South Africa: Beyond democratic deficit in public service broadcasting

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SOUTH AFRICA

Beyond democratic deficit in public service broadcasting

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South African media have much in common with media in BRICS and other countries in the global South, in the sense that its media systems inherited frameworks from the colonial era that are either no longer applicable or are urgently in need of reform. In South Africa the re-emergence of debates on the decolonization of knowledge and culture has revived interest in the tenuous link between democracy and the country's post-apartheid media institutions. This chapter argues that there is an urgent need to interrogate, uncover and unsettle power in the existing media models. The experience of democratization in South Africa demonstrates the necessity for a contextually embedded approach to the role of media in transitioning societies. Crucially, the chapter draws attention to the tensions between Southern African understandings and visions of democracy and those which have been articulated by global North paradigms, which are not always transferable to the different contexts of the BRICS countries. Through the case of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the chapter examines how public service broadcasting in a transitional democracy raises questions about the nature of democratic participation. By rooting the analysis of democratic participation within local histories, practices and contexts, the chapter argues for a contextually driven framework for understanding the role of media systems in democracy in Southern Africa.

Media in Africa are increasingly discussed in terms of their relationship to the liberal democratic concepts of media freedom, freedom of expression and media accountability. For some African scholars, the notion of democracy is wedded to the context and aspirations of Western modernity (Conway and Singh, 2011: 689); hence they argue that the concept and its concomitants are incompatible with African political and social systems. Yet, as can be seen in places ranging from Hong Kong to the streets of Zimbabwe, the citizens of the global South have repeatedly demonstrated their desire for 'the rights and freedoms that democracy offers'

(Friedman, 2019: ix, 59). However, the democracy that the global South desires, 'neither emulates a model of democracy based on the Western "norm", nor rejects elements of what might be described as liberal democracy' (Brooks, Ngwane and Ranciman, 2020: 20).

Thus, it is not surprising that the South African mediascape differs from media models in the global North. There is inevitable discomfort with the notion that in order to 'legitimize' a particular media set up, it has to be evaluated in relation to what it is not, rather than for what it is and might mean within its own particular contexts. So, in South Africa the media might adopt universally agreed upon principles (such as media freedom and freedom of expression) but will (and should) do so on their own terms. This is in part because, where media policy is concerned, socio-political considerations are key. In this regard, Mano and milton (Forthcoming, 2020a) argue for self-standing Afric[...] informed by locally relevant epistemologies and ontol[...]

What is at stake in the above are crucial question[...] about reformulating media frameworks in changing p[...] are the ways in which the global North continues to b[...] mative assumption underpinning the frame of refere[...] for doing media studies in the global South. In this respect, it has been sugges[...]ed that one should question whether the 'comparing media systems' approach in the tradition of Hallin and Mancini (2004) is useful for discussing mediascapes in the global South. In fact, the very notion of thinking of the media in terms of 'systems' is antithetical to the extreme heterogeneity of media spaces and their usage in the global South. This raises questions about *whose* gaze or epistemological vantage point is invoked when we attempt to identify something as a media *system* (Shome, 2017: 67)?

What this means for us is that an uncontextualized analysis of media in BRICS, which simply juxtaposes them against an invisible global North, might fail to consider the media in these global South contexts for what they are. Such an approach would exacerbate what Grosfoguels (2007) has described as a 'colonial matrix of power' – that is a global system of asymmetric power relations which can be analysed in terms of who is speaking (body politics of knowledge) and from where (geo-politics of knowledge). The global South is rarely listened to – by which we mean that their voice is not taken seriously – especially in policy frameworks, given the in-built continuities in the existing structures of communication and education. The approach here argues for rethinking from and at the margins of the world system to allow other possibilities to emerge.

In relation to the academic discipline of media and communication, this has been approached in terms of 'de-Westernising' media studies (Curran and Park, 2000); internationalizing media studies (Thussu, 2009), and internationalizing cultural studies (Abbas and Erni, 2004). In each of these the id[...] North cultural and intellectual ambit. Yet, as milton an[...] argue, despite these laudable ethical origins, which s[...] and inter-cultural solidarity, these efforts to internati[...] communication studies to bring everyone and everyth[...]

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still largely neglect and misrecognize perspectives from the global South. What is needed are bold and valid epistemological frameworks from the global South which are recognized as such within the pluriverse of knowledge (Mano and milton, ~~forthcoming,~~ 2020a). As will be argued in this chapter, SABC will illuminate the need for the shift in epis... above. Like most media in South Africa, the SABC is both a product and victim of the apartheid context from which it emerged.

