. However, as will become apparent later, it also made diasporic Zimbabweans reflect on what actually comprised ‘Zimbabweanness’. More generally, the television show *Big Brother* has become known for generating a lively debate among both scholars and viewers.²¹ Among academics, Hill and Palmer (2002: 251) have argued that “[a]s a sociocultural phenomenon, it inspired much discussion about the meaning and function of television and the internet at the turn of the century”. Scannell (2002: 278) summed up the reasons why *Big Brother* has become a much-talked about ‘media event’ as follows:

Everyone knows that for a time in the summer of 2000 the *only* thing that anyone talked about was *Big Brother*. The amount of comment, discussion, and evaluation that it elicited at the time, in the press, in pubs and buses and households up and down the land was enormous. This talk was not accidental but a structural feature of the show’s relational totality of involvements. Involvement showed in talk so that to consider what it was that elicited such a “discursive ferment” is to get at the heart of the program’s care-structure as an event invented for television. The program invited, indeed, demanded that not only should it be watched on a daily basis but that it should be talked about.

Scannell considered ‘talk’ as a crucial part of *Big Brother*’s success formula in the United Kingdom.

The 2005 *Big Brother* show that provoked such significant debate among diasporic Zimbabweans in Britain was the sixth edition in the United Kingdom. The show kicked off on Friday 27 May 2005 and drew 13 contestants together for 75 days in the confinement of the *Big Brother* house. According to the British tabloid *The Sun*, “This year’s 13 *Big Brother* housemates [...] proved the weirdest, wackiest bunch seen so far”.²² Makosi was introduced as follows in official *Big Brother* publicity material:

Makosi is 24 and was born and raised in Harare, Zimbabwe. [...]. One of two daughters of a police officer father and housewife mother, she left the country at 18 to come to the UK to live with her

²¹ *Big Brother* was launched in 1999 in the Netherlands and invented by the Dutch television production company Endemol. The format has been exported to many different countries. See Mathijs and Jones (2004) for the spread of the *Big Brother* format worldwide, Jacobs (2007) for responses in Africa to *Big Brother Africa* and Frau-Meigs (2006) for *Big Brother* in Europe.

²² IT’S BACK...WITH STRANGEST LOT YET; *BIG BROTHER*, *The Sun*, 28 May 2005.

aunt and to train as a nurse. [...]. Prior to entering the house she was working at the High Wycombe hospital in the commuter belt around London and living with her sister (Flyn 2005: 152).

Makosi soon began to prominently figure in the British tabloids which traditionally closely follow the *Big Brother* show. Two weeks after the beginning of the show, *The Sun* headlined “MAKOSI’S ILLEGAL”, suggesting that Makosi could be ‘booted’ out of Britain as she violated her work permit as a trainee nurse by participating in the television show.²³ Two weeks after the end of the show, Makosi was questioned about her visa by police after they asked her for identification as she was not wearing a seatbelt. Makosi subsequently launched an appeal against attempts by the Home Office to deport her, stating that she would be in danger going back to Zimbabwe because of her lesbian behaviour in the *Big Brother* house, which she argued would be highly controversial in ‘homophobic’ Zimbabwe. *The Sun*, well-known for its racist coverage of immigrants and asylum seekers, held a poll entitled ‘Should Makosi get the boot’ among readers and 91% of its readers agreed that Makosi should indeed be ‘evicted’.²⁴ In the end, Makosi won her appeal and in November 2005, she was granted refugee status in the United Kingdom.

Apart from frequently figuring in the British tabloids, Makosi quickly drew the attention of Zimbabweans, both those based in Zimbabwe and those part of the ‘diaspora’. Bubbly, charismatic, confident and stunning, Makosi provided Zimbabweans with plenty of material to talk about. During her days in the *Big Brother* house, she confessed to being a virgin upon entering the house, went topless, controversially kissed female housemate Orlaith, allegedly engaged in unprotected sex in the pool with fellow housemate Anthony and claimed to be pregnant. As a prominent Zimbabwean in the United Kingdom commented: “I have been to several Zimbabwean gatherings in the past few months and was surprised at the amount of time spent by people discussing the Makosi issue. We have to admit that Makosi has become a household name to many of us”.²⁵

In Zimbabwe, the weekly private newspaper *The Zimbabwe Standard* wrote: “We hold our breath as more reports surface, but never before has a Zimbabwean captivated a demanding audience the way nurse Musambasi has”.²⁶ The same newspaper noted that “unlike the African M-Net produced *Big Brother*, the UK version is raunchy, not for the faint-hearted and definitely not for a conservative African audience”.²⁷ The daily state-funded Zimbabwean daily newspaper *The Herald* wondered whether it was in the nature of Zimbabwean girls to ‘misbehave’ and compared Makosi to Tapuwa Mhere, a Zimbabwean contestant in *Big Brother Africa* which was broadcast in 2003 on the South African-owned channel M-Net which is available throughout Africa to those who sign up with MultiChoice satellite subscription television services. As the newspaper wrote:

But two of the girls who have so far flown the Zimbabwean flag in reality shows have brought shame to their families and country. What exactly happens once they go into these reality shows? Is it the environment? The people they meet and associate with? Or there is something that snaps in their heads? It’s not a rule that for them to scoop the prizes they should behave shamelessly and

²³ Cox, Emma, MAKOSI’S ILLEGAL, *The Sun*, 10 June 2005.

²⁴ Cox, Emma, SHOULD MAKOSI GET THE BOOT?, *The Sun*, 1 September 2005. Cox, Emma, MAKOSI: DEPORT ME AND I’LL GET BEATEN, *The Sun*, 2 September 2005.

²⁵ Chireka, Dr Brighton, Makosi’s case, as I see it, *The Zimbabwean*, 25 November 2005.

²⁶ Mokwetsi, John, Zimbabwe: BB housemate Makosi causes stir in the UK, *Zimbabwe Standard*, 6 June 2005.

