



**Quote This
Woman+**
No voice left behind

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Open letter to newsrooms: What stories do we leave out in how we frame March and March?

Every day, Quote This Woman+ takes its hat off to all the journalists who work under pressures that most news consumers rarely see: long hours, shrinking newsrooms, low pay, relentless deadlines, online abuse, and the constant demand to produce for multiple platforms. Despite this, they perform one of democracy's most important functions: they take events of immense complexity and distil them clearly enough for the rest of us to understand what is happening around us.

Every act of journalism is, by necessity, an act of simplification. That is one of journalism's greatest strengths, and it is also one of its greatest responsibilities.

As the June 30 March and March protests approach, pressurised newsrooms reporting in and about South Africa will draft headlines, write blurbs, prepare news alerts and conduct interviews, using their skills of distillation and simplicity. These headlines and blurbs act as cognitive shortcuts. That means that well-established words and phrases will be chosen for their ability to drop readers directly into current events before they have read a single paragraph.

QW+ is aware that long after the detail of today's reporting has faded, people often remember the frame through which they first understood the story. History is rarely written all at once. It accumulates, headline by headline, frame by frame, until one explanation comes to feel inevitable.

Yet every frame carries an opportunity cost. Every decision about what sits at the centre of a story shines a brighter light on one aspect of events while another receives less attention.

At Quote This Woman+, we have been asking ourselves what stories become harder to see when “xenophobia” becomes the dominant frame through which March and March is understood.

We know that violence directed at people because they are perceived to be foreign deserves rigorous reporting, and that the attitudes that make such violence possible require careful coverage. We also know that June 30 sits within a much larger story of state failure, deepening inequality, economic desperation, political mobilisation, collapsing

public trust and continental instability. These realities co-exist and all of them help explain this moment, and right now, the word xenophobia has the potential to work as a shortcut that obscures a wide range of inter-locking issues.

Our concern is that when xenophobia becomes the dominant explanatory frame in headlines, blurbs and social media posts, many of those connected stories become harder to see. Readers remember the frame. Public conversation follows the frame. History eventually inherits the frame.

Quote This Woman+ has spent many years encouraging newsrooms to ask whose voices are missing from coverage. Today we would like to offer a companion question for newsrooms preparing to cover June 30 events: **What stories become harder for readers to understand when xenophobia frames the headline?**

Newsrooms help societies decide what matters, where responsibility lies, and which questions deserve sustained public attention every time they choose a framing and a headline.

Is there space to be specific about March and March? Or to give space to the multifaceted nature of protests? Instead of “Residents stage xenophobic march” to write “Residents stage march” and allow the story to unpack the rest?

Or instead of “SA branches for anti-immigrant shutdown” to say “SA braces for March and March action?”

Coverage of these events will become part of South Africa's historical record. Quote This Woman+ hopes that, in the midst of the urgency every newsroom will face, there is also space for one brief pause, one additional question, and one more moment of editorial curiosity about the opportunity cost of the frames we choose.

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