

**THE MARKET PARADIGM AND THE LOSS OF PUBLIC SERVICE
BROADCASTING (TELEVISION) FOR DEVELOPMENT AND
NATION BUILDING**

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ABSTRACT

Can public service broadcasting (PSB) under the pressure of the market approach be saved for development and nation building purposes? Within the context of the ongoing local and international debate about the future of PSB and how to justify it, this article seeks answers to the above question by first of all describing what the market paradigm or approach to the regulation and management of broadcasting entails. Thereafter the approach's impact on PSB is briefly discussed, followed by an analysis of the impact of the market approach on broadcasting in South Africa. The article concludes by arguing that the dilemma of PSB lies in the inherent paradoxes that arise in the process of trying to merge the cultural and market paradigms in/to broadcasting.

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INTRODUCTION

In the process of modernisation, globalisation and technilisation many developing countries are in the process of adopting the so-called market paradigm or approach to the regulation and funding of broadcasting. Despite this approach's potential economic benefits and benefits related to increased consumer choice, the market approach has almost worldwide led to the decline of public service broadcasting (PSB) and its values. The question posed in this article is whether a country such as South Africa can afford it to lose PSB with its potential for development and nation building. Furthermore, if PSB is to be saved, the question is how?

In the following parts the nature of the market approach, its impact on PSB and its impact on South African broadcasting are discussed.

A few notes on methodology: The discussion and arguments in the following parts are mainly based on a literature study of the international academic discourse on the decline of PSB, the need why it should be protected, and the urgency of finding a new policy model. In terms of theory, this discourse (and this article) is rooted in the ongoing debate about the revision/adaptation of the "classic" normative press (media) theories (cf. Siebert et al 1956). Such a revision/adaptation is necessary in order to accommodate the changed nature of the media's social responsibility in postmodern society and the media's changed nature as a public sphere. (Cf. e.g. Brants, Hermes & Van Zoonen 1998; Fourie 2002.) The question is: What is the role (if any) of PSB in postmodern society and the changed media environment? The article should thus be read within the context of the ongoing debate about the media's social responsibility (which, for the reason of space is not repeated here), and the academic discourse about the almost world-wide decline of PSB.

The article is furthermore based on an observation of broad developments and trends in the South African broadcasting sector (up until July 2004). Observations, criticism, assumptions and judgments are obviously open for empirical investigation. Given the factor analyses, in this case the (broad) impact of the market approach on PSB and other crucial factors which may evenly impact of the functioning of a broadcasting system, may in the process, be neglected and overlooked.

It should be noted that the article is not about development communication (theory and research) and the role of broadcasting in development as such. Suffice it to say that numerous empirical studies confirm broadcasting's role in and potential towards development. PSB, in its original conceptualisation, and in the present struggle to protect its future, was and is seen as a kind of "social cement" in society and as being indispensable for democracy. Its original principles and values (cf. e.g. Scannell 1990) foster the provision of an impartial space for free expression and open debate, programming for all interests and tastes (plurality and diversity), programming for minorities, concern for national identity and community, competition in good programming rather than for audience numbers, the liberation rather than the restriction of programme makers, universal accessibility, and addressing audiences as citizens, not as consumers. The value of these principles for the development of society and its peoples is self-evident.

Neither is the article about the topic of “nation building” and related concepts such as “nation”, “nationhood”, “nation state”, and the complex process of nation building in South Africa. See in this regard, amongst others, Simpson (1994) and Baines (1998). Again, in terms of the original principles of PSB as paraphrased above, the potential role of PSB in nation building is self-evident.

Finally, with “developing countries” the frame of reference is the countries of the southern African region, or the so-called Southern African Development Community (SADC). In their Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport (cf. Southern African Development Community 2004) as well as in the Windhoek Declaration (cf. Declaration of Windhoek 2004), these countries have committed themselves, amongst others, to the creation of a political and economic environment conducive to the growth of pluralistic media, and the promotion, establishment and growth of independent media. By so-doing they have adopted (in varying degrees) the market approach to broadcasting.

Unless otherwise indicated, the arguments mainly concern *public service television*.

THE MARKET APPROACH

Public service broadcasting in its ideal form started to decline under the pressure of globalisation, neo-liberalism and new economics that brought about far-reaching cultural, political, economic and social transformations (Cf. Fourie 2001: 592-622).