²⁷ Mokwetsi, John, Zimbabwe: BB housemate Makosi causes stir in the UK, *Zimbabwe Standard*, 6 June 2005.

outrageously. This fact was evidenced when in the *Big Brother Africa*, the Zambian contestant Cherise Makabale got the prize despite her cool character and admirable behaviour. They [Tapuwa and Makosi] both got shamelessly drunk and were reckless in having sex in the full glare of cameras. While Tapuwa paraded herself topless, Makosi went further and showed up stark naked. Makosi has made history by saying anything that she thinks of and Tapuwa almost exchanged blows with Warona of Botswana, caused by a tug of war over Mwisho Mwampamba of Tanzania. The question then is why Zimbabwean girls, especially in these times of HIV and Aids? How does their performance augur for their country? Is it the money or it's their nature?²⁸

The article judged Zimbabwean girls in a negative light as compared to their female counterparts in other parts of Africa. It was suggested that the 'immoral' behaviour demonstrated by both Makosi and Tapuwa put the Zimbabwean nation to shame. The same article invited Zimbabweans to provide an explanation for Tapuwa's and Makosi's antics in the house. Amai Ponesai Guvheya of Glen View 3 in Harare blamed it on the poor upbringing of children, loss of cultural traditions and the excessive monetary aspirations of Zimbabwean girls:

Zimbabwean girls are no longer mentally stable. Their need for money has led them into doing the unthinkable. Kusatokwana chaiko [*English translation from ChiShona: That's not being decent*]. Parents are no longer teaching their children the right thing. If you trace their backgrounds you will find out why the girls are doing this.²⁹

Mary Makuvise, who was quoted in the same article, saw a strong link between immorality and migration and suggested that Makosi's behaviour was characteristic of Zimbabwean women resident outside the country. As she noted in *The Herald*, "That should be a mirror reflection of the characters of some of our sisters and mothers when they leave the country. They bring shame to their country and families".³⁰ The diaspora experience therefore was considered to be instrumental in changing the behaviour of Zimbabwean women and it was suggested that these changes somehow reduced their 'Zimbabweanness' and brought shame to the nation.

Apart from the debate sparked off in both the British and Zimbabwean press by Makosi's participation in the house, the website *NewZimbabwe* fulfilled an important role in providing space to diasporic Zimbabweans to discuss their recent move to the United Kingdom and to debate the antics of their fellow Zimbabwean in the *Big Brother* house. More generally, the internet played a key role in the lives of diasporic Zimbabweans. A study conducted by Bloch (2005: 72-73) for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) concluded that participating in internet discussion groups was the most regular activity that diasporic Zimbabweans engaged in with other diasporic Zimbabweans (24.5%). Although this could to some extent be explained by the fact that the IOM conducted part of its survey through internet questionnaires, it is significant that this activity was mentioned and recognised as a form that kept them in touch with others, as a means to maintain a sense of community.

In line with Mathuthu's tabloid aspirations mentioned earlier, *NewZimbabwe* quickly set the stage for a lively debate through its announcement that "Every Zimbabwean should be ashamed" of Makosi in an article on the frontpage:

²⁸ Guchu, Wonder, Zimbabwe: reality shows craze catches up with Zim, *The Herald*, 16 July 2005.

²⁹ Guchu, Wonder, Zimbabwe: reality shows craze catches up with Zim, *The Herald*, 16 July 2005.

³⁰ Guchu, Wonder, Zimbabwe: reality shows craze catches up with Zim, *The Herald*, 16 July 2005.

The reality TV show *Big Brother* -- a sad and pointless contest in which 13 participants compete for fame and £100 000 in the same house for nearly 2 months, trailed by television cameras -- this year features a pathetic, self-obsessed Zimbabwean who claims to be a virgin! [...] Zimbabweans are generally cultured people, but not this chicken-brained sanctimonious squit. She has already started behaving like an Amazon squirrel, plunging the depths of iniquity to try and rile the other inhabitants of the jungle that is *Big Brother*.³¹

NewZimbabwe referred to Makosi as a ‘foul mouthed weasel’ who undermined fundamental Zimbabwean values. The provocative front page article quickly triggered a significant amount of debate in the forum section of *NewZimbabwe* and at least 100 discussion threads in the forum section focused on Makosi. As chatroom participants noted, Makosi soon became a topic that could not really be avoided. For example, one participant remarked that “the girl’s antics have forced her into all the newspapers (for the wrong reasons) and you just cant help reading about it, its like trying to ignore the Iraqi war, its always in your face anyway”.³² Another participant confessed to not normally watch the show but somehow felt obliged to engage with conversations about Makosi: “I not a fan of *Big Brother* and I dont stay glued to the TV. either. As a matter of fact I have not been watching *Big Brother* at all. Its just that all the white people at work been talking about her and her antics on a daily basis. I did not even witness the said incident but everyone is talking and there is no smoke without fire”.³³ The remainder of this article focuses on two aspects of the ‘Makosi debate’ in the forum section of the *NewZimbabwe* website.³⁴ First of all, it discusses the different identities that were attributed to Makosi by chatroom participants and secondly, it examines the way in which diasporic Zimbabweans evaluated Makosi’s perceived role as ‘ambassador’ of Zimbabwe.

Debating Zimbabweanness: Makosi’s multiple identities

Initially, the arrival of Makosi in the *Big Brother* house generated huge excitement amongst diasporic Zimbabweans participating in the *NewZimbabwe* discussion forum. One participant had immediately identified Makosi as a Zimbabwean through the way in which she spoke English: “I picked it up from her DISTINCT Zimbo accent before they said ‘She’s originally from Zimbabwe’. Our accent is unique and quite easy to pick!! Can’t wait to hear her scream ‘MAIWEEEE’”.³⁵ ‘Maiweee’ literally means ‘mother’ in ChiShona, Zimbabwe’s major local language, and is an expression used when facing danger or when calling out in disbelief.

