

Article

Towards an Analysis of the South African Media and Transformation, 1994-99¹

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Politics and Methodology

How should one assess the place of media performance during the 'Mandela state', 1994-99? A good place to start is within the realm of political discourse, which – notwithstanding its confusions and superficialities – can be distilled to reveal a number of contrasting perspectives. Identifying the pitfalls within these perspectives helps to clear the way for a different approach – one that goes beyond conventional wisdoms and into a more considered analytical mode.

To begin with the realm of political discourse then, it is possible to extract from amongst the blurred and often inconsistent positions, four different perspectives on media performance in the first five years of South Africa's democracy. All four have distinct theoretical and political assumptions.

The first perspective is that South Africa's media – notwithstanding some exceptions – was a factor in the production and reproduction of a racist authoritarian system that ended in political terms in 1994. The second, opposing view would claim a role for the media in resisting and/or reforming that system.

For the first perspective, the explanation would be that the media served the dominant interests in the system because it was – in essence – an integral part of that system in terms of ownership and control, revenue streams, staffing, content and audiences (see findings of the Truth Commission). The whole socio-economic environment, not to mention the legal and political one, meant that it could realistically not have been otherwise. As in many other societies then, the South African media in almost all its persuasions, in the years preceding 1994 was – in this

perspective – inevitably part of the establishment. For adherents of this analysis, the critical focus for the post-apartheid period is the transformation of this bastion of old-system power. This means assessing whether the media post-1994 came (or was brought) around to promoting the cause of that new system.

Thus, in the first perspective, media performance post-apartheid would be assessed by the extent to which it became part of a new dispensation. Of course, the moot point here is whether the media helped produce, reproduce and deepen democratic institutions and thorough-going socio-economic transformation, or whether it inevitably ended up servicing a new ruling class alliance. The idea in this view is that media in any society – at least eventually – will fall into line with the power structure, just as surely as water follows the pull of gravity. Whether this structure is one that puts power in the hands of the 'people', rather than a new elite (which may – or may not – have an interest in pursuing democratic and socio-economic transformation), is significant. But more important for the purposes of this article is the underlying notion that the media does not, and cannot, stand outside of the social relations within which it operates. Accordingly, an analysis of the media during 1994-99 would focus on the expected, indeed inexorable, alignment of media to the changed power structure. This means assessing the changed environment within which media operated, as well as changes in the racial balance in media ownership and staffing, and whether these changes led to the media giving credit and legitimacy to the new democracy and the elected government. An example of the politics associated with this approach can be found in Fourie (1994:49-50) who argues that developing countries cannot afford uninvolved media, and therefore that 'South Africa's media can and should become an integral part of the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme.'

Turning to the second perspective, the argument for the media as a factor for change prior to 1994 would lead to a different research focus for the post-1994 period. The analytical assumptions here highlight the relative autonomy of the media and 'professional' (ie liberal pluralistic) journalistic values from the dominant social relations. In this view, media inherently epitomises a fourth estate, and should be assessed as such.

In this view, prior to 1994, there was a continuum, not a chasm, between the change-oriented roles of the white liberal press (for example, the *Cape Times* and *The Star*), the black press (like *City Press*, and the *Sowetan* and its banned predecessors) and the 'alternative press' like *Weekly Mail* and

Vrye Weekblad. These media all – in various ways and degrees – dealt in discourses of liberal democracy that were at odds with the apartheid government and defied attempts at control. It could be argued still further in this paradigm that even the Afrikaans press (cf Van Deventer 1998) and the SABC (cf testimony by Pretorius and others at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) helped lead politicians and reluctant parts of the public towards a full franchise dispensation. The point is that within this general perspective, the assessment of media's role post-apartheid means interrogating whether the media after 1994 stayed true to liberal pluralist values – or whether it withered and bowed under illiberal pressures of a new government and newly empowered society. The resulting assessment of media between 1994 and 1999, then, is of the extent to which the media holds the line against the predatory designs of the new power-holders, versus transformative tendencies to align with them. There is a suspicion of state power per se, a sense that governmental power corrupts its holders, and a belief that the media can (and should) strive to be independent of all power relations. The 1994-99 assessment would focus on this as the number one issue: whether media has discarded its 'traditional' identity, and yielded to a new anti-democratic hegemony or not.

Who espoused, and espouses, these two different approaches? Radical journalists, especially black journalists, and the ANC are certainly proponents of the first view: that the media served apartheid and needed to be transformed to serve the new order after 1994. Interestingly, some media owners and editors – notably at Independent Newspapers – have also acknowledged complicity with apartheid and pledged to transform their institutions so as to accord with the new situation (see submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). Typically espousing the second approach, white liberal journalists – but also young black journalists like one-time *Drum* staffer Ramotena Mabote and some elements from the 'alternative press' – have emphasised continuing a tradition of opposition to (some) vested interests, especially those wielding governmental power. Berating the first approach, Mabote complains that: '... black journalists have decided to look the other way when the ANC government does something wrong' (*The Star* November 1, 1996, see also *Mail & Guardian* November 1-7, 1996). In its adherence to an oppositional mode of media, the second perspective has been supported by an array of parties representing newly-disadvantaged interests (the Democratic Party and other white opposition groups).

In brief, the difference between the two positions outlined thus far can be summed up as follows. What informs the first is a kind of structural-functional view, according to which what stays constant in history is the way the media reinforce ruling class power. What guides the second is the liberal-pluralist notion of an enduring watchdog role which forever pits the press (including private broadcasting) against the state. In both cases, the politics of assessment focus on the extent of historical continuity in relation to the basic role of media in society.

These two positions are of course caricatured as they in fact are in the real cut-and-thrust of polemic and struggle over the role of the media in South Africa.² Nonetheless, as set out in this article, the two perspectives are heuristic devices to highlight the diverse methodological and political assumptions that can inform analysis of the media post-1994. The same utility can be found in a third and a fourth set of views can be drawn from the messy discourses around media and post-apartheid transformation. These two additional perspectives, unlike those discussed above, allow for historical discontinuity in roles, but they still remain some distance from a more sophisticated appraisal. The third perspective that can be identified in the discourse is the interpretation that the media, once happy to be part of a system of privilege under apartheid, discovered a profound and vigorous interest in the importance of being critical once that privilege was scrapped. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, for instance, has observed that the media which was 'quite brave in its criticism of the new government', was also 'coy about saying boo to a goose in the old days' (*Mail & Guardian* December 6-12, 1996). The assumption here is that the invigorated watchdog role post-1994 is simply an expedient expression of vested political interests and has nothing to do with the media as such. The continuity in interests meant a discontinuity in historical role – support of the status quo pre-1994 gave way to opposition thereafter. The research focus that arises from this view is the extent to which media in the 'Mandela state' still represented whites. There is no essentialist assumption that the media reinforces ruling class power, nor that it stands in opposition to it. Media's role, rather, is subordinate to the political conjuncture of which interests control the media. The analysis privileges interests as its core notion of what media does. Its enduring assumption is that the media is an instrument that reflects the position of those who control it, and thus class and colour of ownership is a key focus.

The converse of this third perspective is a fourth view which suggests the reverse discontinuity. It recognises (and indeed applauds) critical coverage under the old regime, but argues that this role became redundant once a new, democratically-elected, government took office. In the period under review, 127 Afrikaans-speaking journalists apologised to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for effectively failing to carry out professional obligations under apartheid (Brynard 1997). The implication is that they found their true vocation under democracy and with hindsight. Yet such a discovery was too late and out of kilter with the context for the fourth perspective as outlined here. A critical media, in short, is deemed to be anachronistic in this view. The argument is that there is simply no call for the media to oppose the new authorities who respect democracy, clean government and freedom of expression (and to boot, who are also committed to socio-economic transformation). Thabo Mbeki is said to have advocated this view (see Owen 1998:179), as has leading ANC official Smuts Ngonyama ('media and government have common objectives in a non-racial democracy', *Daily Dispatch* June 26, 1998). For 'struggle' journalists who had supported the liberation movement prior to 1994, it raises a real question about whether they should move from opposition to the old government to support for the new. Analysis of the media in this perspective would reject any notion of an 'eternal' contradiction between media and state, or the notion of the check and balance provided by the Fourth Estate, and assess rather whether this media spuriously pursued a hostile role in regard to the new government between 1994 and 1999. Like the third view described above, there is no ahistorical assumption that media does, or should, intrinsically play an oppositional (or even a supportive) role towards dominant social relations. The fundamental assumption, rather, is that the media stands for liberal pluralistic values, and therefore its battles are over once a liberal pluralistic democracy has been achieved.