Media-democracy dynamic

The democratization process in transitional societies around the world – and also in Africa – has been far from uniform. There is a need to question the extent to which changes in these countries constituted a thorough-going transformation of society or whether instead this has resulted in the repositioning of, or partnerships between, elites (Sparks, 2009). Spark's analysis of media in countries moving from authoritarian to democratic rule finds significant continuities in 'both institutions and personnel between the old regime and the new' with 'highly politicised interventions into broadcasting and a highly partisan press' and 'licensing of new commercial broadcasters' in a manner that favours those connected to 'political power' (Sparks, 2009: 196). Close attention should also be paid to 'how media institutions that emerge from transitions are strongly influenced by the political elite'. Sparks uses this to argue that 'the degree of democratisation, if any, is secondary' and in the case of South Africa in particular he notes that the '… South African media has a fair degree of fit with the elite continuity model', with some modifications needed to the model arising from the specific context (ibid.: 197, 213).

It can be noted that in the immediate aftermath of apartheid, there was a general mood of 'never again' in the reconstruction of South African media policy, i.e. never again would the media be used as a tool for powerful elites, never again would censorship be allowed to deter the voices of the most vulnerable, never again would the public broadcaster function as an organ of state. However, as observed by Sparks above and will be shown below, the South African public-service broadcaster's emergence from apartheid seems to belie this affirmative approach to transform. Amongst others, it reveals a changing dynamic in the negotiation of power in the representation of party politics (as well as the politics of identity) in South Africa.

The political transition in South Africa has had a noticeable influence on media democracy that emphasizes the need to adequately assess and account for the specificities of the post-apartheid context, especially as it pertains to the media landscape. South Africa's media issues, as with media in other BRICS contexts, challenge generalizations about the media-democracy link common in the field of media and communication. Berger's questioning of the media-democracy relationship is especially apropos here:

> [m]any writers (but not enough) have sounded warnings about lifting
> concepts like media and democracy from Western conditions and applying

them unthinkingly to Africa … Most striking of all is the reliance in much
of the writing upon unreflective, conventional wisdom about the way that
'media' is an important element in 'democracy' – which 'wisdoms' in turn
tend to be limited to a liberal pluralist paradigm … [whose] suitability to
Africa is questionable.

(Berger, 2002: 21)

Berger argues that there is a need to look at alternative paradigms of democracy
and of media in Southern Africa. Nyamnjoh (2011) agrees but advocates caution
in this regard, noting that, despite the critique of the dominant, normative, liberal-
democratic paradigm, one should avoid the trap of an idealization of Africa. He
advises against a blind, romantic essentialism of 'African values' that, according to
him, many proponents of Afrocentric thought are prone to. Instead, a 'flexible the-
oretical position is needed … one which takes into account the multiple, over-
lapping spaces and flows in the era of globalization yet refuses to gloss over global
power imbalances and material inequalities' (Nyamnjoh, 2011: 20).

Clearly, a one-size-fits-all approach to the concept of democracy creates
problems. The above critiques are not meant to suggest that democracy and media
democratization are alien to Africans. For example, freedom of expression, a vital
aspect of democracy and economic development, is, in our view, consistent with
the African concept of *ubuntu* as it enables people to be the most they can be, facili-
tating the establishment of communities (Chasi, 2015: 91). Hence, we argue that the
democratization of broadcasting is essential for citizen participation in the African
democratization process.

In Southern Africa, not least as a result of the great economic divide, free-to-
air public broadcasters still attract the majority of the viewing and listening audi-
ence, but questions about public-service broadcasting are being articulated ever
more loudly. Commentators, including civil society organizations, print media and
academics, question African public-service broadcasting's purpose, how it should
be defined and who it should be accountable to (milton and Fourie 2015; Mano,
2016). For our purpose, we have to question what the role or place of media – and
here specifically public-service broadcasting – is and/or should be in relation to
democracy, without falling prey to 'fortress journalism syndrome' (Nordenstreng,
2004). A nuanced analysis, in our view, necessitates an understanding of the inter-
play between media transformation and broader societal change. More importantly,
it requires 'engaging, and even sometimes building, epistemological references and
frames for understanding media, its scope (that is, what may count as media) that
thus far may not exist' (Shome, 2017: 70).

In South Africa – as elsewhere on the continent – the most important factor
that has influenced the development of broadcasting is the varying shades of colo-
nial legacy (Eko, 2000: 87). Colonialism not only placed broadcasting and other
public institutions outside African life, it also, crucially, positioned them as vehicles
for taking Africans out of a rural, subsistence existence, which had hitherto been
dominated by traditional philosophies, practices and personality types. Eko maintains

that the modernization process dismissed African life and saw broadcasting as a way to diminish its role in public life. The institutions of public-service broadcasting were part of a well-orchestrated modernization approach that aimed to condition African populations to distrust traditional knowledge and 'Africanness' as a precondition for development (Eko, 2000). Hence, it could be argued that the problem with public-service broadcasting in South Africa is that it is linked to apartheid and failed modernization programmes from the 1950s and 1960s, which sought to bring 'Western-type' development by destroying local knowledge and traditions (West and Fair, 1993; De Beer and Tomaselli, 2000).