Another *NewZimbabwe* member exclaimed “We are on the map”, hereby suggesting that Makosi’s partaking in the show had made diasporic Zimbabweans visible in the United Kingdom.³⁶ It was felt that Channel Four’s *Big Brother* show was meant to represent society, “ratio in a way”, and Makosi’s participation therefore suggested that “Zimbos are now getting

³¹ Every Zimbabwean should be ashamed, *NewZimbabwe*, 29 May 2005, available from: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/fame4.12697.html> (last accessed 26 June 2006).

³² Post by DRBOB on 8 June 2005, 11:23am, part of thread “Makosi’s Blow-job on National TV.”

³³ Post by TSOTSI on 8 June 2005, 11:24am, part of thread “Makosi’s Blow-job on National TV.”

³⁴ On 29 May 2006, an advanced Google search on Makosi was done on the forum section of *NewZimbabwe* (<http://newzim.proboards29.com>). This yielded 221 hits. Ultimately, nearly 100 threads were identified with the subject heading Makosi. These were ordered chronologically and analysed. In order to retain the character of the postings, none of the quotes from the chatrooms have been edited. All typing and grammar errors have been retained.

³⁵ Post by jmcguire on 27 May 2005, 9:37pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

³⁶ Post by Bantuwarrior on 27 May 2005, 9:39pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

the recognition”.³⁷ Forum participants felt that Channel Four had finally realised the presence of large numbers of Zimbabweans in Britain, hence the need to portray this minority through Makosi. But the recognition of Zimbabweans in Britain, through Makosi’s participation in the *Big Brother* show, was felt not going to last for long. As a result of persistent forms of racism in British society, one chatroom participant expected Makosi to be voted out of the show fairly soon:

HOW LONG DO YOU THINK SHE WILL LAST I GIVE HER 2 WEEKS OR LESS YOU KNOW
THE BRITISH AINT GOING TO LET A BLACK PERSON WIN, LET ALONE A AFRICAN
AND OHH SHIT EVEN WORSE SHE IS FROM ZIM, TONY BLAIR WILL HAVE THAT
BITCH OUT OF THERE QUICK.³⁸

The capital letters used by this chatroom participant serve to underline the urgency of the comment which was indirectly a comment on the broader ‘diaspora experience’ of Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom. As Cunningham (2001: 36) notes: “much diasporic cultural expression is a struggle for survival, identity and assertion, and it can be a struggle as much enforced by the necessities of coming to terms with the dominant culture as it is freely assumed. And the results may not be pretty”. The above posting shows the participant’s disappointment about majority white ‘British’ attitudes towards ‘a black person’ and more particularly about Tony Blair’s possible vindictiveness on a fellow Zimbabwean. This imagined power of the dominant white British hosts was an issue recurrent on the *NewZimbabwe* forum. Participants shared a number of fears and conspiracy theories on behalf of Makosi which ultimately connected to their own insecurities of being diasporic Zimbabweans in Britain, many of whom did not have a secure residence status or permit.

Another participant expected Makosi to be voted out because she indirectly represented Zimbabwe’s regime with which the British government no longer had sound diplomatic relations. While the participant above emphasised Makosi’s identity as a black person in Britain and more specifically as a Zimbabwean who by virtue of being Zimbabwean did not enjoy a secure residence status in Britain, participant ‘Dr Chinoz’ portrayed Makosi as a representative of the ruling party ZANU-PF because of her alleged affair with Philip Chiyangwa, a prominent ZANU-PF parliamentarian and businessman. Makosi, which literally means ‘princess’ in Ndebele, was in fact a ‘Zanu princess’:

I got a feeling that Makosi has been lined up as the first candidate to be booted out next Friday not only because she is Zimbabwean, but because she has been a “Zanu Princess”. How can they give her the tall order of having to receive the highest nominations from all the house’s in mates within the first seven days?³⁹

In these comments, diasporic Zimbabweans strongly identified with Makosi and in the process expressed their own views on their self-perceived roles and positions in British society. The hostile attitudes of British ‘hosts’, both in the house and more generally in British society, led participants to show their solidarity with Makosi.

However, the demarcation of ‘us’ (Zimbabweans) versus ‘them’ (British) was not always that clear cut and some participants began to distance themselves from Makosi in terms of both

³⁷ Post by watisthis on 27 May 2005, 11:07pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

³⁸ Post by watisthis on 27 May 2005, 10:21pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

³⁹ Post by Dr CHINOZ on 28 May 2005, 11:29am, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

her class and ethnic background. Instead of representing Makosi as a diasporic Zimbabwean in the United Kingdom, they attempted to situate her back in her previous Zimbabwean context which was not shared by all chatroom participants. For example, a *NewZimbabwe* member mainly saw Makosi as a fairly well-off Zimbabwean, often expressed in the term ‘musalad’ which refers to young well-to-do urban Zimbabweans residents in upmarket suburbs who dress in Western clothes and are often embarrassed to speak in local languages:

Haaa!!! Wanditangira JoeDoe. Zi Accent racho. I told my young brother she was from Zim, before Davina said it. Gore rino tinoonerera. Accent yacho haiite kunge akakura achishoferwa tho. ndainonga chop chop. Makosi... Makosikhazi? ⁴⁰

English translation from ChiShona:

Haaa!!! You beat me to it. It’s a very Zimbabwean accent. I told my brother she was from Zim, before Davina [*Big Brother* presenter] said it. This year has plenty in store. She has a posh Zimbabwean accent, although she sounds as if she grew up being chauffeur driven. I quickly figured out the accent. Makosi [literally princess]...Makosikhazi [literally queen]?