In broadcasting this transformation led the United Kingdom and major European countries to adopt the USA's commercial broadcasting system or variations thereof. The previous clear distinction between three main types of national broadcasting systems, namely a core public service system, a core private system, or a core state system (Raboy 2003:45) started to merge into a single system made up of a mix of public, private and other types of broadcasters in which public service broadcasting may still play a significant, but no longer dominant role.

Apart from globalisation, its politics, ideology and economics, the change in broadcasting philosophy was also brought about and accelerated by technological developments that brought about digitisation, convergence of media technologies, and the provision of new delivery platforms (cf. e.g. Chalaby & Segell 1999). This led, amongst others, to deregulation with, as a result, increased consumer choice, increased competition in local and global markets, the rise of niche markets, an increased battle for advertising revenue, and an increased battle to find new ways of funding. All this constitute the present market approach to broadcasting. (For an overview of paradigms in media policy and media policy research, see Van Cuilenburg and McQuail 2003).

As far as regulation and funding are concerned, the market approach is based on the belief that the market is the only “democratic” regulatory mechanism (Cf. e.g. McChesney 1997:3). The main argument in the new paradigm is that regulation should favour the contributions of technology to the creation of a vibrant economy and to the convenience of consumers. Freedom of expression is interpreted to mean, first of all, diversity. Governments are increasingly seen not to intervene, but to rely on the

industry's self imposed controls and perceptions of social responsibility. Stein and Sinha (2002: 419), for example, argue that in market-based regulation the role of the government is limited to establishing a legal framework that facilitates commerce, provides industries with incentives to regulate themselves, and maintains marketplace competition and consumer choice. The primary goal is economic efficiency. The ability of economic efficiency to maximise wealth is equated with the overall public interest and beneficial social outcomes. The legitimacy of the market approach rests on the assumption that consumers can choose at any time to exit a relationship.

Critics of the market approach argue that allowing business to determine social purposes results in the erosion of public service values traditionally maintained by governments. By defining economic efficiency as the end goal of a communication system, market regimes reduce information and communication to mere commodities, and fail to recognise the social and cultural roles of communication and information in political, social and cultural life. It takes the right to be informed, the right to quality and freedom of expression out of the domain of public, political and social processes and into that of private organisations where these rights will not necessarily find protection and valuation.

As far as content is concerned, traditional PSB was seen to offer *citizens* (compared to *consumers* in the market approach) with quality programming that would

- provide them with information that will allow them to participate fully in their societies;
- foster their development, curiosity and education;
- tap the best of a nation's cultural resources in literature, art, drama, music, science, history; and
- express national and regional cultural identity (Cf. Blumler 1993).

Under the market approach this emphasis has moved to the satisfaction of commercial interests and thus to the maximisation of audience figures. This has led to increased commercialisation, popularisation, repetition, less depth and less diversity in programming, despite the rise of so-called niche channels.

In short, as Tracey (1998) argues, the market approach and the resultant new media environment it has created, has brought with it a new ideology characterised by an ethos in which managerial values, financial gain, process, efficiency and recipes, instead of creativity, public service and social good, rules. The idea of public broadcasting to sustain the general good and well-being of society has become secondary. The body politic is no longer seen (also by itself) as necessary to make strategic interventions and decisions to safeguard an institution that can provide a range of depth and quality as a bulwark against the immanent inadequacies of finance and capital. Most of all, and despite the diversity and pluralism the market approach may have created, it has and is undermining the very idea of broadcasting as a democratic public sphere (see point 3). As Van Cuilenburg and McQuail (2003:13) show, the market approach is not just about money. It is about a system of beliefs and values that continually activate a media culture in which mass communication is primarily a business.