Following Mararike's (1998) work on African philosophy and development, Mano (2005) has used the metaphor of '*kudyiswa*' in Shona, '*ukudhliswa*' in Ndebele, '*guthaiga*' in Gikuyu or '*miti*' in Kikamba to discuss this damaging conditioning of media in Africa (Mano, 2005). Each of these terms refers to the administering of a traditional love potion to one's lover in order to ensure that they remain devoted in their love for you in a myopic manner. The overall effect of the '*kudyiswa*' process is to create a client out of someone. We see this as relevant to the discussion of how colonialism's embeddedness in modernization thinking refused to acknowledge an Africanist ethos in approaches to public broadcasting. As Mararike boldly states:

> [the] '*kudyiswa*' process … must be seen as 'conditioning' a practice of 'knowing' that constructs an object as 'external' to the 'knower' and 'independent of him or her.' The role …. is to create and preserve conceptions and means of description for the world as it is for those who have power rather than 'as it is' for the ruled and power-less. The '*kudyiswa*' process … is a process of 'mental conditioning' or 'ideological indoctrination' and 'brainwashing'.
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> *(Mararike, 1998: 90)*

The '*kudyiswa*' process arguably shaped the development of public service broadcasting (PSB) in Africa and was effective on the basis of side-lining locally-generated historic knowledge, local actors and processes. This heritage might explain why postcolonial broadcasters have struggled to find a social fit. As institutions, they remain subservient and serviceable to modernization agendas (ostensibly in service of the 'developmental state' of the emerging democracies) that were decidedly against the local. It is our argument that current public-service broadcasters, including the SABC, need to overcome restrictive media policies, including undemocratic, colonial developmental legacies.

Alhassan and Chakravartty concur, noting that '[m]edia and communication policy for nations and societies in Africa, Asia and Latin America is "deeply embedded" in discourses and practices of development and modernisation', which can be traced 'to a longer history of colonial, national and international governance' (Alhassan and Chakravartty, 2011: 366). For them, 'the legacy of the colonial encounter … is visible in the ways in which the actual state practices of policy-making often betray … the unresolved fundamental questions of inequality and exclusion, upon which national discourses of development are founded' (ibid.).

There is therefore a need to re-theorize the role of the postcolonial state in discussions of media and communication policy in emerging postcolonial nation states to be more in step with actual conditions on the ground.

A re-theorized PSB framework needs to encourage participation through all its structures and processes. Chasi and Rodney-Gumede (2016) argue in this regard that we need to re-imagine PSB in ways that will speak to our (African) realities. In essence, we are arguing here for a destruction of the 'crooked room', which, in our view, will allow something else to emerge. This metaphor is utilized by Melissa Harris-Perry (2011) to explore the particular epistemology that Black women face in 'white spaces'. Perry argues that, when Black women are confronted with race and gender stereotypes, they are standing in a 'crooked room', and that they have to figure out which way is up. When they find themselves being inundated with warped and distorted images of their humanity, some Black women tilt and contort themselves in order to 'fit' the distortion rather than stand up straight in a space that is extremely disorienting and uncomfortable.

We borrow this metaphor to elucidate on the strictures to reform media in the global South arising from hostile, colonial-era structures. We argue that, in these cases, many behave in a way that compels them to fit the alien world around them, a world which then rewards them with accolades about how well behaved they are, but which never quite meets their need to be more appreciated and respected. At core is a question about their misrecognition and denial of dignity. Scholars from the global South cannot give up; they need to produce more knowledge informed by and capable of informing their (un)changing media context. We will illustrate this by unpacking our primary argument, i.e. that public-service broadcasters must engender democratic participation and inclusive democratic communication aligned to the needs and realities of African lived experiences.

Public-broadcasting policy frameworks in African contexts veer towards inward-looking policy structures, which complicates policy-negotiation. Contemporary broadcast policy in Africa, we argue, is shaped by the process of '*kudyiswa*'. Civic groups, for example, have not been sufficiently involved in media policy-making because of the centralization of processes by the state, specifically the overzealous involvement of Ministries of Information. Where civic groups do engage, they by and large tend to fall back on an elitist, paternalistic, Reithian-perception of the public-service ethos, negating in their deliberations a thorough focus on, or in some cases even any acknowledgement of, an African ethos. This is in part a result of the ways in which Africanist media models such as 'journalism for social change', 'communal journalism' and 'journalism inspired by oral discourse' (Skjerdal, 2012: 637) have been misused by autocratic governments to serve their own political ends, instead of the common good – or, to phrase this in PSB language, the public interest. However, it is also primarily a manifestation of the lack of consensus about what an Africanist ethos in PSB might entail (Berger, 2002; Skjerdal 2012).