In summary, set out above are four possible views of the role of the media in the first five years of South Africa's democracy. The first focuses on how the media moved towards reproducing the new social relations. The second zooms in on the media remaining independent and aloof. The third points to the media opposing the new social relations because of its apartheid roots, while the fourth puts the spotlight on the changing conditions nullifying the critical role of the media.

One political conclusion from the first methodological perspective is that the media did not make any significant changes towards becoming part

of the 'new South Africa', and to this extent functioned as a drag on democratisation and socio-economic transformation. For the impatient lobby behind this perspective, changes in the media were too little and too slow. Another more considered and more consistent political conclusion from this first perspective is that there were, as could be expected from the core methodological assumption, important changes in the media, and that the institution was brought along in the main. The second perspective, in contrast, supposes that precisely to the extent that there was such an alignment with the new power structure, the media failed to champion the cause of democracy and socio-economic transformation – and instead was party to supporting creeping centralisation, authoritarianisation, corruption and half-baked economic policies. Here, this second perspective gives rise to the conclusion that there was not an alignment, and that the media managed to keep the flag flying through exposing authoritarianism, cronyism, corruption, flaws in economic policy, etc. The judgement of the third perspective is that the media fought against putting its weight behind the interests of the new democracy because it still represented the interests of the old pigmentocracy. Part of the establishment prior to 1994, the media failed democracy and socio-economic transformation then; opposed to the new order thereafter, it failed in the more recent period as well. In the fourth view, the media correctly opposed the apartheid past, but did a disservice to developing democracy by unthinkingly opposing a non-apartheid government.

In two of these four views, the third and the fourth, the media is judged to have hindered democracy and socio-economic transformation during the post-apartheid era because it did not change, because it was critical for either reactionary or redundant reasons. That verdict stands starkly against the more consistent of the conclusions of the other two perspectives (the first and the second), that media helped defend and deepen democracy in this self-same period. The same conclusions of transformative success are reached in the first and second perspectives, but for different reasons; the first because the media changed, the second because the media did not change.

Interestingly, the politics often associated with the second perspective (valuing an oppositional media) could look at the first perspective and conclude that the media has failed precisely because it changed in line with the new order. Likewise, the politics usually linked to the first perspective, could find evidence of persistence of an oppositional media mode and conclude failure on the basis that the media had not changed.

There are clearly problems with this level of analysis if the four perspectives produce such conflicting conclusions. One major reason is the mix of methodological assumptions and political judgements. Another reason is the different meanings understood by 'transformation' in each perspective. In addition, every perspective tends to generalise so as to apply a narrow set of assumptions to all the media as if a singular institution was being dealt with. On the other hand, what the four perspectives and diverse conclusions do signal – and herein lies their value – are the huge differences that politics and methodology can make to analysis of media in the 'Mandela state'.

Taking a different methodological and political approach, this article argues that the apparent irreconcilability of these four assessments and their opposing conclusions is incorrect. Its assumption is that a more concrete analysis of what democratic and socio-transformation meant in the 1994-99 period, will demonstrate many contradictions in the role of media, and thus find evidence of all perspectives and of both conclusions – ie that the media both helped and hindered transformation. It begins by taking as a given that the media as a complex and uneven whole – both reinforced and changed anti-democratic political features and even some socio-economic ones in the pre-1994 dispensation. It concludes from a review of the media post-1994 that the institution as a whole played a similarly complex role regarding transformation in that period.

The methodological assumption here eschews the kind of structural functionalism of the first perspective, as well as the abstract historicism of the second. It further distances itself from the third view which sees the media as a simple instrument of vested interests, and is critical of the simplistic notion that contradictions between media and state can be abolished. Instead, the view here accepts that media is part of dominant social relations, but a contested part. In addition, the analysis below takes seriously the relative autonomy of media, related to its own professional ideology and *raison d'être* as a particular kind of economic and social institution (which *raison d'être* of course is different to that of government). The control of media by class and racial interests is taken as significant, but it not privileged as the sole or even the most important factor in the assessment.

The political assumption of the analysis below is that there are limits to democratisation and socio-economic transformation in post-1994 South Africa as a negotiated polity with a capitalist economy located in a global

network of relations after the Cold War. But within these parameters, many meaningful alternatives were possible. Thus while media in such a society is unlikely really to provide the access or appropriate information resources for grassroots participation in governance, it could play a range of other democratic functions. One of these was the potential to contribute to representative (if not participative) democracy by enhancing the informed choices of citizens at least at voting times. Another was the possibility of acting as a greater or lesser pluralistic forum (at least for elites), and as a relatively-independent watchdog (or, rather, as a guard-dog of various interests) that scrutinises government, promoted transparency and enhanced accountability. There was, further, a range of potential educational and entertainment roles played by media that could have a bearing on civic culture (including political tolerance and respect for democratic institutions) as well as the balance of power between state, business and other sectors of society. In all these respects, there was the potential for the media to play a range of functions in socio-economic development, including as regards its own status as an industry.

Significant for assessing how these transformative roles actually played out are: the wider legal environment within which media operates, the systems of ownership and control, staffing set-up, content and self-definition, and reach and construction. These are the specifics investigated below, and they emerge from a paradigm counterposed to the general perspectives discussed above.

The thrust of this article is to pursue the complex character of media operation in South Africa's first democracy.

Legal Environment

One of the ways the media supported dominant social relations prior to 1994 was its accession to the restrictive legal environment erected by apartheid. This legal control over the media was not continued in the post-1994 period. On the contrary, the new government came to office with much less state power at its disposal than its predecessor – not only because of the balance of forces in society at large, but because of the smaller role for the state agreed upon for the 'new South Africa'. The ANC's programme also propelled it towards a freer media order, and hopes were high after the 1994 elections that the new government would proceed at a pace to decrease the power of state

te over the media by liberalising the publishing and broadcasting regimes.

scrapping censorship laws, and introducing transparency into the operations of the state and business.

There were indeed improvements in the legal situation over the period till 1999, but not quite as significant as hoped for by the libertarian advocates of the second view discussed above, or as acclaimed by the 'partnership' perspective of the fourth view. Probably the most important legal changes were signalled in the new constitution which gave South Africans, for the first time, a right to freedom of expression and freedom of information.

The right to freedom of expression was codified expressly to include freedom of the press and other media. In the interim constitution (1994-96), this right could only be limited if such limitation was 'reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on freedom and equality'. In addition, inasmuch as freedom of expression related to free and fair political activity, any limitation would not only have to be 'reasonable', but also 'necessary'. As Ken Owen points out, this was not as strong a statement about freedom of expression as that found in the United States constitution's famous fourth amendment (1998:177). In fact, the provision was to be weakened further in the final constitution, where freedom of expression was more specifically qualified so that it did not extend to 'propaganda for war, incitement of imminent violence; or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm'. Arguably, this narrowed the space that was theoretically opened up in the interim constitution, but surprisingly the media itself passed little comment.

Another difference between the two constitutions was the omission in the final document of the provision (located under freedom of expression in the interim version) that 'all media financed by or under the control of the state shall be regulated in a manner which ensures impartiality and the expression of a diversity of opinion'. This change also, arguably, has negative implications for the democratic role of media. Indeed, an outcry just ahead of the 1999 election arose precisely when opposition parties accused the Government Communications and Information Service of producing partisan information.

