

# Battle of the editors

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An article published by Rapport has sparked a fierce row between two leading Afrikaners, writes Rehana Rossouw

MOST readers who take umbrage against an article which appears in a newspaper will write one letter to the editor and leave it at that.

But an unusual row has developed at Rapport between its editor, Izak de Villiers, and its former deputy editor, Professor Hein (HJ) Grosskopf. Grosskopf has written a spate of letters to the editor, the manager, the managing director, the editorial staff and members of the board in protest against an article which appeared in Rapport on October 6.

The article suggested that Grosskopf's son Hein (an African National Congress activist who has an Afrikaner right-wing reward of R50 000 placed on his head) was in hiding at a secret address in England.

This lead story of Hein junior "confirmed" he was in hiding by stating that his address and telephone number did not appear in any of the British telephone directories. For his father, this article was one of the worst written about his son, and his vitriolic letters demanded De Villiers's resignation.

The first letter (in Afrikaans) was sent to Rapport's general manager, Fanie Jordaan, and began: "Are you also nauseated by Izak's hypocrisy?" According to Grosskopf, De Villiers's hypocrisy was clearly evident in his latest footnote which responded to a reader's letter of complaint at De Villiers's renewed attempts to sensationalise his campaign against Hein junior.

"His defence was that the misleading, trashy article was based on the fact that Hein did not make his address generally known – while the pitiful Izak himself hides behind a secret address and secret telephone number!" writes Grosskopf.

The second letter, also addressed to Jordaan, called on De Villiers to resign and sarcastically suggests that he is the man Afrikaners have been waiting for to rescue their culture.

Grosskopf writes that the need is so great among Afrikaners that they urgently want Rapport's management to pension off De Villiers so that he can begin this task.

"Just think of the wonderful cultural leadership he had already provided, like the loan of R100 000 to the Wit Wolf so that he could tell his old story again why he killed so many kaffirs. And the breathless way he tells us exclusively that a third-rate actor has for the umpteenth time made an unmarried girl pregnant. That's culture!"

Grosskopf's next letter was addressed to the news editor and written as a news article. He suggests that it be used in the next edition with the headline "Exclusive: Rapport's Izak located! The truth about his new face! His luxury hideout exposed!"

The "article" says De Villiers's fan club, mesmerised by his colourful use of language, looked in vain for his telephone number in the Rand directory. His "lackeys" refusing to give them his address.

It continues with details of De Villiers's cosmetic surgery to change his appearance in preparation for his new role as leader of the Afrikaners and his cruise around the world.

"Attempts to get comment from him failed constantly because his home and movements remain a secret," writes Grosskopf. "It is naturally his right to keep his home a secret, but it creates opportunities for elements to gossip that there are shady reasons for this unusual situation."

In his next letter to De Villiers, Grosskopf says he has written so lightheartedly because he wants to show De Villiers how he is making a fool of himself with his "hoernalistiek" about his son.

"It will surprise you how many journalists phoned us to say this was the most synthetic sensationalism they have ever encountered."

"But now it has gotten serious, and this fax has only one aim: to persuade you to take the honourable route in the interests of Rapport."

Grosskopf's next fax is addressed to the editorial staff of Rapport, after De Villiers failed to persuade him to stop his flow of letters. He says the "smear article" about his son was not whispered confidentially but "blurted out" to all the newspaper's readers.

"You did not answer my charge of hypocrisy: that you are hiding away at a secret address which is not generally advertised," writes Grosskopf. "It is great that you are no longer going to place articles which have as its source a nameless gossiper.

"But, I accept your apology for the pain your articles have caused myself and my wife. It is strange that a former priest's [De Villiers] sensitivity for how a father feels if his wife and child is defamed, can only develop when his own wife and children land up in the crossfire."

The last letter in the Mail & Guardian's possession dated October 31 and ended with "continues", is even more vitriolic than the previous ones. Grosskopf's olive branch is withdrawn and he quotes Oliver Cromwell who told Parliament, "Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!"

His blood pressure seemingly rose again when he discovered the tactics Rapport had used to get its story.

"How do you feel about the fact that your agent is harassing a 78-year-old widow. That's not how your mother raised you. I believe you condemn this, but still, you remain the editor of a paper where such things happen."

Grosskopf complains bitterly about the fact that a Rapport "agent" had camped for three days on a London pavement to get photographs of his five-year-old granddaughter.

"That's obscene, and it's all happening while you are safely hiding away in your secret shelter. Can I tell you how your brave warriors found my son? "His mother-in-law, a 78-year-old retired lecturer, was constantly pestered at her home by one of your agents, who also harassed her neighbours. "If your hero, Adriaan Vlok, who ordered Khotso House's bombing, says Hein did this, that, or the other, the chase is then on for his mother-in-law and daughter. Can you answer these questions, Izak?"

"I really think you should do the honourable thing for Nasionale Pers [Naspers] and resign, because you are becoming a burden to everyone."

Grosskopf refused to comment on the row, except to say he was “very disappointed” that Rapport had decided to do the story about his son.

Naspers chairman Ton Vosloo also said he had no comment on the “confidential correspondence”.

De Villiers said the matter had been settled and, as a father, he would never attack another father by using his son. “I don’t understand why people are wanting me to retire. I myself wanted to do so last year already and was persuaded by the board to remain for another year. I am definitely going into retirement next year,” he said.