Makosi was thus represented as a relatively wealthier Zimbabwean which was expressed in her particular accent in English. Despite the likely class difference between Makosi and the chatroom participant, Makosi was still considered as a Zimbabwean. Another participant agreed that judging from the way Makosi speaks, she is a “pure muZimba”.⁴¹ But this was disputed by others on the forum who rejected that one could be identified as Zimbabwean simply through the way one speaks: “So you’re saying she’s Zimbabwean because she has an accent? Under those qualifications I would be American because of my accent”.⁴² The same chatroom participant stated:

She [Makosi] only identifies herself with Zimbabwe because she grew up there. But in terms of the blood running in her very veins and even her genetic make up she is not Zimbabwean. The fact fact she has 0% = Zimbabwean blood. Scientifically speaking, culturally speaking you name it she is not Zimbabwean.⁴³

So while most of the early forum postings celebrated the arrival of Makosi in the *Big Brother* house, subsequent contributions rated her ‘Zimbabweanness’ in a much more unfavourable light. Her ethnic background became a factor that was often drawn into this debate, particularly when *NewZimbabwe* members began to reflect on Makosi’s roots. Some believed Makosi was born in Zimbabwe to a South African mother and a Mozambican father, and this suddenly made her Zimbabwean identity appear questionable:

Can’t vouch that a Mosken [derogatory term used for Zimbabweans of Mozambican origin] with a South African mother represents Zimbabwe in the true sense of the word, values, culture, the lot. Were they passing through Harare when she was born? She is quite a loud mouth, and not very likeable.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Post by FullMessage on 27 May 2005, 9:44pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴¹ Post by watisthis on 27 May 2005, 11:04pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴² Post by spie on May 28, 2005, 7:39pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴³ Post by spie on 28 May 2005, 8:12pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴⁴ Post by munodawafa on 27 May 2005, 10:58pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

Some considered her to be a ‘muNyasarandi’, which is a derogatory term referring to migrant workers of Malawian descent, most of whom came to Zimbabwe between 1953 and 1963 during the time of the Central African Federation comprised Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (now Malawi).⁴⁵ Others pointed towards Makosi’s surname which for then proved that she was no ‘Zimbabwean’: “OK to end this argument is ‘Musambasi’ a zimbabwean surname? - No its not! Just like surnames Liboma or Modimo its not a Zimbabwean. She just grew up in Zimbabwe but is not Zimbabwean”.⁴⁶

Merely having been born in Zimbabwe was not sufficient for being ‘Zimbabwean’, and another participant drew parallels with his/her own British-born child: “If she [Makosi] is Zimbabwean then my son is English”.⁴⁷ Others felt that ‘Zimbabwean culture’ should simply be defined in terms of a person, born and bred in Zimbabwe, someone who has solid ‘roots’ in the country.⁴⁸ One *NewZimbabwe* member even argued that it did not make sense to discuss ‘foreigners’ on a forum that was supposed to deal with ‘Zimbabwean’ issues: “She is beautiful its a pity Zimbabweans argue about foreigners on a ZIMBABWEAN FORUM” and the participated acknowledged to “proud of ZIMBABWEANS that excel but I resent foreigners that masquerade as Zimbabweans, one’s nationality is of paramount importance .Visiting a stable does not make you a horse”.⁴⁹

However, calls for support to Makosi were made and justified particularly by referring to her position as an African and victim of racism in the *Big Brother* house. For example, one participant put it as follows: “I read ‘pull her down’ syndrome in the majority of contributions. Why not support a sister from mother Africa guys? If she does not get your support, who will give it?”.⁵⁰ It was felt that Makosi could not count on votes from British viewers who were unlikely to support her. Fellow housemate Saskia’s racist remarks were also mentioned as a reason for support to Makosi: “Yeh, let’s support her. We should nominate Saskia for eviction. She sez she hates immigrants!”.⁵¹ The mood thus shifted to “she got my support” and to “Guys we should stick together and prevent her from being voted out next week”.⁵²

Other ways in which Makosi was discussed was through framings of gender. Several participants, most of whom seemed to be male, were not particularly concerned about Makosi’s exact roots but primarily say her as ‘hot chick’. When a picture of Makosi was posted on the forum, participants exclaimed: “damn she looks quite nice, She has that Zimbabwean look, at least they found a descent girl to represent Zimba. I now might jus vote to keep her in”.⁵³ One member alerted the forum to the fact that Makosi was in a “Bikini right now on E4. Wow nice to see a woman with hips for a change! Was tired of sticks with boobs!”.⁵⁴ The debate turned into adulation for black women: “I love black women. Black women huchi [honey]!!”⁵⁵ The comments queried Makosi’s claim that she was a virgin and became suggestive of her sexual

⁴⁵ Post by eddy on 27 May 2005, 11:07pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴⁶ Post by spie on 28 May 2005, 4:21pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴⁷ Post by spie on May 28, 2005, 5:42pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴⁸ Post by munodawafa on 27 May 2005, 11:21pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁴⁹ Post by vumani on 28 May 2005, 8:55pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁵⁰ Post by munodawafa on 28 May 2005, 12:22am, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁵¹ Post by JonDoe on 28 May 2005, 12:39am, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁵² Post by spie on 28 May 2005, 12:32am, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁵³ Post by watisthis on 27 May 2005, 10:50pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁵⁴ Post by JonDoe on 27 May 2005, 10:54pm, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁵⁵ Post by munodawafa on 28 May 2005, 12:58am, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

potential with talk of thighs looking “like they have never been stretched that much”.⁵⁶ Makosi was considered to be a ‘proper’ and ‘voluptuous’ Zimbabwean woman as compared to her ‘thin’ British housemates.

This section has demonstrated the different identities that were attributed to Makosi such as ‘muZimbo’, diasporic Zimbabwean in the United Kingdom, ‘musalad’, ‘Mosken’, ‘muNyasarandi’, foreigner, ‘hot chick’ and ‘Zimbabwean woman’. These debates have shown that the formation of identities should be seen as a never-ending, dynamic process during which categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’ – and distinctions between them - are constantly being made and remade. While debates around Makosi’s participation in *Big Brother* seemed to focus on her sexual escapades, these ultimately revolved around what it means to be ‘Zimbabwean’. For some, merely having been born in Zimbabwe did not make one Zimbabwean, and nationality of both parents was therefore considered to be crucial in determining ‘Zimbabweanness’.

