

exploit the country's fisheries, bauxite, titanium and diamond deposits. The situation became worse when in the 1980s there were cuts in social services and subsidies as the country attempted to meet the conditions that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) laid down in exchange for loans. Although the banditry of the RUF became unsurpassed, the rebel group's roots lay in the marginalisation of Sierra Leone's south and east regions.

The second feature of the Sierra Leone conflict that the movie misses, is the regional nature of the civil war that is the backdrop to *Blood Diamond* plot. Except for references to Liberia as the route to smuggle diamonds to overseas markets such as the scene where Archer is arrested on Liberia's border disguised as a *National Geographic* reporter, *Blood Diamond* makes no reference to the role of Liberia in the civil war. Liberia's Charles Taylor provided support for Foday Sankoh and his RUF rebels as a response to Sierra Leone's role in the regional peacekeeping force that was deployed in Liberia. Liberia has always had its eye on Sierra Leone's eastern regions. Support for the RUF may have been one way of settling this long-standing border dispute.

Not helping the plot is the implausible flirting between Archer and Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly) who is a United States journalist doing a story on illicit trading of diamonds in Sierra Leone. Bowen comes across as a journalist who is committed to get to the bottom of the story on the role of diamonds in the conflict in Sierra Leone. Besides spicing the story with sexual flirtation, the relationship between diamond-

smuggling Archer and the investigative journalist is artificial. Their world outlooks are miles apart.

Besides these scriptwriters' attempts to fit the story of the Sierra Leone civil war into a Hollywood box of personal tragedy and sexual flirtation, *Blood Diamond* is a good movie with excellent acting and a tight storyline. It raises many of the questions about how in resource wars, it is not the soldiers that are on the firing line but ordinary civilians. LE

Some reading on the Sierra Leone civil war

- Le Billon, P 2004 "The Geopolitical Economy of 'Resource Wars'", in *Geopolitics* 9(1)
- Richard, P 1996 *Fighting for the Rainforest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*. Oxford: The International African Institute with James Currey
- Silberfein, M 2004 "The Geopolitics of Conflict and Diamonds in Sierra Leone", in *Geopolitics* 9(1).
- Tabb, W 2007 "Resource Wars", in *Monthly Review* 58(8).

Dinga Sikwebu is a part-time lecturer in the Sociology Department at the University of Witwatersrand. Blood Diamond is currently on circuit, but if you miss it the DVD will soon be out.

Do glowing reports fit

Lebo Mathosa's slinky body?

Writer **Jackie Mondl**

wonders at the prejudice, sexism and hypocrisy of the media's eulogies around Lebo Mathosa's death.

Lebo Mathosa's death was quite a blow to most of us. She had definitely made her mark in our hearts and minds. Even those who did not like her, could not ignore her, she was there whether you liked her or not. It is therefore fitting that glowing tributes and praises poured from all sectors of our society on her death. In true South African style and contrary to Shakespeare, the tributes showed that "the evil that men do does not live after them".

Perhaps there is nothing wrong with this, but I am perturbed by the manner in which most of the tributes perpetuate homophobia, sexism



and stereotypes about femininity in their selective reporting of Lebo's life and lifestyle. Plus, the sanctifying spin that some of the reports put on Lebo's bad behaviour and habits is worrisome in a country that is grappling with instilling good values among its citizens. So, as the song goes *akuvumi mangithule*.

There is certainly a denial theme about Lebo's sexuality that threads through most of the articles and reports in the media. The fact that she was a lesbian, where it is mentioned, it is quite superficially and not with the same zeal as the other attributes: Diva, Icon, Prima Donna etc.

In the *Saturday Star* 28 October 2006, Therese Owen wrote, "Lebo was also open about her preference for the fair sex". She cites this as an example of Lebo's "controversial life that makes our lives interesting". Why is it controversial that a woman prefers women? And, who calls women "the fair sex" in 2006? But of course this is more palatable than saying outright that she was a lesbian. Nevertheless, at least Owen does mention her lesbianism. Other reports are silent on this just to keep her in the closet even in her death. Captions under the photo of her mourning lover Sibongile, refer to her as "Lebo's friend". In his article in the *Sunday Times* of 29 October 2006, Andrew Donaldson, does talk about Lebo's

sexuality, however, he mentions this as part of what he calls "an utterly skewed value system". I think what is skewed in this instance is Mr Donaldson's view of homosexuality.

It could be argued that since Lebo was open about her sexuality, there was no need to mention it, but the same could be said about other aspects of her life. One would expect more prominence to be given to this aspect of her life considering Jacob Zuma's statement on gays and the current debate on same sex marriages. Mshoza became a villain with many for her statement that Lebo introduced her to lesbianism and drugs. Is this not hypocritical considering among other accolades, Lebo is celebrated for leading the women of this country by example?

Also, the desperate attempt by the media to depict her as a sex symbol from the male perspective and for men's delight is not so subtle. For many, it is just hard to believe that a beautiful, young woman, with a beautiful, well proportioned body and pliable hips could have no interest in pleasing humans of the male species. After all, aren't lesbians supposed to be those butch, muscular women whom men would not be interested in, anyway?

Then there is the question of femininity and sexiness. Lebo had her style, her look and it worked for her. Lebo fit perfectly into the Western stereotype that sparsely dressed thin bodies epitomise sexiness and femininity. I am sure the blonde hair increased the points towards the coveted Barbie look. But, it does not mean that female musicians who prefer to cover up their bodies are less sexy, lack glamour and are therefore lesser Divas. In her *Saturday Star* article, Owen contends that

Thandiswa Mazwai's "Mama Afrika" look and "rotund body" lack glamour. This is such a myopic view of femininity, especially where African women are concerned. With her well endowed behind and voluptuous curves draped in long flowing skirts and head covered with a Xhosa doek, Thandiswa oozes the confidence and sex appeal of a regal African woman in a way that Lebo in all her skimpiness, could not. There is a lot to be said about leaving something to the imagination.

All of a sudden, now that Lebo is dead, unsavoury traits – rudeness, tantrums, violence – are shown as essential for the Diva touch. These are unattractive traits which should neither be tolerated nor accepted. It is also important not to gloss over the drug abuse innuendos. The truth is that upon hearing of Lebo's death, some people were relieved and others surprised that the cause of death was a car accident and not drug-related. We have to make a strong point against drug and alcohol abuse. Despite the argument that "people in the arts and entertainment industry take drugs and so what's all the brouhaha on Lebo about", we have the responsibility to turn the tide against this, to preserve our artists' lives and to protect our children who see these young stars as their role models.

A character in Morabo Morojele's novel, *How We Buried Puso*, asks this question, "What is it about death that it can suddenly change a bunch of fools into something else despite their lives?" I am not saying Lebo was a fool or such; in fact my gripe is not with Lebo really, it is with all the self-serving tributes that went to great lengths to depict Lebo as a saint of sorts. Lebo was not a saint; she was a Drama Queen.