To get out of this quagmire, there is need for democratization to step in line with Afrokology in a process of '*gutahiko*' or '*kuritsiswa*', i.e., the expunging of colonial thought or then, the decolonization of PSB in Southern Africa. We propose

Afrokology as a key African-facing heuristic toolkit that can counter the '*kudyiswa*' process (Mano and milton, ~~forthcoming~~ 2020a). If

the colonization that 'continues to be administered ... of the population and is producing more damaging results than before' (Mararike, 1998: 93), then the process of '*kurutsiswa*' can neutralize, expunge and ultimately insulate against the '*kudyiswa*' effects, and herein lies the lesson for an Afrokology of PSB. First, the causes of the problems with PSB and the frameworks within which they operate need to be identified clearly.

Following this, there is a need to rid Africa of the problem by administering the right kind of medicine at the right time and in correct quantities. Finally, permanent preventative measures must be put in place. To this end then, we appreciate Berger's assertion that '… if much African media has historically played a political propagandist role or a developmentalist role, it does not serve any explanatory purpose to hold up a watchdog model and measure Africa's historic deficit. What needs to be explained is not what did not happen, but rather what did' (Berger, 2002: 21–22). We offer a contextually driven explication of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's emergence from apartheid era state apparatus to contemporary (fledgling) public-service broadcaster with a broader democratic mandate.

The case of SABC

The democratization process in transitional societies — including in

Africa – has been 'far from uniform', and one needs to question the extent to which changes in these countries constituted the thoroughgoing transformation of society or rather resulted in the repositioning of, or partnerships between, elites, as mentioned above (Sparks, 2009). In South Africa for example, the democratization of the political sphere, ushered in an ostensibly transformed broadcasting mediascape with the SABC leading the changes in its move to transform itself from a state to a public broadcaster (Duncan, 2000). The SABC developed and implemented transformation strategies in key areas such as programming and news and current affairs. These changes supposedly marked a radical break with the ethos of the old apartheid-era state broadcaster.

Duncan, however, is sceptical about the extent to which these changes have been effective. She notes that it is less acknowledged that there are many continuities between the old and the new order that involve '… an eerie convergence of interests … [that] severely curtails the Corporation's ability to become a bona fide public broadcaster' (Duncan, 2000: 53). Added to this, the commercialization of the public broadcasting space means a continuation of audience segmentation, possibly reflecting a reconstitution of old apartheid identities, which goes against the stated post-apartheid commitment to non-racialism (Jacobs, 2004). In fact, the numerous problems facing PSB as an institution in post-apartheid South Africa are well documented.

Recent years have for example seen a downward spiral of financial woes for the public broadcaster, coupled with increasing concerns about political interference

(milton, 2018; Khosa and Khosa, 2019). Its editorial code emphasizes the SABC's autonomy, including journalistic, creative and programming independence of its staff. It gives special importance to protecting the freedom of expression of the SABC's audiences. However, faith in the SABC's autonomy is dwindling, with scholars suggesting that '[a]lthough care should be taken not to overstate the case of government interference in broadcasting in South Africa, it would appear that a number of high-profile incidents between 2002 and 2008, are suggesting a shift for the SABC from public broadcaster into his master's voice' (Louw and milton, 2012: 267).

In the face of threats to media freedom and freedom of expression in the past two decades, South African civil society has organized and picketed the SABC. They also instituted court cases to challenge the broadcaster's approach to censorship and journalistic freedom. A case in point is when, in 2016, civil society joined journalists in approaching authorities to rule on the lawfulness of a decree by the then Chief Operating Officer of the SABC to ban political and service delivery protests. The fall-out of this de-facto censorship resulted, perhaps for the first time in 30 years, in public interest from the broader community of viewers in the role and function of the SABC. Media workers joined with viewers and civil society to protest by picketing and disregarding decrees that interfered with journalistic freedom and professionalism. When the latter resulted in the SABC firing the journalists involved in the protest, there was a defiant show of solidarity when their colleagues wore black on the very same broadcasts.

The pressure resulted in a temporary cease-fire. The former COO was forced to reverse his belligerent position and had to agree to stop censorship of images related to protest action and to reinstate the fired journalists. These responses and their resultant impact on the threats to media freedom and freedom of expression, demonstrate that South Africa's democracy is very much alive and kicking. As such, the SABC can be seen as a metaphor for South African society: it is unsettled, it is in transition and is, in many ways, not unlike the society it represents and reflects. Take, for example, the policy contradictions inherent in the SABC's editorial policies, which mirror the shifts and changes in the fledgling post-colonial democratic context.

SABC's 2014 editorial policy review process

The SABC's editorial policy review process of 2014 was introduced in line with South Africa's principle of consultative/participative democratic practice, which requires an extensive consultative process with stakeholders, citizens and civil society all making verbal and written contributions. milton (2014) contributed to that process on behalf of the Media Policy and Democracy Project – a joint project between the University of South Africa and the University of Johannesburg. Key to the contribution was the idea about journalistic credibility. A revised editorial policy, it was argued was needed to rebuild the trust in the editorial integrity and credibility of the broadcaster's content and the process by which it was produced

and distributed. The submission to the SABC's Editorial Policy review was particularly concerned about governance and the relationship between management and editorial oversight, which was complicated by the so-called 'upward referral' clause in the existing editorial policy.