However, despite the rise and dominance of the market approach, the ideal of PSB free from political and market pressures is not yet dead. It continues to designate a strong value of social worth - "the last best hope for socially purposeful media acting in the public interest" (Raboy 2003: 46). Despite globalisation and the so-called decline of the nation state, individual countries and regions still see the need to defend PSB as a reflection of own culture, cultural needs and language. Finding ways to protect it, to safeguard it from the World Trade Organisation's claws (cf. Pauwels and Loisen 2003), and to revive it, are at the order of the day. In the European Union, for example, the continued belief in the value of PSB is underscored by the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty (cf. Council of the European Union 1997). Although far from solving the dilemma of PSB, this declaration can be seen as a step towards the need to safeguard public broadcasting institutions as essential to the health of the media in a democratic society. Another example in this direction and to the benefit of developing countries and the role of PSB in development, is Unesco's Action Plan for Cultural Policies for Development (cf. Unesco 1998). In this Plan the importance of PSB is emphasised.

However, the question remains as to how to secure PSB as an important democratic force. Finding answers are not easy.

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING, THE MARKET APPROACH AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

In academic research it is usually argued that finding a solution should start with a re-interpretation and re-appreciation of the principles and values of PSB. These principles and values were defined in an era of general interest media long before the present era of convergence and deregulation. They remain essential for the future of PSB, but need to be revisited and reinterpreted in the new media landscape characterised by, amongst others, media and audience fragmentation (Cf. Price & Raboy 2001).

The original principles sought to ensure and guide a public broadcaster that would be (i) free from political and commercial pressure and interest (principles related to independence and autonomy), (ii) representative of and accessible to all citizens of a country, and (iii) provide quality programming that would reflect national culture and identity, open debate and creativity.

To re-interpret and adapt these principles presuppose a new understanding of the role of a highly commercialised media in a changed public sphere.

Two main models (cf. Thomass 2003:29-41) prevail as to what the concept of the "public sphere" in a democracy entails: the *liberal-representative model* (with its origin in the work of authors such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill in the 17th through the 19th centuries) and the present *deliberative model* as elaborated on by authors such as Habermas and J.B. Thompson. Insofar the role of the media in a democracy is concerned, the main focus in the first model is on the independence of the media (and thus of PSB), representativeness, access, and regulation towards the securement of the afore-mentioned. The function of (media) content is primarily seen to deliver information (programming) that would contribute to the formation of an informed public opinion. Within the public sphere the media constitutes a system of observation and exposure of anything that poses a danger to the existence of democracy.

Apart from addressing independence, representativeness and access, the *deliberative model* also emphasises the *quality* of the public sphere, consensus and transparency. More attention is given to content by posing questions such as “What is the nature of communication in today's public sphere?”, and, “What is the character of the debate in today's public sphere?”. Within the context of today's so-called knowledge society, the media is seen not just to provide information but also *knowledge*, which is information connected with experience and the capacity for social action. The quality of information and its potential and ability to empower citizens towards meaningful and concrete social, cultural and economic involvement is thus at stake.

As far as the present state of market-driven PSB is concerned, the question is: What is the quality of the information and knowledge carried by PSB that *distinguishes* it from other media in its tasks to mediate, provide orientation, and to structure and contextualise information, entertainment and education towards social action?

In answering this question (or variations thereof) a rather gloomy picture unfolds. Author after author tends to question the value of PSB under the pressure of marketisation. Despite technological advances (including increased access), not only PSB's political independence but increasingly its commercial independence to achieve the journalistic ideals of political debate (cf. McNair & Hibberd 2003: 272-283), namely representation, exposure, and the mobilisation of citizens to participate meaningful in society, are questioned.

As far as culture, entertainment and education are concerned, it is acknowledged that the supply of popular and popularised knowledge via a variety of popular programmes is an important constituting and formative element of the public sphere (cf. Fourie 2001: 277-288; Thomass 2003:33;) However, it is questioned whether PSB can achieve this when it has to sacrifice its distinctiveness under the pressure of competition with as a result prime-time dictates, structured program formats and genres, little room for documentaries, and little room for creativity and originality.

To summarise: Whereas the liberal-representative public sphere model mainly warns against totalitarianism and the political misuse of the media, the deliberative model warns that despite its potential and claims towards pluralism and diversity, market pressure poses a similar threat to the independence of the media (and PSB) and its role in a democracy. (Cf. e.g. Fourie 1992: 19-29 for a further exposition of this argument.)