The second major change introduced by South Africa's first democratic constitution was the right of access to information. Here, the final constitution was an improvement on the interim one. The latter restricted a citizen's right of access to information held only by the state, and then

only in so far as that information which was needed for the exercise or protection of that individual's other rights. The final constitution dropped these conditionalities. It thereby removed the limited basis on which a citizen had right of access to information held by the state, and it also expanded access to include any information held by non-state entities inasmuch as information in this sphere was needed for the exercise or protection of any rights. This advance on the interim constitution was, however, weakened in that the final constitution also allowed for legislation that could reasonably alleviate the administrative and financial burden on the state in giving effect to the right of access to information.

On the whole, however, the final constitution certainly represented a gigantic advance in the media environment compared to that prevailing prior to 1994. In addition, the constitution declared that the interpretation of the Bill of Rights should promote 'the values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom'. Any limitation to the rights by legislation had to pass the test of being reasonable and justifiable in the context of this kind of society. The codification of these rights of freedom of expression and freedom of information meant, undoubtedly, that much legislation restricting the media was unconstitutional and needed to be scrapped. The new rights also meant that new laws needed to be passed to give effect to the new provisions. Meanwhile, not waiting for new legislation, at least one prominent journalist, Justin Arenstein, successfully cited the constitutional right to information in attempts to prise information out of recalcitrant bureaucrats (*Rhodes Journalism Review* 17:41). As it happened, despite lobbying by the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) and the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF), by the end of the first five years of South Africa's democracy, most relevant restrictive laws were not repealed or amended. Further, not all the anticipated new legislation was passed, while some that was, had mixed implications for media freedom.

To the surprise of many in the media, several restrictive laws were trundled out by the authorities on various occasions during the period. The 1968 Armaments Development and Production Act was drafted in to block newspapers from publishing the name of a country (Saudi Arabia) from whom Armscor/Denel intended to win a major weapons supply contract. Claims to secrecy were also invoked when the government Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs attempted to block disclosure in court of information about the biological warfare programme headed by apartheid

poisoner Dr Wouter Basson. Use of the discredited Protection of Information Act saw the detention of Swiss journalist Jean-Phillipe Ceppi for possession of a 'confidential' military document later found to have been publicly given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by the army itself. Government also displayed a hostile attitude to the free flow of information when it resorted to the courts in a bid to halt publication of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Also kept in service was the infamous Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act, in terms of which Cape Town journalists were subpoenaed several times to give evidence about the murder of drug lord Raashied Staggie. In 1998, however, SANEF succeeded in securing an agreement by government to limit the use of Section 205 in recognition of the constitutional right to freedom of expression, and pending negotiations to find an alternative legal mechanism in the interests of both media and state (Fisher 1999). Meanwhile, a joint committee was set to begin work in 1999 on identifying the prospects for an omnibus bill repealing unconstitutional legislation still restricting the role of the press.

During the period under review, one significant item of legislation was passed in line with the new constitution, viz, The Film and Publications Act (1996). This law set up a board to classify media into categories with a range of age-related and distribution-related restrictions, with the exemption of publications in the Newspaper Press Union. This publication control was initially post-publication, but in early-1999 was extended to cover pre-publication (ie production per se of offensive content became an offence). What the law restricted was sexual and 'religious hatred' content, except in cases of bona fide artistic, scientific or discussion-oriented purposes. These constraints accord with the 'human dignity' provision in the constitution, and even though they clearly limit freedom of expression, this is not a limitation (arguably) that goes to the heart of media's role in democracy or socio-economic transformation.

What is more serious is the limitation by the Act on producing or publishing content which either 'amounts to propaganda for war', which 'incites to imminent violence', or which advocates 'hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and which constitutes incitement to cause harm.' Again, there are exemptions for bona fide artistic, scientific or discussion-oriented purposes. In addition, the 'hate speech' restriction is qualified in that the offending content should not only be 'hate speech' but such speech when it further entails incitement to cause harm. While the

Film and Publications Act was not used to curb the media's democratic political role between 1994 and 1999, it could conceivably lend itself to this in the years ahead. The successive apartheid governments certainly used laws purportedly to prevent race hatred in order to suppress criticism of white domination.

Another new law introduced, although not passed, in the period under review was the Open Democracy Bill. The intention of such legislation to give effect to the right of access to information was signalled early in the new government's term of office, and a first draft of the bill was introduced in 1995. By 1999, however, the law had been through numerous revisions and was significantly cut back in its provisions. The original 'sunshine' proposals for open meetings of state bodies were gone, as was the notion of 'information courts' that could speedily enforce access to documents. In line with the final constitution, however, the Bill still did provide for partial access to information held by private bodies. There was concern that the law, by defining exemptions, could actually make it harder to access state information (*Finance Week* July 16-22, 1998). By the end of the period under review, it was an open question as to whether under the 'Mbeki state' there would be greater access to information and a culture of transparency, although it is not insignificant that Mbeki himself was one of the initiators of the bill.

On balance, the mix of matters in the legal environment after 1994 was generally far more positive than negative when compared to the past. Notwithstanding the negative, however, it is the case that media in the 'Mandela state' operated with relatively impunity irrespective of the law. When the majority of newspapers broke the law and published the evidence in the Mandela-divorce case, no action was taken against them. When the *Sunday Independent* ignored both a court interdict and the Armaments Development and Production Act, and published that Denel/Armcor were seeking to supply Saudi Arabia, the paper was not charged for either offence. This signalled a sea-change in South Africa, and created a space in politics that allowed substantial autonomy of the media from political controls during the period.

Perhaps the biggest improvement for the media between 1994-99 occurred not in improvements in part of the criminal law, nor in the lack of enforcement of other parts of this law, but in civil law. For years, the press had been curbed by court cases, or the threat thereof, by litigants citing defamation. Not only politicians like Mangosuthu Buthelezi and police

prisoners like Lothar Neethling took action, but also corporations like Sage, successfully silenced or chilled the media by securing protection from the courts in terms of conservative application of defamation case law prior to 1994. Exposed for his dubious deals, Liberian businessman Emmanuel Shaw III was one of those after 1994 who threatened the same when trying to halt adverse publicity about him in the *Mail & Guardian*. In 1997, a book on controversial hotel magnate Sol Kerzner – alleged to have secured a Transkei gambling licence through bribery, and reportedly a generous contributor to both the National Party and the ANC ahead of the 1994 election – was prevented from going on sale under a defamation ruling. It looked like a bad omen for the media, but such curbs on the democratic role of the media came to an unexpected end with the celebrated Bogoshi judgement in 1998 (Marcus and Burnett 1999). This ruling saw the courts reinterpret the law in the light of the new constitution. The effect was that journalists no longer had to prove that what they published was true, but that they had not been negligent in trying to verify truth. This may have the unexpected downside of requiring journalists to disclose their sources (should they wish to use the Bogoshi judgement defence), and therefore may prove to be less significant than first hoped. However, it still meant the period under review ended with the media substantially strengthened in its ability to publish.

Another significant advance between 1994 and 1999 was the change in legislation regarding broadcasting. The constitution included in its category of 'state institutions supporting constitutional democracy', an independent broadcast authority. This body was to 'regulate broadcasting in the public interest and to ensure fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing South African society.' The Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) was actually legislated into existence in 1993, but the independence of the body received constitutional backing in the final constitution. It was on this rock that the ANC majority in parliament failed in an attempt to undercut the IBA in 1998. President Nelson Mandela referred back to parliament the Broadcasting Bill on the grounds that the conferring of regulatory powers and extensive policy directive powers on the Minister could face constitutional challenge. The offending aspects were amended and the revised law passed in March 1999. This constitutional protection of the IBA did not mean pure independence of the institution: political influence remained through the parliamentary committee nominating people for the IBA council, and the state president could and did reject the candidates.

The threat of merging the IBA into the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA), which latter body reports to the Minister rather than parliament was still there in early-1999. However, on the whole, the IBA did function as an autonomous institution that successfully licenced more than 100 new broadcasters independently of government or party political influence. In this way, the IBA was a major factor in facilitating both the democratic and the socio-economic transformational role of broadcast media during 1994 and 1999.