Representing the nation: Makosi’s perceived role as Zimbabwean ‘ambassador’

While the previous section discussed how online debates about Makosi were ultimately about what is required to be classified ‘Zimbabwean’, this section highlights the ways in which chatroom participants assessed how Makosi performed the ‘ambassador role’ that she was thought to have. Even though her Zimbabwean identity was contested by participants, the *Big Brother* show clearly framed Makosi as a Zimbabwean nurse in the United Kingdom. Whether they agreed with this status or not, chatroom participants strongly felt that Makosi was indirectly representing all Zimbabweans through her participation in the *Big Brother* show which often resulted in profound embarrassment among contributors.

The idea that Makosi brought the Zimbabwean nation to shame is demonstrated by a thread entitled “Makosi makes it seem like we eat dogs in Zim”. In the *Big Brother* house, Makosi confessed that she had tasted dog, horse and cat meat. It provoked discussion and a sense of disgust among forum participants who saw Makosi’s claims as a clear embarrassment to all Zimbabweans. Postings made it clear that they were “not happy with this. now peeps think we eat dogs in Zim”. Another participant “almost kicked my TV when she said that!!!” and others were convinced that “its all lies, she never ate dog. Asi chii nhai? Sei Tichidaro?” [*English translation from ChiShona*: what’s wrong with her? Why do we do that?]. However, a supporter of Makosi tried to downplay the comments by stating that it was only a game show and forum participants should not take Makosi so seriously:

For pple who DO eat rats i am surprised that you shld find offence in Makosi jokingly saying that she has eaten dog meat. They were after all trying to cause disgust to Science [fellow housemate]. If you are to follow this reality ‘game’ show be in the mood for play and jokes as it exactly that , a GAME show. Otherwise just switch off your television if C4 or E4 are the only channels your Tele receives otherwise flick to others that dont have Makosi on them.⁵⁷

This forum member disagreed that Makosi was required to perform an ‘ambassador’ role and felt that since Zimbabweans traditionally ate mice [*mbeva* in ChiShona], they should not take offence if Makosi had indeed eaten dog meat. Another participant accused the forum of implying that Makosi’s statements in the house were applicable to all Zimbabweans:

⁵⁶ Post by munodawafa on May 28, 2005, 1:08am, part of thread “A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!”.

⁵⁷ Post by toots on 24 July 2005, 12:17pm, part of thread “Makosi makes it seem like we eat dogs in Zim”.

Makosi never said Zimbabweans eat all those kind of things she mentioned. She said she ate them. She did not say she ate them in Zimbabwe either. So I don't see where the problem is. This is our sis wanting to grab a bit of headlines and get something out of it. So let it be. I am for Makosi full-time and I wish she would go all the way.⁵⁸

This discussion demonstrates how Zimbabweans dealt with their new place in British society. Forum participants felt that on the rare occasion that they saw a Zimbabwean on their television screen, Makosi had a responsibility to represent Zimbabweans adequately. Mainstream British media would rarely show Zimbabwe in a positive light but Makosi now had the chance to do so but many chatroom participants remained unimpressed.

Makosi's sexual escapades in the house provoked similar responses of embarrassment. Under the title "Makosi's Blow-job on National TV" the forum discussed an allegation that Makosi had performed oral sex on Anthony, one of her housemates in *Big Brother*. Many strongly opposed this act and felt that Makosi's "hand job, blow job is now pushin it a bit 2 far even for me as a liberal zimbo". It was felt that Makosi had violated fundamental Zimbabwean moral values, and this would never be shown on ZTV, Zimbabwe's only television station: "its too trashy watch something else haisi ZTV kaiyi [*English translation from ChiShona: This is not Zimbabwe television*]".

Makosi's sexual escapades again brought the issue of identity to the forefront, as is apparent from the following quote in which her identity as a Zimbabwean was questioned:

Hand job on national tele?Thats really pushing it.She is really a whore and I think she is a disgrace to zim.thats the last thing zimbo's in the uk need, another zimbo on tele acting like she a nymphomania.She needs help and she is a total embrassement.Did she grow in zim or the UK?⁵⁹

As shown by these postings, Zimbabweans in the diaspora expected Makosi to behave in a certain way, to show 'Zimbabwean behaviour' that was familiar to them:

Oh she's independent and free to do what she wants. Bollocks!!! Our society did nor raise girls to hop into bed uninvited and hand out sexual pleasures to unsuspecting men. You say its for TV and to keep her in the house, hakusi kuhura ikoko [*English translation from ChiShona: isn't it prostitution*]?. Even the British are shocked. She went in having stated that she is Zimbabwean bhuradhishiti wake [*English translation from ChiShona: she is bloody 'shit'*]! She is soooo cheap.⁶⁰

Makosi was not only given the responsibility of representing Zimbabwe but Africa more generally, and she was not doing a terribly good job according to most participants. In the face of dominant society, it was felt that Makosi should make even more efforts to do Africans proud:

The issue here is not so much of whether she should stop or something along those lines, the issue is that she is a disgrace whether that is the African female prowess. Any sane person would not condone such acts, it is these same things that we as Africans are prejudiced and you go on and on saying that Euro and Americans in fact whites discriminate you, but its you Africans who engage in shameful activities. It does not simply imply that because whites are doing it, or arabs its good, we have an integrity to protect as Africans that is the issue.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Post by Gudoricharime, 24 July 2005, 2:28pm, part of thread "Makosi makes it seem like we eat dogs in Zim".

⁵⁹ Post by Izvo on 8 Jun 2005, 12:51pm, part of thread "Makosi's Blow-job on National t.v.".

⁶⁰ Post by tazviona on 8 June 2005, 2:11pm, part of thread "Makosi's Blow-job on National t.v.".

⁶¹ Post by Mufundisi on 8 June 2005, 1:42pm, part of thread "Makosi's Blow-job on National t.v.".