If PSB is to continue to play a role in democracy, it should provide a space where the public can express ideas freely and in which information, opinions, criticisms, entertainment and education can be circulated independent of commercial pressures or political influence. To achieve this, the guiding principle towards establishing an independent and democratic public service broadcaster should be the establishment of “pluralism” - but then, pluralism that is neither part of the state nor wholly dependent on the processes of the market. This can only be established through the principle of *regulated pluralism* (cf. Thompson 1995) in which editorial and programme independence, institutional autonomy and accountability is entrenched. Furthermore, the goal should be to make the relationship between public broadcasting, government,

the market and civil society as transparent as possible and to discourage any attempt at interference. Only if PSB is able to do this, can it reclaim its justification as an important instrument for social cohesion and integration and justify its role in democracy and within the broader media framework.

Increasingly the solution seems to be in finding a new policy model for PSB that would ensure its independence, accountability, funding, regulation, access, and, most of all, *distinctiveness*. The following section seeks to investigate the impact of the market approach on PSB in South Africa.

THE IMPACT OF THE MARKET APPROACH ON PSB IN SOUTH AFRICA

For decades South Africa had a system of mixed state-public-private-broadcasting. During this time the public broadcaster was misused for disseminating first the ideology of British colonialism followed by the ideology of apartheid and thus separate development based on racism and a disregard for human rights. The legacy of apartheid left the new ANC government, since it took control of the country in 1994, with severe development and nation building challenges. Various development and nation building programmes are in place, with different levels of success and in different stages of implementation (cf. South Africa 2002(d): 45-59).

Nevertheless, and needless to say, in a country where 20 to 28 million of its 44 million citizens still live in poverty, 39% do not have a stable source of food, 25% earn less than R100 a month, one in nine is HIV infected, between 35 and 40% are unemployed, and around 60 murders are committed per day (cf. Bonthuys 2004; South Africa 2002 (c): Department of Social Development), the media and especially broadcasting are expected to play a key role in development and nation building.

Understandable, new broadcasting legislation is then also geared towards the empowerment of the broadcasting sector (especially the public service sector) to play such a role. Yet, in the early 1990s South Africa began to adopt the market approach to broadcasting, leaving the country with a disempowered public service broadcaster, as will be argued below. (For an overview of the history of South African broadcasting, broadcasting policy and the transformation of South African broadcasting, see Wigston (2001:3-100); Fourie and Wigston (2002); Fourie (2003) and the Triple Inquiry into the Protection and Viability of Public Service Broadcasting Services in South Africa (Independent Broadcasting Authority 1996).)

The main goals with new broadcasting legislation (cf. Icasa 2004; South Africa 2004) are twofold:

First of all, broadcasting is seen to empower the public broadcaster to play a role in development and nation building. This is outlined in various mission and vision statements and supported, amongst others, by a local content policy (cf. Icasa 2004) which is based on the premise that the more South African broadcasting is defined by programmes about *other cultures* and from the creative output of *others*, the less the "South African way of life", values and contexts are reflected.

A second main goal is to liberalise the broadcasting sector in line with international market trends and convergence technology, and by so-doing, allow broadcasting to contribute significantly to the national economy.

The problem is that these two policy goals inherently contradict each other. The effects of this contradiction, amongst others, increased competition, public discontent, and threats to the autonomy of the public broadcaster, are now being felt.

Increased competition

Liberalisation and deregulation, which started with the selling of six of the SABC's radio stations and the adoption of more liberalised ownership regulations (cf. Icasa 2004) set the SABC on the road of competition with the private sector to the detriment of fulfilling its public service mandate. To this must be added that the SABC's state funding decreased and it had to become more self-funded and self-reliant. In 2002/2003 the SABC was 87 % self-funded, deriving most of its operating revenue from advertisements (62,5%) and sponsorships (12,75%), with the rest made up out of government funding (2,6%), licence fees (14,7%) and other sources (7,2%).

Although still dominating the broadcasting sector with its fourteen public, four "public commercial" radio stations (reaching an average audience of 20, 8 million people) and three national full-spectrum free-to-air television channels (reaching an estimated daily audience of 17 million people), the SABC has lost its absolute monopoly of more than four decades.