Another legal factor affecting media and democracy in this period was legislation relating to the SABC. Ahead of the 1994 elections, the SABC board had been chosen directly by a Minister. It was put under control of an autonomous board ahead of the poll. The first 'democratic' board was chosen through public interviews with candidates by a committee of 'eminent people' - which committee in turn was chosen by a committee of other eminent people who had been agreed upon in multi-party negotiations. This model, 'two-steps' removed from politics, was dropped after the elections. Yet, control did not revert entirely to the pre-1994 model. The SABC board was chosen by a parliamentary committee through public interviews with candidates nominated by civil society.

The 1999 Broadcast Act further reinforced the independence of the public broadcaster by specifying that coverage should include 'significant news and public affairs programming, which meets the highest standards of journalism, as well as fair coverage, impartiality, balance and independence from government, commercial and other interests.'

In short, at the end of the first five years of South Africa's democracy, the media was better placed than ever before to play a democratic role unfettered by government. It could publish or broadcast with very little restraint and was on the verge of accessing at least some information hitherto held in the closed filing cabinets of both business and state. Further, the media itself had played a significant part in reducing the power of the authorities to limit the democratic space open to it. It is within this significantly transformed environment that the role of media between 1994 and 1999 can be properly assessed.

Media Ownership

One of the most critical factors for the role of media in democratisation and socio-economic transformation concerns ownership and control. As was graphically evident under apartheid, concentrated ownership works against these roles. Broadcasting prior to 1993 was effectively a state monopoly

and, within this, was very tightly controlled not only by the government and the propagandists it appointed, but by the Broederbond and latterly 'securocrats', and in a few cases by Bantustan dictators. The only private broadcaster was M-Net, owned by the newspaper industry and forbidden to broadcast news. Newspapers were privately owned and therefore less subject to the same level of control as broadcasting. But the press was effectively held by four groups, the two English language ones ultimately being sourced to mega-corporation Anglo-American. Interlocking companies and pyramid structures meant there was a form of horizontal integration of the newspaper sector with the pulp and paper industry on the one side, and ownership of printing and distribution facilities on the other, and in turn this meant formidable barriers to potential newcomers. Worse, there was very little direct competition between the groups – oligopoly existed even to the extent of one legal agreement specifying that Caxtons would not enter into the sold newspaper business and, for its part, the then Argus (now Independent Newspapers) would not compete in the free-sheet or magazine market. It is true that Afrikaner capital companies Naspers and Perskor engaged in devastating competition in the 1970s, with Naspers emerging victorious with its *Beeld* newspaper (Muller 1987). The political significance of this battle meant that Cape Nationalist influence triumphed over Transvaal – which had a bearing on developments towards wider democracy but which, ironically in a sense, snuffed out the voices of several other Afrikaner papers in the process. In short, if a pluralism of media owners, and ease of entry into the industry, are healthy for democracy and socio-economic development, pre-1994 South Africa was far removed from this. The picture changed dramatically, however, beginning in 1994.

Enter foreign ownership in the first instance, in the form of Irish magnate Tony O'Reilly buying 35 per cent of the Argus company in January 1994, rising to 58 per cent in 1995 and further acquiring full control of papers until then not wholly in the renamed Independent Newspapers. These papers were the *Cape Times*, the *Natal Mercury* and *The Pretoria News*. In April 1999, O'Reilly bought out the last remaining shareholders (24 per cent), and was poised to de-list the company in South Africa. Considered in terms of concentration, this foreign investment was not a positive development from the vantage point of democracy in that in Cape Town and Durban the same company now owns both morning and evening papers. However, at the same time, the entry of international capital saw a noticeable increase in competition in the newspaper industry

– even if this was only at the higher end of the market. It took the form of more vigorous competition by Independent titles with those of other groups, as well as the launch of new publications *Business Report* (going head to head with *Business Day* for advertising and readers) and the *Sunday Independent* (taking on the *Sunday Times*).

Following O'Reilly, fresh foreign ownership was introduced (again in the higher end of the market) when United Kingdom-based Pearson PLC bought half of *Business Day* and the *Financial Mail* from Times Media Limited, and went on to set up with TML a large new internet publishing operation called I-Net Bridge. The foreign investment trend was also evident with 62 per cent of the *Mail & Guardian* being bought out by the United Kingdom-based *Guardian* in March 1998, a move that undoubtedly prevented the closure of the loss-making paper. Swedish group Dagens Industri took 24 per cent in Mafube publishing during the period.

The impact of all this foreign investment on staffing and content will be discussed later. Suffice it to record at this point that it signalled the exposure of South African media to international media forces, and on balance added to competition and limited diversity in the media landscape. There was, however, little if anything in the way of thorough-going socio-economic transformation as regards local economic empowerment.³

It was not all a case of capital inflow to media under the 'Mandela state'. Ironically, the liberation of South Africa saw the death of the liberation movement's media, mainly because foreign funds for these alternative publications dried up under the donors' mantra that the country was now normalised. This development saw the demise of all the 'alternative' newspapers besides the *Mail & Guardian*. *South*, *Vrye Weekblad* and *New Nation* died as did their magazine counterparts like *Work-in-Progress* and the short-lived publication successors in the community press like *Nemato Voice* and *Cape Dokta*. The Independent Media Diversity Trust, whose contributions from the mainstream South African media industry had come to an end, also ran short of print media funds from foreign sources.

There was also capital outflow in the form of investment abroad by local media between 1994 and 1999. The period saw significant investment by South African broadcast media groups M-Net and Primedia – into television, cinema, internet, events organising, and outdoor advertising in places ranging from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Australia and the Far East. For the first time, South African media became active in global media markets, and with seeming economic success.

The biggest capital flows, however, were the foreign investment in South African media and concomitant with this change in the nationality of ownership, a further change took place in both the form and racial character of the ownership of several media groups. From the vantage point of pluralism as a factor in democracy, these changes can be heralded for further promoting competition and for bringing new and previously excluded players into the media business. Not only black ownership of media came into play, but owner-stakes by unions, women's groups and even a development trust entered the picture. Many of the new owners were highly geared in financing their acquisitions – leading to accusations by President Nelson Mandela that they were hollow, indeed virtually bankrupt, owners (Mandela 1997:34). Yet, while it is true that these new owners will still be repaying the banks for a long time to come, that they now have formal title is still significant when compared to the racist and purely corporate concentration pre-1994.

First in this change in ownership was the 'unbundling' of the *Sowetan* by Argus in 1993 to Dr Nthatho Motlana's New Africa Publishing (NAP) (owned in turn by New African Investments Ltd, or NAIL). Second was the sale of Johnnic holding company of TML amongst others to a consortium of black business and, significantly, labour interests, all headed by Cyril Ramaphosa. Known as the National Empowerment Consortium, the new owners included NAIL and other black capitalist interests, but also had half its shares held by labour including 13 per cent in the hands of the National Union of Mineworkers and ten per cent by the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (Tomaselli 1997:16). Soon after the NEC takeover, TML took full control of the *Daily Dispatch*, and brought in local minority black business owners on its Port Elizabeth dailies. A similar development in drawing in local black capitalists regarding the *Daily Dispatch* was announced in April 1999. Third in the 'empowerment' ownership transformation was Nasionale Pers relinquishing part-control of *City Press* to Oscar Dhlomo's investment company Dynamo (although Dhlomo sold his shares back to Naspers in late-1998). Fourth came the entry of the Kagiso Trust development into media with a merger first with Perskor and then in 1998 with Caxtons. Early-1999 saw moves for Caxtons to give 42 per cent of its shares to NAIL in a share-exchange.

All these changes amounted to rather fundamental transformation in the proprietorship of print media in South Africa, and had various consequences. Unfortunately, the new owners did not mean new life for loss-making

media. New African Publishing bought, briefly sustained, and then closed the alternative paper *New Nation* in 1997; Kagiso shut shop on Perskor's historic *Imvo* in 1998. But TML and New African Publishing together launched a new newspaper in early-1999, the *Sunday World*, to compete mainly with Naspers' *City Press*. In another development, distribution company Allied publishing was broken up and sold to various black interests. If democracy and socio-economic transformation meant breaking the white capitalist stranglehold on the print media, this has now happened to a very significant extent.