However, others did not agree but felt instead that Makosi was actually confirming exactly what Zimbabweans and Africans more generally engage in:

African morality-what a joke?Where is the morality in celebrating “small houses”, mbenembe and promiscuity on this site and what explains the horrendous HIV infection rates and aids in Zimbabwe? Makosi honestly does in public what most other Zimbos do behind closed doors who then in public act out mock piety and innocence. How is Mugabe moral with his history of an adulterous affair with disGrace? If you point a finger always remember that three are pointing back at you-get real and wake up to your selves-you can take it or leave it.⁶²

This was confirmed by another forum participant:

Africans are good at hiding behind their fingers. Makhosi is a good person in that she reveals the other hidden side of Africa. We are all into this its just that Makhosi is brave to reveal the true African sexual prowess. I wish if she could join NewZim.com.⁶³

In addition to an alleged blow-job, the *NewZimbabwe* forum also received an update to the effect that Makosi had “played tonsil tennis” [kissing game] with fellow housemate Anthony and then with female housemate Sam. This again was received with disgust by *NewZimbabwe* members:

Usually two women kissing would be the ultimate fantasy, but seeing that girl yesterday somehow was tasteless. i dont know maybe because i know her or its the first time i have ever seen a Zimbo bisexual woman in action - i mean *Big Brother* had to go to an adverts break as the snogging was so heavy it could have caused censorship problems. this was this morning at 12.30am.

We have now come full circle in UK. i know for a fact that there are many more Makhosi’s out there, vamwe vanoita zvemaBJs [*English translation from ChiShona: some do BJs*] for a living. We have now fully embraced the Sodom and Gomora culture ye the West. Lets hope we dont all end up the same way.

Good news though - not all Zimbo girls in the diaspora are like that. vamwe vachiri kuzvibata [*English translation from ChiShona: some are still looking after themselves*].⁶⁴

Makosi’s behaviour was blamed on her moving to the United Kingdom where she had assimilated into dominant ‘British’ culture. Kissing between women was seen as something part of British culture and alien to Zimbabwean culture. However, there was some hope as Makosi was not representing all Zimbabwean women in the diaspora.

While ‘forumites’ debated how Makosi performed in her perceived role as ambassador of Zimbabwe through her conversation about food and her sexual escapades, the issue of politics could not be avoided. With many having left Zimbabwe because of the ‘crisis’ in the country, they felt Makosi could at least have used the occasion of the *Big Brother* house to highlight the situation ‘back home’. As one participant noted: “She spends all her energy talking s**t to papers but seem to have forgotten her roots. Has she said ANYTHING about what’s going on at home??? Does she care or even have an opinion... doesn’t seem like it! She’s wasting a valuable opportunity on a big fat ego trip!”.⁶⁵ But another forum contributor disagreed and argued that “Makosi has got her own business to take care of same as anybody else i don’t think it’s her duty to comment about the Zim situ in the UK media”.⁶⁶

⁶² Post by abcdefghj, 8 June 2005, 9:26am, part of thread “Makosi’s Blow-job on National t.v.”.

⁶³ Post by Ndabangani on 8 Jun 2005, 10:15am, part of thread “Makosi’s Blow-job on National t.v.”.

⁶⁴ Post by tthomik on 16 June 2005, 8:44am, part of thread “makosi update”.

⁶⁵ Post by Nzara on Aug 15, 2005, 8:15am, part of thread “Makosi has no integrity”.

⁶⁶ Post by Whit on Aug 15, 2005, 9:52am, part of thread “Makosi has no integrity”.

This section has shown the different ways in which diasporic Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom considered Makosi as ‘their ambassador’ who was burdened with having to represent Zimbabwe in a positive light. The chatroom response from diasporic Zimbabweans relates more generally to responses to media coverage of ethnic minorities or diasporic communities in mainstream media. For example, in the 1980s, Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities strongly criticised programmes such as Channel Four’s *Black on Black* and *Eastern Eye* for being shallow and unable to deal with key issues relevant to different ethnic groups. While these programmes specifically targeted ethnic minority audiences, the “content and angle of some programmes have laid them to charges of scandalous, and even racist, portrayal that is no better than that of the mainstream” (Daniels 1999: 76). Because of the generally unfavourable coverage of ethnic minorities in mainstream media, individuals from minority groups such as Makosi often carry an extra burden of representation with them. Makosi provided Zimbabweans with a rare chance to prove to British audiences that they were not all simply ‘economic migrants’ or ‘asylum seekers-turned-criminals’. However, according to chatroom participants, Makosi did not take this chance seriously and ultimately put the Zimbabwean nation to shame.

Conclusion

With the growing numbers of Zimbabweans leaving Zimbabwe for greener pastures such as the United Kingdom, we have seen a rising number of media initiatives catering for both the needs of Zimbabweans abroad and at home. While these initiatives sought to supply Zimbabweans with critical perspectives on what became known as ‘the Zimbabwean crisis’, some also offered an opportunity to interact with other diasporic Zimbabweans and with mainstream media in Britain, such as the forum section of the website *NewZimbabwe*.

This article has focused on debates surrounding the participation of a Zimbabwean nurse, Makosi Musambasi, in the 2005 British television show *Big Brother*. As a nurse, Makosi was the archetype of the Zimbabwean diaspora experience in the United Kingdom. Well summarised by Taffy Nyamwanza in the newspaper *The Zimbabwean*, Makosi “brought to the fore some critical issues that Zimbabweans in the diaspora are all too familiar with: nursing as a platform to bigger things, AIDS and the rumours of AIDS, media xenophobia, and perhaps by far the most topical, a perilous immigration status accompanied by the constant fear of forced removal to Mugabeland by the real *Big Brother*, the Home Office”.⁶⁷ Zimbabweans could easily identify with Makosi’s experience in Britain but also profoundly distanced themselves from her.

As a migrant to the United Kingdom, Makosi underwent training as a nurse upon arrival in the country. As Nyamwanza suggested, this was not because she was particularly interested in nursing but like many other Zimbabwean migrants, Makosi considered nursing as a ‘stepping stone’ to a more glamorous professional career. Another issue that enabled diasporic Zimbabweans to identify with Makosi was the amount of racism that both Makosi and other Zimbabweans were confronted with in their daily lives in the United Kingdom. The producers of *Big Brother* received a number of complaints from viewers about alleged racism when Makosi’s fellow housemate Saskia told her “You lot always have a chip on your shoulder” and made derogatory comments about her Afro-hairstyle: “And you wear a fucking wig on your head”.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Makosi was also confronted with the same levels of insecurity surrounding her immigration status in Britain when she faced deportation two weeks after the show.