This clause gave the broadcaster's General Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) the final say on editorial matters. Given the politics of the board nomination and implementation process in South Africa, where board members (especially the GCEO) are often political appointees, this blurring of the necessary distinction between management roles and editorial roles opened the SABC to undue external commercial, political, religious and other influences. In this situation, there was potential for a conflict of interest, with the GCEO ignoring the SABC's accountability to the general public. It was argued that allowing the GCEO to also be editor-in-chief contradicted the SABC's claims of 'editorial independence' and 'freedom from undue influence' – be that influence from the market or from politics. Issues such as the SABCs blacklisting of journalists and commentators, and unilateral decisions by the GCEO to 'can' television and radio programmes critical of government or the ruling party illustrate that when management roles and editorial roles collide, freedom of expression is inhibited and journalism suffers.

In the submission, milton (2014) also observed that 'upward referrals' endangered the editorial policy of commitment to content diversity given that distribution on the SABC was being dominated by a single point of view. Apartheid and a colonial-era type of control in the institution narrowed down the performance of the SABC. What was needed was content diversity that furthered the goals of a democratic society by enhancing public access to the full range of ideas, information, subject matter and perspectives required to make informed judgements about issues important to South Africans. It also reflected the public service broadcaster's 'special mandate to serve many different and discrete audiences' (ibid.). The goal of diversity thus requires ongoing efforts to ensure that the broadcaster's content fully reflects the pluralism of South African society, including for example, appropriate representation of linguistic and other minorities. Upward referral thus poses a threat to public service broadcasters being usurped by political appointees who, under the guise of development, use the institution for political gain (milton and Fourie, 2015). It is worth noting that, when upward referral was first introduced into the SABC's editorial policy, its inclusion in the editorial code was debated at length and at that stage it was argued that it was consistent with international practise in this regard. At issue here is the legacy of broadcasting administration structures, in service of 'international best practice' that are not adequately suited to media democratization in post-authoritarian contexts.

milton's (2014) submission to the review process proposed that it was good governance practice to separate the duties of the SABC Board from that of professional management. It was submitted that the GCEO should concern him/herself with ensuring a proper business platform to enable content providers and journalists to do their job. The Editor-in-Chief 's role, it argued, was to protect the reputation of the SABC and its journalism: hence, neither the GCEO nor any other board

member should be engaged in editorial decision-making. Board members should adopt policies and procedures that enabled professional management to operate in a way that would give the public full confidence in the editorial integrity of the broadcaster's content/programming. The submission suggested that the SABC should make every effort to ensure that the content it distributed satisfied editorial standards to ensure integrity. It should lead in demonstrating to both citizens and public policy makers that its 'programming is free from undue or improper influence'. The submission's proposals were echoed by other civil society actors such as SOS: Support Public Broadcasting and the Right-to-Know Campaign.

PSB as partner in participation

The transformation of the SABC, as the title of a book by Louw and milton (2012) suggests, was about bringing 'new voices to the air'. This is in line with the aim of public-service broadcasters to engender democratic participation and inclusive communication, reflecting the diversity of the community. However, the problem with 'bringing new voices' to the table is that it assumes that the 'table' is fine and that all we need to do is bring new voices. For example, in the South African context, a preoccupation with the 'numbers game' in effect re-racializes society in ways that the non-racial ANC of the 1960s and 1970s probably did not envision (Chasi and Mboti, 2016).

How then do we participate if, in Chasi and Mboti's (2016) words, 'inclusion' as envisioned in contemporary transformation discourse is not the way? Indeed, what would an Africanist participation theory look like? In 2015, a group of African scholars organized a pre-conference at IAMCR (International Association for Media and Communication Research) where they retheorized 'participation' from an African vantage point. The Africanist participation studies approach was proposed as a counter-weight to conventional communication frameworks of enquiry. Chasi and Mboti (2016) submitted that the main objection to conventional communication theories that are in use in communication departments in (South) African universities and governments is not necessarily that such theories are non-African in their original ethos. Rather, the objection is that such theories do not always adequately march in step with qualitative transformations in the everyday lives and lived realities of Africans. At base, this is a question about relevance (ibid.).

Thus, when arguing in the abstract that public-service broadcasters must engender democratic participation and inclusive communication, this is the participation we have in mind. One that marches in step with qualitative transformations in the everyday lives and lived realities of the Africans in whose interest it ostensibly operates. This question of relevance was also behind the 2013 'Continental Conference on Media Legislative Reforms and Transforming State Broadcasters into Public Broadcasters in Africa' held in Midrand in South Africa, at the Pan-African Parliament (PAP). The conference was co-hosted by the Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project (AfriMAP), the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa, Article 19 and the Media Institute of Southern Africa. It attracted

a new constellation of local and international organizations, including consultants, universities, politicians, journalists and high-level international partners, to find resolutions for the ongoing problem of state control over public broadcasters. The conference culminated in the 'Midrand Call to Action: Media Freedom and Public Broadcasting in Africa' (Mano, 2016).