If transformation of nationality, race and the form of ownership looked heady in the print media after 1994, it was positively head-over-heels in broadcasting. Leading the way here was the newly-created community broadcasting sector, where community-owned radio stations were licensed in profusion with 89 recorded by the IBA in August 1998 to be actually broadcasting. An analysis of these on the IBA's website suggests that an estimated 37 were owned by black communities, the others being white ethnic communities, Christian groups and campus stations. Unlike in print, there was foreign funding for these stations, and government itself pledged in 1998 to fund 18 community stations (although no independent mechanism for selecting these was proposed). A total of 232 applications were lodged by the end of 1998 for four year licences for community stations.

These ownership developments in broadcasting were followed in 1996 by the privatisation of seven state-owned stations to primarily black interests (including womens', labour, civic and business interests). Eight new commercial radio stations were also licenced to private owners including, again, significant black interests. These include YFM which included youth organisations in its ownership structure. Cape Talk was bought by Primedia, but with a stake held by the Mineworkers Investment Company. Kagiso Trust took ownership (through Kagiso Media) of East Coast Radio, Radio Oranje, and had a 42.5 per cent stake in Jacaranda FM.

Television was part of such trends. M-Net (already part-owned by black interests through Johnnie's 20 per cent in the company) gave 20 per cent of its stakes to small black investors to be paid for by amortisation of the dividends. The company's Phutuma scheme claimed to have generated more direct black shareholders than any other 'empowerment' exercise. Then there was a hotly contested licence eventually being awarded to the trade union linked Midi consortium in 1998 to set up e.tv. Investors in Midi included Hoskens (in turn controlled by the Mineworkers Social and

Benefit Investment Company and the SA Clothing and Textile Workers Union) as well as the SA National Civics Organisation and the Youth Development Trust amongst others. The other big shareholder in Midi is Vula, which counts the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa and the Communications Workers Union, amongst its significant shareholders.

Not only did these ownership developments signify the creation, almost overnight, of a totally new category of black broadcast owners. Following the example of TML selling part ownership of *Business Day* and the *Financial Mail* to Pearson, it also represented foreign ownership entering into partnership with local black economic groups. Midi's members included a 20 per cent share held by Time Warner. Likewise, foreign investment also came into broadcasting with Norwegian money in two 'greenfields' licenses for commercial jazz radio stations. More foreign ownership was envisaged by the legal changes allowing corporatisation of SABC in 1999 which were expressly done with a view to a future sale of shares in the public broadcaster to a foreign 'strategic equity partner' (*Saturday Star* February 21, 1998).

Importantly, there emerged a degree of cross-ownership too. NAIL acquired a 42 per cent stake in Jacaranda, while Independent Newspapers and City Press (with the Communication Workers Union and ANC-linked investment company Thebe) were central to Kaya FM. NAIL also bought out the independent television production company, Urban Brew, and appointed ex-SABC head Zwelakhe Sisulu to run its media interests. TML had interests in Classic FM, and also developed specialist business television operations culminating in a satellite channel, Summit TV. Also emerging as cross-media players in all this flux were Primedia, who – five years after 1994 – owned three commercial radio stations, and had large interests in cinema, business-to-business magazines and the Internet company Metropolis.

Cross-ownership between broadcast and print is generally seen as negative for media's democratic role, and indeed is limited by the IBA. But it can assist in socio-economic transformation by increasing the economies of scale and chances of survival for groups such as South Africa's new media owners. By 1999, it seemed that there was little in the way of negatives arising from the extent of cross-ownership, but rather that it was helping consolidate media owners.

Cross-ownership went beyond media during the period, with media companies developing in other enterprises, notably cellular telephony.⁴ Naspers and Johnnic (TML) through M-Net linked to M-cell, and by 1999 New African Publishing were looking to swap their stakes in M-Net for a chunk of MTN. As elsewhere in the world, media and telecommunications interests have become interlinked at the ownership level in South Africa.

The Internet arrived as a new medium between 1994 and 1999, although its significance in democracy and development had not become really evident by the end of the period when major investment was beginning to flow into it. Besides for TML and Pearson's I-Net Bridge initiative, Naspers became a force with its 24.com which rapidly went on to merge with the M-Net affiliated company, M-Web, in 1999. Primedia's Metropolis has been mentioned above. Independent Newspapers was slow off the mark, but in partnership with the Vodacom cellular telephone company, began putting serious money into an Internet presence by 1999. Small Internet publishers such as Woza proved the potential for sustainable entry of tiny voices into this form of publishing. New NGO web publishers, such as WomensNet – a women's resource data base (<http://www.womensnet.org.za>) – empowered civil society. The Parliamentary Monitoring Organisation, produced a record of parliamentary portfolio proceedings online, allowing for close scrutiny of elected representatives (<http://www.pmo.org.za>).

The Internet service-provision business became a hotly-contested terrain when Telkom entered the field and claimed monopoly rights for its Intekom offshoot as against private players.⁵ While the issue was still simmering in early-1999, there had already been a phase of rapid mergers and take-overs in the sector. Attempts to spread new media technologies to disadvantaged communities in the form of Multi-Purpose Community Centres began in 1997 with the establishment of the Universal Service Agency, but it had made little impact by 1999. The Internet seemed poised however for increased relevance for democracy and development under the 'Mbeki state': it was no longer a fringe medium in 1999.

Ownership and control of the public broadcaster also changed between 1994 and 1999. According to the 1999 Broadcasting Act, the institution, while remaining at least in part a state asset, was to be corporatised giving further impetus to the commercialisation of much of its activities. The body was to be split into a Public Service Broadcaster and a Commercial Public Service Broadcaster, with the latter subsidising the former. This solution,

which still had to be put into practice in 1999 (and which may in fact end up as nothing more than a paper) was an attempt to free the SABC to run at least one TV channel as a purely public broadcast service, according to the Government's Green and White Papers on broadcasting in 1997 and 1998.

In sum, the matter of media ownership and control and media diversity at the end of the 'Mandela State' period was far healthier from a democratic point of view than at the outset. A greater number of owners, increased competition, an expanded media industry, and the entry of black business, labour and other segments, all meant that centralised control by a single entity or oligopoly was no longer possible. Pluralism in ownership is, arguably, more likely to correspond with a diversity of contents than would limited ownership, even if it does not on its own guarantee this. What had fallen by the way, however, was the pre-1994 hope that a new government would make possible a series of new owners of print media serving the lower end of the market. The matter of a statutory funding body for such media diversity flickered on and off between 1994 and 1998, and was lobbied for by the National Community Media Forum and proposed both in the Comtask commission into government communication and the Broadcasting White Paper. But no enabling mechanism had emerged by May 1999.

While South Africa's democratic prospects (and perhaps even its developmental ones too) in 1999 are thus richer in media terms, it remains the case that the majority of South Africans after five years of an elected government are still a minority in terms of significant media ownership. The bottle, of course, may be admirably half-full or only be disappointingly half-empty, depending on whether one looks at the past or the future. But it indisputably contains a lot more liquid than it did before 1994.

Representativity

For media to play a properly democratic and/or developmentalist role, it needs to be staffed and managed by people with a sensitivity to this role and who are also in a position to communicate with the bulk of the electorate. In South African conditions, this requires tipping the imbalances in media staffing towards demographic representativity – particularly racial, but also along gender lines.