It now has to compete with fourteen private radio stations, fifty community radio stations, one free-to-air private national terrestrial television channel, *e-tv*, and the subscription satellite service *MultiChoice*. On the DStv platform *MultiChoice* offers more than fifty television and forty-eight music channels (cf. South Africa 2002(d):136). This includes the SABC channels, 13 *M-Net* entertainment and sports channels, a parliamentary channel, *e.tv*, *BBC World*, *Sky News*, *CNN*, *BVN*, *BBC Prime*, the Afrikaans channel *kykNET*, niche channels such, *BBC Food*, *Discovery*, the *History Channel*, the French *TV5*, additional pay packages to cater for the German, Portuguese and Indian communities, and interactive data channels, including the 24 hour South African digital on-line news channel, *news.24.com*.

In typical competitive (market paradigm) style, the SABC adopted strategies (cf. Fourie 2003) such as market-oriented programming in which the focus is on prime-time programming and popular programme formats, day-time repetitions, the exploration of supplementary sources of revenue such as sponsorships, the provision of services that go beyond traditional broadcasting such as on-line activities, and branding campaigns to position itself in an increasing competitive market.

As far as organisational restructuring is concerned, the Corporation relaunched its channels with new logos, new slogans, new presenters, new sets, etcetera. As for staff, the broadcaster embarked on the road of affirmative action and black empowerment, affecting all levels of governance, management and employment. In terms of the Broadcasting Amendment Act (cf. South Africa 2002(a)) the SABC is in the process of dividing into two sections: a public service section and a public commercial section,

with the latter expected to fund the former. It is thus in the process of being converted from a statutory corporation to a public company (SABC Ltd), with the Minister of Communications as shareholder. Whether this strategy will allow the SABC to fulfill its public mandate more successfully, remains to be seen.

Media analysts and critics (cf. e.g. Duncan [Sa]; Matlou, 2004) argue that the splitting of the SABC into two divisions runs the risk of creating, amongst others, an “unworkable” and more costly organisational structure as SABC departments cannot neatly be separated into two distinctive divisions each with its own management team and financial reporting system.

Popular programming and content

In terms of content, the following: Since 1990 South Africa is going through a rigorous process of political and social transformation that affects the life of each citizen and the organisation and culture of each South African institution. There are many uncertainties and anxieties amongst those who have lost their power and positions as white citizens. At the same time, discontent amongst the black population is growing as their expectations are not met and the gap between rich and poor and between a new black elite and those who have not gained much since South Africa became a democracy, grows. For the public broadcaster the main challenge should be to tell these people's stories, to bring them together through programming that has as its objective to create an understanding of each other's cultures, histories and ideals, and to contextualise the country's problems, achievements and possibilities.

Yet, this has and is happening only in a limited and fragmented way. Adopting the market approach has, as elsewhere, brought about a decline in more serious programming such as documentaries, drama, investigative, in depth discussion, educational and current affairs programmes. (Cf. South African Broadcasting Corporation 2003 for a breakdown of programme scheduling between genres, including news and current affairs programmes.)

It can be argued that apart from the SABC's “social responsibility announcements” (cf. South African Broadcasting Corporation 2003: 110-113) and the broadcasting of national events, little has materialised of programming that can be seen as contributing to the ideal of nation building and development. Claims that locally produced soap-operas and dramatic series (with their mixed-race casts, plots, and *mise-en-scene*) contribute to such story-telling and thus to a better understanding (nation building) amongst South-Africa's different races, ethnic groups and cultures, may be true, but are open for empirical investigation. In terms of reception theory, counter-arguments can be raised that these programmes may also contribute to a further alienation between people and that they portray images that are far removed from the reality as experienced by the majority of South Africans.

In short, in terms of content, new policy and competitive strategies caused the SABC to lose its *distinctiveness* as a public broadcaster. The SABC offers little, if anything, that can not be offered by the private sector.

This argument was reaffirmed in 2002/2003 when Icasa conducted public hearings about a further relaxation of ownership regulation. The private sector was almost unanimous in its view that (i) the SABC should be empowered (through funding other than advertising) to become a pure public service broadcaster, (ii) the ownership regulations at the time of the hearings were out of step with the demands of sustainable economic transformation, (iii) the regulations inhibit the economic stability and growth of present and future private media owners, and (iv) the SABC's commercial broadcasting services should be privatised (Cf. Mabuza 2003(a)). Worded by Stan Katz, head of African Media Entertainment's broadcasting division: "If [South Africa] wants a thriving, globally competitive broadcasting industry, we cannot have the SABC raking in 62% of the total advertising revenue in radio and TV" (Cf. Classen 2003).