Noting the dire state of broadcasting in Africa, it called on all African institutions, decision-makers, civil society and social justice organizations and publics to promote media freedom on the African continent as well as commit to actively playing their part in transforming and strengthening all state broadcasters into public broadcasters (Afrimap, 2013). The Midrand Call to Action focused in particular on the [accountability] role that each sector should play, noting with regard to National Public Broadcasters that these should, amongst others, '… develop, through an inclusive public process, editorial and programme guidelines that adhere to public broadcasting principles and promote public interest programming …' and 'use digital technologies to promote broader access and public participation in the development of editorial policies' (ibid.: 6).

Of particular relevance to this discussion is that the delineations of PSB as envisioned within the African context above, is congruent with a PSB ethos that submits that, for a PSB to be useful within a democratic framework, it should adhere to the widely accepted core goals for PSBs, summarized by Barr as being: (1) universal accessibility (geographic); (2) contribution to a sense of national identity and community; (3) distance from vested interests; (4) direct funding and universality of payment; (5) competition in programming rather than for numbers; (6) guidelines that liberate rather than restrict programme makers and (7) universal appeal (general tastes and interests) (Barr, 2000: 66).

Clearly these principles have changed little since the beginning of public service broadcasting in Britain. Murdock notes that, for much of its history, public service broadcasting:

> was designed to demonstrate how the distinctive qualities of the nation, and by extension of the Western Christian tradition, found their highest expression in works that had entered the official canon. Reith was adamant that one of public broadcasting's central missions was to ensure that 'the wisdom of the wise and the amenities of culture are available without discrimination …', but he took it for granted that what constituted 'wisdom' and 'culture' would be defined by intellectual and creative elites.
>
> *(Murdock, 2010: 180)*

Reith's core elements of a national, non-commercial service that is directly funded by government are still important aspects of the services provided by the BBC and remains one of the most contested aspects of PSB funding in South Africa (cf. Louw and milton, 2012; milton and Fourie, 2015).

In spite of aspirations for alternatives, wholesale mimicking of global North frameworks is still widespread in Africa. Even when transformation in service of

African ideals is discussed, there is still a tendency to revere templates and reference points that are alien. Mano and milton (2020b), for example, with regard to their participation in the Midrand-Conference, note that, apart from a few notable exceptions, the experts from the North framed and dominated the policy conception phase. African stakeholders were largely included at the operationalization stage and as implementers. At issue here is that the global North remained an invisible and, due to the nature of the event, at times a very visible point of reference for the conference deliberations and outcomes. Their experience as participants in the conference processes led Mano and milton to conclude that a more inclusive collaboration is needed whereby the voice of African stakeholders are *listened to* in PSB reform (ibid.). Here it is worth noting that African-developed charters have much to offer to the ethos of PSB. Most laudable is the defined commitment towards a participatory PSB environment that pays specific attention to emancipation, human dignity and dialectical processes of voice and listening. These commitments are geared towards ensuring deeper participation, especially for marginalized communities.

In general, what is at issue in attempts to theorize from the African metropolis, is how do we 'reorient the media content (to change the focus to stories which have genuine relevance for the African context); transform the presentation style (emphasising processes and dialogue rather than breaking news) and reorganise the structural outlook of the media (where it is argued that, rather than serving as an isolated Fourth Estate, the media should work together with other parties in society for national development)' (Skjerdal, 2011). What is evident in this is the emphasis placed on participation as a necessary component of communicative theory and practice. This is interesting also in the light of recent efforts towards emphasizing the importance of participation in PSB globally – perhaps influenced by marketization, digitization and the increasing popularity of social networking. Lowe (2010), for example, notes that contemporary discussions about renewal in PSB has focused increasingly on public participation, although what that means for practice remains uncertain and why it matters is largely framed in ethical terms. He notes that '[a]s an "altruistic imperative", public participation is important among media theorists concerned about growing marketisation that may threaten the vitality of the public sphere for contemporary democracy' (Lowe, 2010: 9).

When discussing contra-flows in theorizing, it should be noted that concepts shift and change across continental borders, languages and political contexts. Sometimes it merges with so-called concepts from the global North (for example there is some overlap between the concept of *ubuntu* and the more Western-defined communitarianism), while at other times theorists themselves insist on interrogating the concepts through a Western lens, hence rendering the concept powerless before it is even considered. The argument is raised that the political economy of African mediascapes is still guided and dominated by views from the global North. Values related to ownership, control, management and journalism practices, and freedom of expression as well as public opinion and public interest are therefore inevitably discussed from the viewpoint of an assumed universal gaze (milton and

Fourie, 2015). We conclude by considering what value could be added by looking at PSB from an Afrokological vantage point.