The period under review saw significant transformation in race as regards staffing.⁶ In broadcasting, the SABC from early on (and in part due

to its character of broadcasting in indigenous languages) was able to claim representativity at most levels of the corporation – and increasingly at top management level. The broadcaster as whole came under the direction of Zwelakhe Sisulu, former editor of the democratic campaigning newspaper, *New Nation*. Television lost the once-familiar face of Lester Venter and saw less of his long-standing colleague Freek Robinson. In editorial ranks, black journalists, but ones with democratic credentials like Phil Molefe, Amina Ferenza, Snuki Zikalala and Barney Mthombothis assumed control of editorial content. This was paralleled by the appointments of white democrats like Allister Sparks, Max du Preez, Franz Kruger and Sarah Crowe. Community radio stations based in the townships were staffed largely by black youth, and the newly privatised or licenced commercial stations also saw significant black staffing. Midi's e.tv was driven by Jonathan Proctor, who had previously worked for Bophutatswana dictator Lucas Mangope running BopTV, but black democratically-minded journalists like Jimmi Mathews and San Reddy played an important part.

In print, change initially came slower, but former democratic 'struggle' journalists like Moeqsien Williams, Ryland Fisher and Zubeida Jaffer took up top editorial positions. Other black newspaper editors appointed from 1997 onward were Kaizer Nyatumba, Nazeem Howa and Mike Robertson, and two women: Lakela Kaunda and Paula Fray. A white woman, Bronwyn Wilkinson, was made editor of the *Sports Day* newspaper. On the newspages, black bylines became more and more common, even though in the sub-editors' rooms white (often conservative) journalists still wrote headlines and laid out copy. Prominent white journalists like the *Sunday Times*' Ken Owen, the *Financial Mail*'s Nigel Bruce, Naspers' Hennie van Deventer and many others took early retirement or left the profession for one reason or another. All round, the media over the five year period became far more black in staff profile. Compared to 1994, eight major newspapers had replaced white editors and/or deputy editors with black counterparts by May 1999. Just four retained white editors over this period. A clear factor driving this transformation was the change in ownership. The group most vulnerable to criticism around the lack of black ownership, the foreign-owned Independent Newspapers, was surprisingly the leader in training and promoting black journalists. TML, headed up by Cyril Ramaphosa, came a close second.

The changes in staffing demographics were insufficient to convince the ANC. President Mandela, citing black journalists as his sources, said that

many of the new black appointees attacked the government because this won them favour in the eyes of their white bosses (Mandela 1997). The rhetoric implied that critical white journalists should keep quiet because they reflected only minority interests, while critical black journalists should realise whose side they ought to be on. The race card, it seemed, had not expired despite the political equality for all races. While playing the card may have pressurised media bosses to speed up 'corrective action' over the period, it is also the case that race served as a convenient club for politicians (and others) to dismiss or counter critical coverage. The extent to which this was effective merits further research.

These transformations in staffing had echoes in journalists' organisations. The South African National Editors Forum was formed in 1996, through a merger of the newspaper-based and predominantly white Conference of Editors, and the cross-media Black Editors Forum. Although the new body included a broader layer of media leadership than the Conference of Editors (which represented only editors-in-chief), Sanef's relatively elitist (editor-level) and nonracial character helped spur the growth of the Forum of Black Journalists (FBJ). Sanef's platform was press freedom and 'corrective action', and the organisation held several meetings with President Mandela and other ministers over these issues. Although Sanef brokered an agreement limiting the use of Section 205 (see above) and the FBJ helped to reduce the media hostility of vigilante group Pagad, both organisations still remained relatively weak during the period. During the five year period, race relations amongst journalists probably worsened – and not only amongst white and black, but also between coloureds, Indians and Africans, and almost sunk Sanef at one point (see Haffeejee 1999, testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission).

The calibre of journalists has implications for the role of the media in democracy and socio-economic transformation. In the period under review, training emerged as a key aspect of empowerment and a key plank in buttressing 'corrective action'. Substantial resources were put into training by groups like Independent Newspapers and the SABC. Impatient with what it saw as the white-oriented intakes in tertiary level media courses, Government set up a school of broadcasting in 1998. Meanwhile, a host of private courses of uneven reputability emerged.

Towards the end of 1997, journalism teachers began to take cognisance of the new challenges facing them, including those required by the South African Qualifications Authority, which called for definitions of standards

in the form of educational outcomes, and for external accreditation of those education providers claiming to achieve these. The 1999 Skills Act, which taxes industry pay-rolls in a bid to promote training, dovetailed with the SAQA in that only the use of accredited education providers qualifies industry to claim rebates. During 1998, journalism teachers formed the Broadcast Educators and Trainers Association (BETA) and the Print Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa (Petasa). The extent to which these new aspects in media training will strengthen or stifle the role of media in transformation was not yet evident by 1999. Certainly, however, the issues were changed from what they had been back in 1994.

Content and Conceptions of Media Role

Changes in ownership and staffing do not in and of themselves imply or determine changes in content or role of media, although they make these possible – and in some cases, necessary. But while ownership and staffing can be established fairly easily, this is less the case with content and role. What follows, therefore, is an admittedly impressionistic account of developments in these areas, and one that could certainly be followed up with more detailed empirical research.

South Africa's new black and/or worker ownership did not automatically change the nature of media businesses that were bought. That black mineworkers are significant co-owners of *Business Day* newspaper does not mean their voices and perspectives hold sway over the paper in terms of content. In fact, this particular publication remains one of the only two dailies with a majority white readership, and its contents are pitched towards the interests of that readership. It is an interesting point to note that whereas for centuries whites have made money out of blacks, a publication like *Business Day* under its new owners now generates money from whites for blacks. To continue to do so, however, requires the publication to hold its up-market audience and advertisers, who in South African conditions have been primarily white. Less up-market media than *Business Day* have less of a constraint in this regard.

That does not mean, however, that the media stands still *vis-à-vis* politics. Even within these economic and racial parameters of audiences and advertisers which affected all media, including the SABC, debates have raged about what role journalists should be playing in relation to the new owners and especially the new political power holders. Thus, between 1994 and 1999 many (white) journalists argued that they should (continue

to) be critical watchdogs or objective professionals (see Morris 1996). Some black journalists – like Thami Mazwai (*Business Day* January 16, 1998) – called for a more constructive, ‘patriotic’ approach towards a government that not only represented the majority of citizens, but which also needed support at this early stage of the fragile process of nation-building and transformation. Foreign-owned Independent Newspapers’ management defined the group as being ‘friendly to the new South Africa’, and its parliamentary editor Zubeida Jaffer proposed an *imbongi* role, combining both praise-singing and criticism, for the media. This repudiation of an oppositional role and dilution of a critical one, it was often alleged in newsrooms, was because the Irishman Tony O’Reilly wanted to protect his investment (Williams 1998:194; *Mail & Guardian* March 5-11, 1999). On the other hand, while some newspapers did seem softer on the government, Independent titles were not uniformly in this category. Indeed, the journalists and coverage that most got up the government’s nose came from the *Sunday Independent* (especially with reports by Newton Kanhema) and the *Independent on Saturday* (with its editor Kaiser Nyatumba).

At SABC, notions of the corporation playing a critical role were subordinated to the roles of nation-building (especially through sport and entertainment), social education and serving as a forum for various parties. But there was an ongoing struggle between old and new guard editorial producers even to get this dispensation in place. The corporation relaunched itself in 1995 by a video that incongruously celebrated the broadcasters’ anti-democratic and racist past. As the new guard entrenched itself, however, various independently minded elements in its ranks came under pressure, and the critical role of the public broadcaster qua institution became not just subordinated to its other roles, but increasingly defunct. Head of TV news Joe Thloloe resigned after being demoted, and Allister Sparks, Sarah Crowe and Max du Preez did not get employment contracts renewed. Radio news editor Franz Kruger was carpeted by strategic planner Sol Mokoetle for a negative report on the ANC’s election prospects. Kruger’s senior, the politically-independent journalist, Barney Mthombi, rebuffed Mokoetle’s intervention, but resigned in April 1999 after he was made subordinate to a new general head of news, Enoch Sithole, who is seen as more ANC-aligned. At the end of the period, SABC, it seemed, was set to play at best an educational and forum role, but certainly not a critical or watchdog one with exceptions like SAFM’s current affairs shows and critical dramas like *Yizo Yizo*. Thus, the changes in the public broadcaster

between 1994 and 1999 did not stop at the point of optimum transformation of the corporation's journalistic role, but to move into terrain which narrowed its potential democratic functions.