To defend itself, the SABC argued that it received limited public funding to fulfil its public service mandate; that it was therefore largely reliant on advertising and sponsorships; that the Broadcasting Act and Amendment Act allowed it to run public commercial services in order to subsidise its public services, and, that many public broadcasters around the world were now reliant on multiple sources of funding (Cf. Mabuza 2003(b)). Most of all, the SABC uses the market failure argument to justify its existence and privileges. In short, the market failure argument boils down to the claim that if not regulated and legally entrenched the provision of public service can not be left to the market whose main objective is capital gain and not the provision of public service. Yet, being almost completely reliant on advertising income places the SABC almost completely on par with the private sector which also offers public service programming similar to that of the SABC, and thus diminishes the SABC's market failure argument.

Although the new ownership regulations announced early in 2004 focuses mainly on the increase of private radio and foreign investment (raised from 20 to 35%), the table is set for further competition.

Public discontent

A general discontent can be observed amongst NGOs, the private industry, politicians and academics that little has materialised of the vision for public service broadcasting as formulated during the years of the struggle against apartheid by the Jabulani Group, the Campaign for Open Media, the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, and so on and as worded in numerous policy documents such as the Green and White Papers on Broadcasting.

As has happened elsewhere under the market approach, "public service broadcasting" and policy related to it is increasingly seen to be nothing more than political rhetoric. Despite the fact that South African broadcasting policy is often seen by its neighbouring developing countries as "state of the art" policy (cf. Banda 2003), it can be argued, as was the case in Canada, that "the gap between policy and practice is such that the promise of public broadcasting has more often than not been a pious wish" (cf. Canada 2001).

At a conference in late 2000, organised by the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), and entitled "Taking Stock of the SABC", a wide spectrum of civic organisations and trade unions were unanimous in their condemnation of the SABC as public broadcaster for its failure to carry out its democratic mandate. At this conference the prominent media analyst and critic, John van Zyl (2002:3), commented that "the most powerful and technologically advanced public broadcaster in Africa was condemned by the very constituency that brought it into being".

As far as the language issue is concerned, African and Afrikaans language groups frequently gather to accuse the SABC that it has and is doing too little to promote their languages and cultures (Cf.e.g. Mathebula 2004:15; Tleane 2003: 11).

Two of the three SABC television channels cater for the language needs and preferences of ten of the countries official language groups (English aside), leaving each with a minimum number of minutes, if any, per day. In the case of, for example, Afrikaans speaking audiences, those who can afford private subscription and satellite television, can switch to a channel such as *kykNET* on the *DStv* platform to continue viewing Afrikaans programmes after they have watched 90 minutes of daily Afrikaans programming on SABC 2. By so-doing they may miss programming (the remainder of SABC2 and SABC1 programming) in African languages, even though they may have English subtitles. The opportunity of addressing a national audience with programming of national interest is thus lost. The same applies to African and English language audiences who may switch between channels to view their favourite soaps, series, etcetera, instead of programming of a national interest. It can thus be argued that the language issue has fragmented audiences more than ever and that liberalisation and commercialisation, have not contributed to a solution.

To address the language issue, the Broadcasting Amendment Act (2002) provides for the creation of two regional television services: a Northern service covering the provinces of North-West, Limpopo, Gauteng and the Free State in primarily the official languages of Setswana, Sesotho, Sepedi, Xitsonga, and Tshivenda, and a Southern service covering the provinces of Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and broadcasting in the official languages isiXhosa, isiZulu, isiNdebele, Afrikaans and Siswati. By the time of writing (July 2004) the services, which were planned to be up and running by March 2004, were not yet established and research continues. The main problem seems to be financing, as especially the advertising industry seems to find the services unviable. That is apart from scepticism whether the two regional services will be able to address the different language and cultural needs, satisfactory. (Cf. Media Institute of Southern Africa 2003.)

Questioned autonomy

Despite being financially less dependent on the government, concern continues about the political independence of the SABC. For an in-depth analysis of the government's ideological agenda with broadcasting and those of the successive SABC's boards since the early 1990s, see Louw [Sa].