An Afrokology of public-service broadcasting

Afrokology is presented by Mano and milton (Fort~~... 2018~~ 2021) as a theoretical toolkit, which can provide a basis for an indigenous ~~...~~ media and communication that resonates with conditions on the continent. Here, we look at whether and how PSB and PSB practices can be situated within an indigenized theoretical framework for media, based on an African ethos. To interrogate these, we turn our attention to two attempts at 'indigenizing' media theory in general and PSB theory specifically, from the Southern African context. The first is Blankenberg's (1999) attempt to redefine media theory in the context of *ubuntu* and the second is Banda's (2007) project to redefine PSB within the context of development journalism.

PSB as 'ubuntu'

Ubuntuism can be understood as a moral philosophy, a collective African consciousness deeply embedded in African culture's expression of communal (collective or shared) compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of a community (traditionally the tribe or clan), with justice and mutual caring for all (cf. e.g. Nussbaum, 2003: 1). As such, it differs from the emphasis on the individual of mainstream Eurocentric moral philosophy, which Nyamnjoh singles out as 'harmful' to the African communard (Nyamnjoh, 2004: 2011). *Ubuntuism* views the essence of being as participation with other humans. Unlike Western individualistic democracy, which insists on freedom of the self from intrusion by others, *ubuntuism* sees a person's freedom as dependent on their personal relationships with others. A person is first and foremost a participatory being dependent on others for his/her development. *Ubuntuism* therefore places a high premium on negotiation, inclusiveness and tolerance (cf. Fourie, 2008; milton and Fourie, 2015).

Taking this basic understanding of *ubuntu* into consideration, Blankenberg ~~argued~~ argues that the philosophy of *ubuntu* could be used ~~...~~ imation of a liberation journalism that attempts to ~~...~~ the media and for our purpose, particularly PSB – to serve the basic tenets of democracy (Blankenberg, 1999: 44). The tenets of democracy underlined by Blankenberg include, first, the creation and preserving of a space within which people are able to voice their opinions on the future of their nation and, second, that the media has a strong role to play in the creation and recognition of a civil society, a public space and a common culture. To this he ~~added~~ adds that ~~...~~ modern day liberation project, as a facilitator to ensure ~~...~~ the political system and all aspects of the public sphere, as a 'catalyst' for critical consciousness, and as a storyteller, creating and litigating public cultural rituals for negotiating cultural conflicts and agreeing on common values' (ibid.).

For Blankenberg, liberation media combine the best elements of development journalism, participatory communication and other theories of media to come up with a concept of journalism that best addresses the needs of many African communities. He concludes that the philosophy of *ubuntu*, combined with a Freirean philosophy of critical consciousness, principles of Third Cinema and a spirit of participation, provide a foundation for a journalism applicable certainly to Africa but also globally (ibid.). It is further noted that the *ubuntu*-ethos as explicated here, chimes with UNESCO's definition of public broadcasting, which sees it as a meeting place where all citizens are welcome and considered equals. It is an information and education tool, accessible to all and meant for all, whatever their social or economic status.

This has far reaching theoretical and practical consequences as pointed out by Fourie (Fourie, 2008). First, the implications of this view of the ontology and epistemology of contemporary Southern African thinking about the media are clear. 'The West' focuses on media primarily in terms of its information, surveillance, entertainment and educational role; journalism's freedom and right to protection in order to be able to fulfil its social responsibility, and the individual's right to information, surveillance, entertainment and education. *Ubuntu* shifts the focus towards the media's role in community bonding and dialogue towards reaching consensus based on the cultural and social values and morals of a community. Of course, it has to be noted that this idea of the media sphere is not that different from Habermas' perception of the public sphere (the latter's many problems notwithstanding). The emphasis thus moves from the media as informant, gatekeeper, interpreter and educator, to the media as mediator; from the media as observer, to the media as participant and negotiator, from the media as a watchdog to the media as a guide-dog.

Fourie therefore raises five questions about *ubuntu* as a normative framework for journalism. He points out the significant consequences such a framework may have for journalism in its Western-defined libertarian-democratic ideal of an 'objective representation of the world'. The questions speak to concerns about the relevancy of *ubuntuism* in the context of the changed nature of traditional African culture; the claim that *ubuntuism* is distinctively an African moral philosophy; moral philosophy's vulnerability to political exploitation; *ubuntuism* as a normative theory in a globalized world and changed media environment, and the implications an *ubuntu* approach may have for journalism practice (Fourie, 2008). Yet, as pointed out by Chasi (2015: 98) locating *ubuntu* within a liberal constitutional framework is not necessarily counter-intuitive, 'especially if one recognizes that ubuntu can be read as a moral philosophy that does not eschew recognition of individuals … and that ubuntu has, for example, been found to be consistent with Ralwsian liberal thought …' (ibid.).