Assessment of the SABC's content and role under the 'Mandela state' cannot ignore the corporation's campaign around nation-building. Whereas the corporation had previously stressed the separateness of South Africans, producing ethnic/racial content for ethnic/racial audiences, it now tried to bring people together. It is debatable whether a manufactured nationalism serves to strengthen or weaken democracy of development. Nonetheless, the SABC saw nation-building as part of its mission under the new South Africa. 'SABC presents a new South Africa à la United Colours of Benetton, suspiciously amicable and homogeneous in its picture of perfect diversity' writes Balserio (1997:3). In her view, the 'Simunye' ('we are one') rallying cry of SABC television offered little to fulfill the promise of nation-building in a context when 'the informal economy of violence is the pernicious alternative to being one' (1997:15). Similarly, Saks describes as 'somewhere over the rainbow' the way the SABC's ideology tried to blend local and global programming into nation-building constructs (1997). In the context of media promoting sport as a nation-building subject, such as in regard to coverage of the 1996 Rugby World Cup, Steenveld and Strelitz (1998) have highlighted the contradictions within and without the endeavour. Roome (1997) conducted focus group research in a commendable attempt to look at audience relations with SABC content, and noted that mainly older white English-language speakers were opposed to the Simunye ideology, while other groups found it vague. There were significant differences amongst the latter in, for example, the way they read humour in Simunye-style sitcoms, relating to their racial, gender and urban/rural backgrounds. It would seem likely then that there were limits to the impact that the broadcaster's nation-building role would have had on society during the period under review, but further analysis would be required to see to what extent it played a part in focussing people on their common interests within a single democratic polity and transformed economy, notwithstanding their continuing cultural, language and class differences.

Broadcast did lead the way in making content more accessible to mass audiences – in this way enhancing the potential for media to facilitate grassroots awareness of political choices in the 1995 and 1999 elections, even if not quite for their ongoing participation in politics. The SABC's radio stations took on more indigenous language names, and editorial

resources were spread more equally across them (previously, Afrikaans and English received the lion's share). Early attempts to orientate the broadcaster towards carrying substantially more broadcasting in indigenous languages proved impossible due to the loss of advertising support for these fragmented and generally low-income audiences. Teetering on bankruptcy, the corporation had to call in the McKinsey consultancy company, retrench 700 staffers and cut back on this costly multi-lingual side of its public service role. Still, SATV in 1999 as compared to 1994, had upgraded at least some of the time devoted to African languages (at the expense of Afrikaans), although English (especially American English) was also substantially increased. The way in which this amount of English and the context of its use impacted on democratisation and an informed citizenry needs further research.

The SABC's increasing commercialisation could not but affect its editorial budgets, and concerns were expressed over its limited budget to cover the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and, later, its ability to cover the 1999 elections adequately. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that by the end of the period being studied, the broadcaster was carrying more, and longer, news and current affairs programming than ever before. It has also launched two satellite channels beaming across the continent, one being a 24 hours news channel. While opposition political parties complained about ANC-bias by the SABC, this was generally unsubstantiated. The licensing of the free-to-air commercial television channel, e.tv, provided – at least in theory – a check and balance on the SABC – the two institutions arguably needing to keep their credibility as politically fair forces in the face of competition from each other.

Community radio in theory was a powerful democratic institution. But its efficacy was limited by its lack of skill in journalism. Music and talk shows were the staple on most stations, and news that was carried tended to come from a company based in Johannesburg and disseminating Gauteng-oriented, rather than local, community, information.

Changes occurred in the content in the pages of print journalism. The most visible turning point was reflected in the large colour photographs published just ahead of the 1994 elections of dead white vigilantes, slouched against their Mercedes Benz, after being shot for their attempt to prop up Bophuthatswana's Lucas Mangope. Henceforth, the picture seemed to signal, whites had had their day, and the active newsmakers were black South Africans. Willy nilly, news and photographs of black people began

increasingly to take pride of place in most of the formerly white print media.

White readers may not have liked this, but the representations reflected changing power realities that they could not wholly ignore. The same readers who probably preferred to forget the apartheid past would also not have welcomed the surprising high volume of print and broadcast coverage, starting in 1996, that was given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Reassuring, however, would have been the way that parliament and political reporting frequently fell into the facile stereotype of 'the fat cats on the gravy train', or the 'Bisho bungles' variety.

It was these kinds of unevennesses that, inter alia, promoted accusations from black journalists like Jon Qwelane and Thami Mazwai, that there was still white racism in the media (*Saturday Star* August 30, 1998; *Business Day* January 21, 1999). The same accusations were made by black lawyers, and culminated in the Human Rights Commission in 1999 launching an enquiry into the subject.

News about economic policy saw the uncritical welcoming of the government's GEAR policy and there was also little analysis of Pretoria's effective burial of its previous RDP thrust. There were increasing reports of black advancement in industry, and of black economic empowerment, reflecting – and possibly amplifying – these changes in the wider society. The primary focus, however, was an unsympathetic treatment of the state's problems with 'delivery' – what Thabo Mbeki correctly describes as 'a message of disempowerment of the people, predicated on the notion of a deliverer and a recipient' (Mbeki 1998:156). Crime reporting, understandably, occupied much space, generally reflecting negatively on the failure of the new state to enforce law and order. Much of the crime content reflected crimes committed against middle class property owners, primarily white, rather than white-collar crime or crimes against working class black people. Vigilante group Pagad was crudely stereotyped as an organisation explained by the religion of its leadership. Publicity around bringing back the death penalty (abolished in 1994) probably received disproportionate coverage to the news value of the stories. One crime issue that did assume greater coverage than previously, however, was that of rape and child-abuse, and to this extent the media played a positive role in raising awareness. Much crime, however, was reported through a xenophobic lens, which contradicted South Africa's status as a positively transforming society.

Media coverage of South Africa's foreign policy was somewhat better. The ineffectual Foreign Affairs ministry was routinely criticised, and the military adventure that provoked the razing of Maseru was subjected to strong questioning. According to De Beer and Steyn (1997), and De Beer et al (1995), there has not been much change in the kind of international news appearing in South African papers during the transition period.

The departure from the government of national unity by the National Party in June 1996 passed with little assessment, but the formation of the United Democratic Movement the following year won disproportionate acclaim. The Afrikaans press dropped its support for the National Party, with *Beeld* moving towards being more sympathetic to the government as was the case with papers like *The Star* and the *Cape Times*. Political violence in KwaZulu-Natal received publicity, but little in the way of analysis or investigation. Investigative journalism was rather limited, as compared to the pre-1994 period, with only the *Mail & Guardian* and the African Eye Newsagency continuously exposing corruption.

When all is told, however, it is not clear that the 'Mandela state' saw any real paradigm shift in South African journalism, some efforts by Sanef notwithstanding (see *Rhodes Journalism Review* 15:15). Journalism – with some exceptions – continued to be event-oriented, elite-oriented, middle-aged and male-oriented and to emulate Western idiom, even if black newsmakers were featured in increasing numbers. News values were slow to change.

In effect, then, the proliferation of media in the period under review did produce new faces and voices in the media. The media began to reflect the shift in political power from white to black elite. Some of the media played the role of a forum within a public sphere, thereby contributing to South African democracy. Other media also performed a watchdog function deriving from the professional ideology of its practitioners, a minority like *Die Burger* and the *Citizen* acting as a guard-dog of white interests. It is a complex issue but it does seem that South African audiences were receiving much more, and much more diverse, content from their media in 1994-99. Much of this was of direct relevance to the deepening of democratic identities, even if less perhaps to development.

Audiences

If content and perceptions of roles were a complex mix in the media during the period, audiences also proved to be extremely complex. How audiences

are constituted, how they consume media and what they make of this is clearly of critical bearing for the effective role of media. Unfortunately, while figures exist on the sizes of (some) audiences, very little research has been done on how they decode, negotiate, and make use of the contents of media.

