

Media  on
Monday

IAN BURRELL

Camila Batmanghelidjh is shooting
the messengers who helped her

As the roof caved in on Kids Company last week, its flamboyant founder blamed the demise on “rumour-mongering civil servants, ill-spirited ministers and the media”. In interviews, Camila Batmanghelidjh said she’d become “a football for the media” and been subjected to “trial by media”.

These were strange words for someone who had been lionised by journalists, her status elevated to that of a British Mother Teresa – providing a platform from which she skilfully harvested huge financial contributions.

If the media did not exactly make Kids Company, it at least created its founder’s immense public profile. “Build them up, then knock them down” is said to be a trait of the British. On this occasion, Batmanghelidjh’s sideswipe was unconvincing. Blaming the media has long been a convenient explanation for any woe. Today, in the aftermath of the Leveson inquiry, it’s a potent message in attracting public sympathy.

The history of the reporting of Batmanghelidjh’s problems does not support her inference that it was driven by a political agenda, or a conspiracy. The first journalist to sound alarm bells was Harriet Sergeant, who spent time with Kids Company, and in 2012 wrote a book, *Among the Hoods*. She questioned the number of children whom Kids Company claimed to be helping, although she didn’t name the charity because she admired the way it kept deprived children in the public eye.

Then Miles Goslett, a freelance journalist who won great credit for his work on the Jimmy Savile



David Cameron and Camila Batmanghelidjh of Kids Company in 2010 GETTY

scandal, ran a piece in *The Oldie* in 2014. It asked questions of Kids Company’s use of a £200,000 donation from a widow, Joan Woolard. Batmanghelidjh wrote to *The Oldie*’s then editor, Richard Ingrams, demanding he “repair” the “incredibly damaging narrative” – an action that spurred Goslett on.

His next piece was rejected by two newspapers and a magazine. He believes this was linked to the personal connections of Batmanghelidjh, who is said to have “mesmerised” David Cameron and won of £37m in public funding.

In February *The Spectator* published Goslett’s piece, “The Trouble with Kids Company”. It alleged the charity’s statistic of having 36,000 clients was inflated by including parents and school staff. Goslett concluded it “now acts as a drain on well-meaning donations”. Both Goslett and Sergeant are

aligned to publications on the political right. But Batmanghelidjh has rightist credentials. She gave parliamentary evidence in 2006 claiming black mothers were prone to levels of “rejection and cruelty” towards their men and boys.

The academic Peter Beresford, writing in *The Guardian*, said he had shared a stage with Batmanghelidjh and “she told me about the high priority she gave to being in close touch with the press and the media”. She had an extraordinarily well-connected chairman in Alan Yentob.

The media’s love affair with Kids Company has soured. At Buzzfeed, reporter Alan White had held suspicions since 2008, when he was researching London gangs. At BBC 2’s *Newsnight*, policy editor Chris Cook arrived from the *Financial Times* last year with his own notes. The pair teamed up.

Their first investigation last

month revealed that the Cabinet Office was withholding funding from Kids Company unless Batmanghelidjh stepped down. She went on a defensive media blitz. But another story reported that the Metropolitan Police’s Sexual Offences, Exploitation and Child Abuse unit was probing allegations of criminal activity on the charity’s premises. This was the revelation that broke the back of an organisation that for 19 years had done considerable good.

Yentob insisted, in a show of defiance on *Channel 4 News*, that “there is not financial mismanagement” at Kids Company. He admitted making a call to *Newsnight* and turning up at the offices of the BBC Radio 4 *Today* programme before 8am, when Batmanghelidjh was being interviewed. But he also pointed out the BBC’s coverage showed he had no control over its journalism.

It was Batmanghelidjh’s decision to pull the plug. She must have realised she would attract scrutiny. But, despite the enormous donations, the charity hadn’t put in place the financial reserves to weather a media storm.

The outcome of the investigations will reveal the seriousness of the problems. Batmanghelidjh is seeking to blame a media conscious of accusations that it had turned a blind eye to hacking, to Savile and to the banking crisis. For too long, too many journalists preferred to speak to the charity’s founder than report on Britain’s poorest children – and missed a story right under their noses.

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Media
Diary

Sun keeps the faith in face of super-injunction

The football season is back and so is the “super-injunction”, something that was thought to have ended with the legal own goal scored by Ryan Giggs four years ago when he was identified online as a serial love cheat. *The Sun on Sunday*’s attempts to publish juicy details of a celebrity’s affair with a married sportsman have been thwarted by the High Court.

The tabloid’s sister paper, *The Times*, saw a religious story, quoting Mrs Justice Laing’s observation that “few people, other than adherents to strict religious codes, could rationally consider” there was a “public interest” in the affair. *The Sun on Sunday* would not normally be considered a religious text.



One they made earlier: why bet on ‘Bake Off’?

News that the sixth series of *The Great British Bake Off* achieved record first night ratings will be a relief to BBC Worldwide which, as the cash-strapped organisation’s commercial arm, is under pressure to generate more funds.

The BBC 2 show pulled an opening audience of 9.3 million, up from 7.2 million last year, amid reports of possible insider betting over this year’s winner. I’m surprised Ladbrokes, which has now closed its book, offered odds on a pre-recorded TV contest when plenty of people must know the outcome.

The story will add to the hype, but BBC Worldwide must protect the reputation of one of its most valuable brands.

Claire
Bealeon marketing
and brandingThe kids are
not all right
for makers of
sugary drinks

Next week: Danny Rogers
on PR and advertising

When you watch Ribena’s new television advert, a few things will probably cross your mind – mainly that it is very colourful and there are a lot of cute animals doing surreal things in it. But what’s not immediately obvious is that the new campaign represents a desperate change in strategy for a brand under pressure from the supermarket giant Tesco.

Ribena is trying to disassociate itself from the kids market and reposition as a drink for young adults. Just in case you were in any doubt, Ribena has said that its new target market is family-free adults, adults at the pre-family stage of life, adults who have not yet had children. Is that

clear? Well, not if you actually watch the new ad – fast-paced, joyful and very kid-friendly – but thoroughly understandable if you consider the current climate surrounding the marketing of sugary drinks. Food and drinks manufacturers have been under fire from healthy eating pressure groups like War on Sugar for years. Yet, although there have been some modest changes in how foods are manufactured and labelled, most brands have balked at anything likely to dent taste-appeal or profits.

Then, last month, Tesco turned health tsar and announced that it was withdrawing sugary drinks from its children’s juice ranges. Meaning Ribena, Capri-Sun

and other sugary drinks aimed at children will be pulled from shelves from September.

Hardly surprising then that brands like Ribena are hastily trying to distance themselves from the kids market; it’s crucial that they maintain shelf space in the major supermarkets and begin to grow their consumer base beyond their heartland market of mums with kids.

Labelling their new ad campaign as aimed at young adults might seem a little like post-rationalisation, but this is just the beginning of what will have to be a very real shift.

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