A striking example of government interference was the Broadcasting Amendment Bill (2001). The Bill was seen as a deliberate act of the government to take political control

of the country's airwaves by introducing, amongst others, a requirement for the SABC board to develop policies on programme and editorial content that would have to be approved by the Minister of Communications (Cf. Ensor 2002).

Although the differences were settled and the Broadcasting Amendment Act was passed in February 2003, the furor created by the Bill was seen by opposition parties to be part of the government's strategy to erase agreed safeguards for freedom of expression and the independence of the media. In the words of opposition spokeswoman on communication, Dene Smuts, the government's tactic is to achieve goals by tabling, leaking or otherwise introduce shock measures that reverse the negotiated order (the Broadcasting Act), and then, having created a panic, to retreat in a show of reason, namely to compromise a position which becomes the new norm or point of departure (Cf. Smuts 2002).

Despite the SABC's periodic public reaffirmation of its independence, articles in the media, comments by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) continue to express concern about the autonomy of the SABC. These include reports about, for example, the nomination procedures that were followed with the appointment of the present SABC board, the SABC's preferential treatment of the ANC's launch of its 2004 election manifesto, an alleged political "loyalty audit" amongst SABC news staff, an alleged memo ordering non-current affairs staff not to discuss (debate) politics outside designated current affairs programmes during the run-up to the 2004 general election (for instance in talk shows), concern about the Corporation's news programming chairperson's dismissal of objectivity in journalism as a "delusion that does not exist", and the controversial appointment of a managing director of news and current affairs with alleged close links to the ANC.

CONCLUSION AND IN DEFENCE OF THE SABC

It should, however, be acknowledged that criticism such as the above is not unique to the SABC. Similar criticism is levelled at public service broadcasters almost worldwide, including the mother of PSB, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), all of them in different stages of adopting the market approach and adapting to the new media environment (Cf. e.g. Lowe & Hujanen 2003).

In South Africa, the problems experienced by and with the public broadcaster are too often politicised without taking cognisance of the broader and global impact of the market approach and philosophy, of which South Africa and its broadcasting sector are not isolated. Such a politicised view often inhibits the challenge to find solutions to the problems.

There are many reasons why the governments and industries of developing countries want to adopt the market approach. In countries desperately seeking to develop their economies, the ideology and promises of new-liberal economics, globalisation and being part of the information society are attractive. It includes the potential to develop new international and national markets and to expand, merge and cross old regulatory frontiers (cf. Van Cuilenburg & McQuail 2003:198). In this regard the channel, *SABC-Africa*, with the African continent as its main market, is a good example.

Furthermore, the freedom of the media in developing countries has often suffered under totalitarian regimes. To the media as such, the market approach is seen as a buffer against the misuse of the public broadcaster as a state broadcaster and thus as a propaganda instrument for the government of the day.

Yet, what the preceding parts have shown is that adopting the market approach has left South Africa with a highly commercialised and fragmented broadcasting sector and a public service broadcaster struggling to reconstruct a minimal level of public service.

There is little if any distinction between the content of public, private and community broadcasting. Although the liberalisation of broadcasting has led to more services, the beneficiaries thereof are mainly the rich (who can afford private subscription services), with the majority becoming more information poor. As elsewhere (cf. Steemers 2003), the market approach has increased the SABC's susceptibility to commercial and political pressures and has tended to diminish its independence and credibility.

On the more theoretical and philosophical level, adopting the market approach without calculating the losses has left the country with a public broadcaster that, except for the broadcasting of national events (that can also be done by the private sector), can no longer comfortably claim to achieve the goals of true public service broadcasting, namely to

- perform the function of a national point of reference and identification (cf. Rumphorst 2001);
- be one of the few links in the individualist mass society that could share something with and between citizens in a strongly hierarchical and individualist society (cf. Wolton in Van den Boogaard 1998) and, in South Africa, be a link in a highly racial, cultural, linguistic, political and economic divided society;
- place social and cultural concerns before the imperatives of the marketplace (cf. Raboy 2001); and
- maintain a common national culture in the postmodern era of fragmented communities and fractured identities (cf. McNair 2002).

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