Blankenberg was not oblivious to the issues highlighted by Fourie. In his conclusion he noted that many obstacles stand in the way of the realization of the ideal of an *ubuntu*-inspired liberatory media. Notably, he singled out the interests of those who benefit from a libertarian journalism that enforces the status quo and is elitist in nature, as a key obstacle. In this respect he acknowledges the importance of

buy-in from different role-players in the search for a model journalism that aspires towards mainstreaming – cautioning therefore against a journalism that is 'relegated to only marginalised "grassroots" development' (Blankenberg, 1999: 60). Echoes of such a line of reasoning can be found in West and Fair's work, who argue that:

> Only … by locating media within the sphere of social relations of power and by historically situating media forms … will we see clearly that what is at issue in using communication for development purposes is not merely the success or failure of 'development', but rather the ability of people in African societies to construct, advance, contest, transform, and resist visions for the future direction of their own communities'.
>
> *(West and Fair, 1993: 95)*

PSB as development journalism

Development journalism, notwithstanding its many problems, appears to be making a comeback, notably in the work of Banda, in his attempt to reconceptualize development journalism within the new African reality, specifically aiming at a synthesis between development journalism and public-service broadcasting ideology. Banda's effort, read in conjunction with Blankenberg's explication of so-called *ubuntu*-journalism, presents some interesting pointers for an 'Afrokology' of PSB (Banda, 2007). He notes that the demonization of development journalism (resulting from a discourse embedded in Western notions of press freedom) has diverted attention from important questions about how journalism can contribute to participatory democracy, security, peace and other humanistic values.

Banda demonstrates first, the relevance of the development journalism paradigm to PSB and second, how the principles of the paradigm can be implemented within the context of PSB. He points to five key areas of similarity between development journalism and PSB. First, development journalism stresses the free will of the journalist, which resonates with the requirement of PSB to be independent from vested interests. Second, PSB's notion of 'universality' (i.e. universal accessibility and universal appeal) is implied in development journalism's concern with providing access to marginalized members of society and enhancing their participation (through, for example, having their voices heard on a range of issues) and its holistic view of 'development' as 'appealing to all'. Third, PSB's structure of regional houses and its insistence on a people's representative body to which it is accountable, assumes that PSB is there to service the needs of the people and not a particular political elite. Fourth, both development journalism and PSB value cultural and community identity as a counter-hegemonic force against any local or foreign hegemonic cultural encroachment and, last, both development journalism and PSB are infused with a concern for the development of societies in their entirety (Banda, 2007: 164).

Banda expands on this list in a comparative table where he also points to similarities between the two concepts' perceptions of content i.e. both emphasize good, quality programming content, with development journalism specifically

highlighting the importance of infusing grassroots voices as well, and both value independent programme-making and independent and democratic participation. A distinguishing feature of Banda's attempt to redefine PSB within the context of development journalism, is not necessarily its insistence that the media exists for the people and must therefore have emancipation as its ultimate goal, but rather its downplaying of the role of the state and its focus on the potential of citizens in media making (an aspect that is also gaining traction in contemporary 'Western' discussions of citizen participation in media-making in a digitalized PSB environment).

Conclusion

What does this discussion of PSB in Africa tell us about the way in which the media-democracy link in post-apartheid South Africa can be theorized? The challenges faced by the media system in South Africa, in particular facing SABC as a public-service broadcaster, reflect structural issues in the global media system, which is still dominated by the West. South Africa is not alone in facing this need to find a culturally appropriate path to develop its media. BRICS could provide a framework within which to create a shared strategy that mobilizes for the liberation of media institutions in the global South. Such an intervention might be similar to the establishment of the BRICS Bank in terms of bringing an alternative model for global media governance, one that can be inspired by relevant indigenous knowledge and experiences in the South. However, no one wants to exchange one master for another, so vigilance is required to prevent the imposition of new controls.

Universally, the challenge for PSB has, from the beginning, been characterized by dialectical relations seemingly inherent in linking organizational egoism and orientational altruism (Lowe, 2010). This holds true for the SABC as well. Under apartheid, the SABC operated as a monopoly in a constrained context in which it wished to make a difference – albeit a difference for groups that were narrowly defined in line with first colonial and thereafter postcolonial political and economic interests. It saw at its core the necessity for a developmental function in service of nation building but remained vulnerable to the political party and government of the day in this respect. For this broadcaster to truly provide a participatory democratic sphere, there is need for a concerted effort to limit government influence.

In our view a reconceptualized PSB is not necessarily Afrocentric. Rather it is located within a global centrism of the global North. This ethos takes precedence attempt to theorize media within the context of *ubuntu* opment journalism and public-service broadcasting. framework that places the emancipation of the Afr media and PSB principles. Notably, both emphasize th necessity for free and independent media, although they do not necessarily see the role of the media as an objective observer. Instead, they place PSB as an actor in a participatory civil society with an emphasis on what Nyamnjoh calls 'conviviality', in the pursuit towards

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Rather, it is located...

different and competing individual and/or collective goals within negotiated socio-cultural arrangements (Nyamnjoh, 2013: 128).

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