⁶⁷ Nyamwanza, Taffy, Makosi and the real *Big Brother*, *The Zimbabwean*, 16 September 2005.

⁶⁸ Makosi in *Big Brother* racism row, *NewZimbabwe*, 11 March 2006, available from: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/fame14.12816.html> (last accessed: 21 February 2008).

But other issues did not always lead diasporic Zimbabweans to identity with Makosi such as her alleged unprotected sex with fellow housemate Anthony which was considered by many as irresponsible behaviour because of the risk of HIV/AIDS. Her kisses with a female housemate also could not count on approval from most chatroom participants, neither did her revelations that she had eaten dog, horse and cat meat and her silence on the 'Zimbabwe crisis'. In this regard, Makosi had clearly failed to act as a role model to other Zimbabweans, and moreover, she had put the Zimbabwean nation to shame. To many Zimbabweans, Makosi's participation in the show demonstrated that the Zimbabwean diaspora of the 2000s had finally managed to occupy a place in British public life but it was felt that through her questionable behaviour Makosi had wasted an opportunity to portray Zimbabweans in a positive light.

Makosi's television performance profoundly challenged and provoked ideas about what internet participants understood as 'Zimbabwean' identity, morality and womanhood. On the surface, these debates seemed to be about the sexual escapades of Makosi in the house but underneath these discussions, the 'Makosi case' triggered a more serious debate about what it means to be 'Zimbabwean'. This case has illustrated the ways in which diasporic Zimbabweans tried to fix identity, to provide an essence that could be seen as 'Zimbabweanness'. Ultimately, this demonstrates the importance of the internet as a space in which identities are imagined, formed, contested and challenged, often in response to media coverage of 'ethnic minorities' or 'diasporic communities' in mainstream media.

References

- Ackah, W., & Newman, J. (2003). Ghanaian Seventh Day Adventists on and offline: problematising the virtual communities discourse. In K. H. Karim (Ed.), *The media of diaspora* (pp. 203-214). London: Routledge.
- Adams, P. C., & Ghose, R. (2003). India.com: the construction of a space between. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27(4), 414-437.
- Adeniyi, A. G. (2007). *Nigerian diaspora and the virtual construction of identity*. Paper presented at the Paper presented at the Institute of Communications Studies (ICS) post-graduate conference, 18 May 2007, Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds.
- Anyanwu, C. (2005). Virtual mobilisation and virtual African diaspora. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 32(3), 93-108.
- Bernal, V. (2006). Diaspora, cyberspace and political imagination: the Eritrean diaspora online. *Global Networks*, 6(2), 161-179.
- Bloch, A. (2005). *The development potential of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora: a survey of Zimbabweans living in the UK and South Africa*. Geneva: International Organisation for Migration.
- Bond, P. & M. Manyanya (2002). *Zimbabwe's plunge: exhausted nationalism, neoliberalism and the struggle for social justice*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. London: Routledge.
- Camauër, L. (2003). Ethnic minorities and their media in Sweden. *NORDICOM Review*, 24(2), 69-88.
- Campbell, H. (2003). *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: the exhaustion of the patriarchal model of liberation*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The information age: economy, society and culture. Vol. I: The rise of the network society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers

- Chikanda, A. (2006). Skilled health professionals' migration and its impact on health delivery in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 32(4), 667-680.
- Christiansen, C. (2004). News media consumption among immigrants in Europe: the relevance of diaspora. *Ethnicities*, 4(2), 185-207.
- Cohen, R. (1997). *Global diasporas: an introduction*. London: UCL Press.
- Cottle, S. (2000). *Ethnic minorities and the media: changing cultural boundaries*. Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Cottle, S. (2004). *The racist murder of Stephen Lawrence: media performance and public transformation*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Cottle, S., & Ismond, P. (1997). *Television and ethnic minorities: producers' perspective : a study of BBC in-house, independent, and cable TV producers*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Cunningham, S. (2001). Popular media as public 'sphericules' for diasporic communities. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4(2), 131.
- Cunningham, S., & Sinclair, J. (2001). *Floating lives: the media and Asian diasporas*: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Cunningham, S., Hawkins, G., Yue, A., Nguyen, T., & Sinclair, J. (2000). Multicultural broadcasting and diasporic video as public sphericules. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43(9), 1533.
- Daniels, Therese (1999) Programming for black audiences. In Hood, Stuart (Ed.), *Behind the screens: the structure of British television* (pp. 65-81). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Darnolf, S., & Laakso, L. (2003). *Twenty years of independence in Zimbabwe: from liberation to authoritarianism*. London: Macmillan.
- Dominguez, V. R. (1989). *People as subject, people as object: selfhood and peoplehood in contemporary Israel*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Dudrah, R. K. (2002). Zee TV-Europe and the construction of a pan-European South Asian identity. *Contemporary South Asia*, 11(2), 163-181.
- Durham, M. G. (2004). Constructing the "new ethnicities": media, sexuality, and diaspora identity in the lives of South Asian immigrant girls. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21(2), 140-161.
- Ferguson, R. (1998). *Representing "race": ideology, identity, and the media*. London ; New York: Arnold.
- Flynn, P. (2005). *BIG BROTHER: Access all areas*. London: Channel 4 Books.
- Frau-Meigs, D. (2006). *Big Brother* and reality TV in Europe: Towards a theory of situated acculturation by the media. *European Journal of Communication*, 21(1), 33-56.
- Freeman, L. (2005). Contradictory constructions of the crisis in Zimbabwe. *Historia: Journal of the Historical Association of South Africa*, 50(2), 287-310.
- Gabriel, J. (1998). *Whitewash: racialised politics and the media*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Georgiou, M. (2005). Diasporic media across Europe: multicultural societies and the universalism--particularism continuum. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 31(3), 481-498.
- Gillespie, M. (1995). *Television, ethnicity and cultural change*. London: Routledge.
- Gillespie, M., & Cheesman, T. (2002). Media cultures in India and the South Asia diaspora. *Contemporary South Asia*, 11(2), 127-133.
- Gow, G. (2004). Translocations of affirmation. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(3), 301-319.

- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who needs identity? In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1-17). London: Sage Publications.
- Hammar, A., B. Raftopoulos & S. Jensen (2003). *Zimbabwe's unfinished business: rethinking land, state and nation in the context of crisis*. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Hanafi, S. (2005). Reshaping geography: Palestinian community networks in Europe and the new media. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 31(3), 581-598.
- Hill, A. & G. Palmer (2002). Editorial: *Big Brother*. *Television New Media*, 3(3), 251-254.
- Hiller, H. H., & Franz, T. M. (2004). New ties, old ties and lost ties: the use of the internet in diaspora. *New Media & Society*, 6(6), 731-752.
- Hirji, F. (2006). Common concerns and constructed communities: Muslim Canadians, the Internet, and the war in Iraq. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 30(2), 125-141.
- Husband, C. (1994). *A richer vision: the development of ethnic minority media in western democracies*. London: J. Libbey.
- Ignacio, E. (2005). *Building diaspora: Filipino community formation on the Internet*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Jacobs, S. (2007). Big Brother, Africa is watching. *Media, Culture & Society*, 29(6), 851-868.
- Jeganathan, P. (1998). Eelam.com: place, nation and imagi-nation in cyberspace. *Public Culture*, 10(3), 515-528.
- Kaldor-Robinson, J. (2002). The virtual and the imaginary: the role of diasporic new media in the construction of a national identity during the break-up of Yugoslavia. *Oxford Development Studies*, 30(2), 177-187.
- Karim, K. H. (2003). *The media of diaspora*: Routledge.
- King, T. (2003). Rhodesian in hyperspace: the maintenance of a national and cultural identity. In K. H. Karim (Ed.), *The media of diaspora* (pp. 177-188). London: Routledge.
- Madianou, M. (2005). Contested communicative spaces: rethinking identities, boundaries and the role of the media among Turkish speakers in Greece. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 31(3), 521-541.
- Mandaville, P. (2001). Reimagining Islam in diaspora: the politics of mediated community. *Gazette: International Journal for Communication Studies*, 63(2/3), 169-186.
- Mathijs, E. & J. Jones (2004). *Big Brother international: formats, critics and publics*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Mbiba, B. (2005). Zimbabwe's global citizens in 'Harare North': some preliminary observations. In M. Palmberg & R. Primorac (Eds.), *Skinning the skunk* (pp. 26-38). Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Mitra, A. (1997). Diasporic web sites: ingroup and outgroup discourse. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 14, 158-181.
- Mitra, A. (2006). Towards finding a cybernetic safe place: illustrations from people of Indian origin. *New Media & Society*, 8(2), 251-268.
- Ogan, C. L. (2001). *Communication and identity in the Diaspora: Turkish migrants in Amsterdam and their use of media*: Lexington Books.
- Raftopoulos, B. & T. Savage (2004). *Zimbabwe: injustice and political reconciliation*. Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.
- Rheingold, H. (1994). *The virtual community: surfing the internet*. London: Minerva Publishing.
- Riggins, S. H. (1992). *Ethnic minority media: an international perspective*. Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications.
- Safran, W. (1991). Diasporas in modern societies: Myths of homeland and return. *Diaspora*,

1(1), 83-99.

- Scannell, P. (2002). *Big Brother* as a television event. *Television New Media*, 3(3), 271-282.
- Shi, Y. (2005). Identity construction of the Chinese diaspora, ethnic media use, community formation, and the possibility of social activism. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 19(1), 55-72.
- Sun, W. (2006). *Media and the Chinese diaspora : community, communications and commerce in the Asia-Pacific*. London: Routledge.
- Tevera, D. S. & J. Crush (2003). *The new brain drain from Zimbabwe*. Cape Town: IDASA.
- Thompson, K. (2002). Border crossings and diasporic identities: media use and leisure practices of an ethnic minority. *Qualitative Sociology*, 25(3), 409-418.
- Tynes, R. (2007). Nation-building and the diaspora on Leonenet: a case of Sierra Leone in cyberspace. *New Media & Society*, 9(3), 497-519.
- Wenjing, X. (2005). Virtual space, real identity: Exploring cultural identity of Chinese Diaspora in virtual community. *Telematics & Informatics*, 22(4), 395-404.
- Werbner, P. (1997). Essentialising essentialism, essentialising silence: ambivalence and multiplicity in the constructions of racism and ethnicity. In P. Werbner & T. Modood (Eds.), *Debating cultural hybridity: multi-cultural identities and the politics of anti-racism* (pp. 226-254). London: Zed Books.
- Zinyama, L., & D.S. Tevera (2002). *Zimbabweans who move: perspectives on international migration in Zimbabwe*. Cape Town: IDASA.

Internet chatroom thread references

NewZimbabwe, "Start a Tribalism Section",
<http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=zimele&action=display&thread=1151315932>
(last accessed: 26 June 2006).

NewZimbabwe, "Nzondoro in Uk",
<http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=hotgossip&action=display&thread=1147377775>
(last accessed: 29 May 2006).

NewZimbabwe, "A Zimbo in *Big Brother*!!!!!!",
<http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=zimele&action=display&thread=1117226092>
(last accessed: 29 May 2006).

NewZimbabwe, "Makosi makes it seem like we eat dogs in Zim",
<http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=zimele&action=display&thread=1122201946>
(last accessed: 29 May 2006).

NewZimbabwe, "Makosi's Blow-job on National t.v.",
<http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=zimele&action=display&thread=1118191997>
(last accessed: 29 May 2006).

NewZimbabwe, "makosi update",
<http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=zimele&action=display&thread=1118907878>
(last accessed: 29 May 2006).

NewZimbabwe, “Makosi has no integrity”,
<http://newzim.proboards29.com/index.cgi?board=zimele&action=display&thread=1124090143>
(last accessed: 29 May 2006).