The general trend was a steady decline in mainstream audiences in print, and a fragmentation of audiences in broadcast. A study published in 1999 claimed that 65 per cent of South African adults listened to the radio, 54 per cent watched television, and just over a quarter read newspapers. Media reach remained small, and indeed shrinking, in newspaper circulations between 1994 and 1999. The period ended with still six of every ten African South Africans saying they seldom or never read newspapers. Figures for readership were down across other racial groups. Given the greater independence of newspapers, plus their historical role as agenda-setters, it seems a negative development for democracy that fewer people in 1999 were reading newspapers than in 1994. Former *Sunday Times* editor Ken Owen attributed the decline in print circulation (claiming nearly two million previous readers had been lost) to the profit-orientation of media companies which he claimed failed to invest in quality journalism (1998: 182-3). He has a point, but what is also likely is that many people felt either little need, or little influence in engaging politically. The decline in consumption of serious media, as opposed to entertainment, reflected a wider socio-political apathy. Certain surveys ahead of the 1999 elections showed very low levels of political knowledge (Zwane 1999). If political demobilisation was a major accompaniment to transformation during the 'Mandela state', the media could do little to reverse this. One survey showed that only a third of South Africans felt well informed, but significantly there was a savvy scepticism with only 42 per cent trusting the media to 'tell them honestly about changes in South Africa'. There was also a finding that 82 per cent believed the media should report without fear of government intervention, suggesting a popular value placed on democratic roles of media (Ntabazalila 1999).

During the five years, media penetration into broadcast sectors expanded, even if the total broadcast audience was not much expanded. M-Net launched a Digital Satellite Network, with a large bouquet – including many international channels as well as a local one covering parliament as a running story. Significant was the rocketing success of YFM, the youth-oriented music station in Gauteng, which reached almost a million listeners

just ten months after having launched in 1997 (Strelitz 1999). Older people may have used other broadcasters and print media as a political and/or developmental resource, but YFM demonstrated a huge constituency of young black people seeking their own identity that was often anti both the old and the new establishments.

Audience transformation remains a fluid area, although indications are that media consumption remained racially divided and much media (especially broadcasting) continued to cater primarily to one or other racial or language group at the end of the 'Mandela state'.

Conclusion

A number of left-wing commentators have taken a dismissive view of media transformation since 1994. Sandile Memele (1999) declares that 'the more things change, the more they stay the same.' In his view, transformation is simply a device by the bourgeoisie to ensure the continuation of a system that exploits. Tomaselli (1997:16) declares that racial substitution in the media will not 'automatically provide increased popular access or diversity of opinion in the media'. Instead, continuation of a class-based, if 'more inclusive' society is the real situation (1997:51). He further argues that black owners may facilitate the 'Africanisation of values', but financial survival is determined by readers and advertisers (1997:60). Unfortunately he does not expand on what he means by the 'Africanisation of values' and how this process could be assessed empirically. But he also shows himself to be somewhat rigid in dividing off 'Africanisation of values' from the matter of readers and advertisers. A more dialectical approach would examine the full picture of variables. Of course, black owners on their own will not change the economics of readers and advertisers. A more dialectical approach would examine the full picture of variables. It is true that black owners (and even staffers) do not on their own change the economics of readers and advertisers. But black owners did not emerge in isolation of broader social trends, and the key question is to what extent the same trends also began to generate new readers and new advertisers aligned to 'Africanised' content.

Memele and Tomaselli also concentrate on class in a rather rigid way. Transformation of general social relations in class is clearly a short-term prospect in South Africa; yet as discussed above, the kind of new owners taking shape in media are by no means restricted to corporate capitalists or individual shareholders, and even here there are significant differences

between pyramid-style ownership as in NAIL and mass individual ownership as in M-Net's Phutuma. It may take time for such varied ownership forms to impact on the role of media, if at all, and it may well be that non-capitalist ownership will not essentially change the profit-orientation of media and the markets within which it operates. But these forms are still significant changes in the media, and their potential should be assessed rather than rejected as nothing more than racial substitution or class continuity.

What Memele and Tomaselli do raise, implicitly, is the question of continuity and discontinuity – a theme that is visited in the outline of the four perspectives at the start of this paper. In essence, they argue, continuity of class domination remains primary, irrespective of discontinuities in race domination. So, *media has changed in race, not in class*. As indicated, this misses important class changes, but more than this, it indicates an absolutist brand of politics underpinning this methodology. While Tomaselli's analysis is far more sophisticated than the kind outlined in the four perspectives, it remains in the end as politically-driven as they do. This is not to suggest an apolitical analysis (especially of media) is possible – but rather that it ought not to become a methodological straitjacket that directs one's focus towards generalisations that miss significant specifics. History cannot be reduced to simplistic claims of continuity or discontinuity.

There has been mammoth change in South African media in the first five years of the country's democracy; in legal context, ownership and staffing, in race, and even gender and class. There have been changes in audiences and in the quantity and quality of media. Some of these changes accorded with transformation, some contributed to transformation, some ran counter to transformation and many counted directly as transformation. All of these changes need to be tracked through far more empirical work than has been possible in this article. That there is still a way to go in expanding the role of South African media in democratisation and socio-economic transformation is not disputed. But the media landscape after five years is almost unrecognisable when compared to that existing beforehand. Its transformation may be less than what was wrought in politics and political institutions, its contributions to transformation in these and other spheres may be uneven and contradictory. Yet, transformation there has been. This is just as well given the new kinds of challenges on the doorstep of the next century. Amongst others, there is the growing global cross-ownership of media and telecoms, entertainment or computer software companies, outsourcing and multi-skilling of media workers, internationalisation of

supply and market-chains, technological convergence and the internet, satellites and broadband networks; and the decline of classical journalism in the face of rising entertainment. Media has emerged from the 'Mandela state' significantly transformed from what it was before and is now powerfully positioned, at least in potential, to be part of further democratic and socio-economic transformation under the 'Mbeki state'.

Notes

1. Thanks to Lynette Steenveld, Chris Vick and Hugh Lewin for helpful comments on drafts of this article. It should be noted that much of what is argued here is tentative, and is based on personal involvement in media issues over the period. But if this article serves to stimulate debate as well as further research, it will have served its purpose well.
2. The two approaches have actually been combined at times, such as when Nelson Mandela has urged the media to transform 'to become part of the new South Africa in both word and deed' and simultaneously to act as 'a watchdog to make sure that our famous revolutionaries remain on course' (*Cape Times* November 20, 1996). However, if boiled down to basic premises, it does appear that the two approaches are not quite as compatible as Mandela would have.
3. It may be acknowledged, however, that publications like Mafube's *Enterprise* on the one hand and *Independent's Personal Finance* and *Business Report* supplements on the other did arguably raise the economic literacy of many readers. By drawing together *Independent's* economic coverage around the country, it created a national insert for all *Independent's* morning newspapers and thereby gave far more informational value to purchasers of these individual titles than previously.
4. Primedia in April 1999 bought a controlling share in football club Kaizer Chiefs, emulating the practice of other media companies abroad. Union Alliance Media, owned by various trade unions, spread its portfolio across a wide range of holdings. NAIL held investments in finance and new technology.
5. This issue is important if one regards the spread of Internet access as important for the deepening of democracy and development. Telkom's argument is that the (time-restricted) monopoly it has on landline voice telephony should include internet service provision. The logic seems to be that, as with telephony, if the part-foreign owned corporation is opened to competition, it will not be able to generate sufficient profit to cross-subsidise the roll-out of infrastructure for the bottom end of the market. It is the case that private internet service providers would wire up elite suburbs and not neglected townships, while Telkom has a mandate to service both. At the same time, it is clear that Satra licences can require private providers to deliver some social investment, at the same time as ensuring that Telkom does face some competition.

6. Impressionistically, one can note that data on staff demographics exists for many media companies, but is not especially meaningful given the divergent categories used to classify staff positions. More relevant is that most of these companies now have formal affirmative action policies concerning hiring and promotions, agreed with trade unions in the workplace, but there is little in the way of evaluative mechanisms.

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