

**THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION
(SABC) AND ITS CRISIS OF 'INDEPENDENCE'**

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ABSTRACT

THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION (SABC) AND ITS CRISIS OF 'INDEPENDENCE'

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The subject of 'independence' of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has emerged as a key issue in post-apartheid South African public discourse. While the importance of 'independence' has rarely been questioned, the term's meaning has been subject to fragmented understandings and vague interpretations. This thesis explores the origins of divergent conceptions of 'independence', examining how these conceptions are constructed by staff within the SABC. The central task of this thesis is to critically examine the contested concept of 'independence' a task it accomplishes by engaging with issues of power, knowledge and identity. To this end, the thesis reveals that the neo-liberal policies imposed by the Washington Consensus play a significant role in shaping conceptions of 'independence' through their power to dictate policy in countries in the Global South, including South Africa. This power, exercised through dominant Washington Consensus institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), inform knowledge and identities at a local level through the adoption of neo-liberal macro-economic strategies, such as Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). As a result, there is no local without the global. The engagement with issues of power, identity and knowledge and their relationships to how 'independence' is understood ensures that meanings of 'independence' are contested and that 'independence' is not an immovable edifice. 'Independence' is only a product of an evolving matrix, in which the staff of the SABC, who are divided into four different tiers, construct their own interpretations of 'independence', shaped by their understandings of both organisational and external factors, such as politics and advertisers, in relation to their work. Using data from interview respondents and an analysis of key public policy documents, this thesis presents two key processes that influence understandings of 'independence' and, therefore, link the SABC to the larger external socio-political environment. These two key factors, the commercialisation of the SABC and the African National Congress (ANC) power struggles have helped to shape the four conceptions of 'independence' advanced in this thesis: namely, the legalistic, anti-establishment, political and professional conceptions of 'independence'. At the core of this thesis are two questions: How do staff within the SABC construct and understand the meaning of 'independence' of the SABC, and what has influenced these conceptions in post-apartheid South Africa? Consistent with these research questions, the thesis is located within the interpretive tradition, since it seeks to understand the world of the SABC through the lens of its staff. To complement the interpretivist approach, the thesis situates the SABC and its understandings of 'independence' within the wider South African context, in which the meaning of 'independence' should also be understood as being inextricably intertwined with and a product of the shifting developmental state of the macro-economic environment. The critical political economy of the media is, therefore, used as an explanatory framework for understanding how the macro-worlds of politics and economic

strategies intersect within the micro-world of the SABC to shape conceptions of 'independence'. The thesis concludes by arguing that it is not a strong and domineering state that seeks to control public service broadcasting; instead, it is a weak state that does so because of a need to curtail public discourse, which might present a threat to its own existence if left uncontrolled. As a result, it is difficult to separate the SABC from the state and, for that reason, the role of the public service broadcaster (PSB) is tied to the national narrative which itself is tied to the larger global matrices of power.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Coloniality: Refers the long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism and that define social, economic and cultural conditions in absence of the colonial administration.

Critical political economy of the media: Is understood as the strand of political economy that is concerned with how the making and taking of meaning are shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations

Decolonial epistemic perspective: Denotes the political intervention that seeks to challenge injustices and inhumanity brought by coloniality, thereby placing African subjects at the centre, to understand their subjectivity as ways to counter subjection and imagine possible worlds and knowledges. It is the epistemic system that privileges epistemologies that have been distorted, ignored, and rendered irrelevant by the Euro-North American episteme. It privileges the subjectivity of the subject from its own existential locale and it is fore-grounded outside modernity emphasising the fact that there is no monolithic knowledge.

Global matrices of power: Refers to the transcendence of national commitments by powerful forces, particularly, global-level governance institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF that pursue agendas of some universal interest through the dictation of neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes to Global South nations in the name of development. These dictates come with conditionalities that ultimately create tensions between the governors and the governed in the Global South.

Global North: In this thesis the concept means the political formation of the asymmetrical power and geographic location that resides in Euro-North America, the global configuration that controls the world.

Global South: Refers to 'developing' countries located mainly in the southern hemisphere of whom most share the attribute of being former colonies.

Locus of enunciation: Generally refers to the geo-political and body-political epistemic location within the structures of power and knowledge from which an individual speaks.

Point Zero: A view that represents itself as being without a point of view and always hides its local particular perspective under an abstract universalism.

Subjection: The position of power and also the uses of power that create conditions of life that are informed by and reproduce oppression, subordination, injustice, and dehumanisation.

Subjectivation: Refers to the construction of the individual subject. Individuals are viewed as products of something and that influences their locus of enunciation.

Subjectivity: Refers to the way in that knowledge practises are informed by conditioned ways of knowing and consciousness as the way of understanding self, the lived experience and the world that the self inhabits.

Pluri-versality: An epistemology that de-links from abstract universals by foregrounding other knowledges for example this thesis suggests a shift from looking at the Global South from the perspective of the Global North rather than looking at the global south from the perspective of the different knowledges in the Global South.

Table of abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ANC	African National Congress
AR	Audience Rating
ASGISA	Accelerated and Shared Initiative Growth for South Africa
BA	Broadcasting Act no 4 of 1999
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCCSA	Broadcasting Complaints Commission South Africa
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CIB	Campaign for Independent Broadcasting
COO	Chief Operations Officer
COM	Campaign for Open Media
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPEM	Critical Political Economy of the Media
DOC	Department of Communication
DSM	Developmental State Model
FXI	Freedom of Expression Institute
GCIS	Government Information and Communications System
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party

IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Irish Republican Army
MAT	Media Appeals Tribunal
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
MP	Member of Parliament
NAIL	New Africa Investments Limited
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDP	National Development Plan
NP	National Party
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PSB	Public Service Broadcasting
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACP	South African Communist Party
SAF	South African Foundation
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SOS	Save our SABC
UBC	Uganda Broadcasting Corporation
UK	United Kingdom

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction: Key concepts for understanding the ‘independence’ of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).....	1
1. A vocabulary of ‘independence’ and thesis outline	1
2. Foundations of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) in South Africa	12
3. Research questions and contribution of the thesis	17
4. Research framework: conceptual and methodological issues.....	43
Chapter 2: Critical political economy of the media explanations of SABC conceptions of ‘independence’	53
2 A dual framework: The CPEM and interpretivist approaches.....	53
2.1 Challenges to a PSB's role in transitional democracies.....	59
2.2 Understanding SABC ‘independence’ within the South African ambiguities of reform	66
2.3 Independence, decoloniality and the de-Westernisation of public service broadcasting.....	79
3. The CPE and the interpretivist method: A return to ‘independence’ through the SABC lens...	87
4 Conclusion	91
Chapter 3: The early transition of the SABC from state broadcaster to post-apartheid broadcaster	93
1. Introduction: The making of the SABC’s crisis of independence	93
2. Political visions of the RDP and mixed consequences for independence.....	108
3. GEAR, DSM and the manifestations of commercialisation and ANC power struggles	116
4. How the four tiers construct the four conceptions of SABC independence	128
5. Conclusion	133
Chapter 4: Shaping of the meaning of SABC 'independence' during the commercialisation era.....	136
1. Introduction: Commercialisation as a Bretton Woods project	136
2. Defining commercialisation.....	138
3. How commercialization forced the SABC to restructure	148
4. Conclusion.....	186
Chapter 5: How internal power struggles within the ANC have shaped understandings of the ‘independence’ of the SABC	186
1. Introduction: The ANC and politically shaped conceptions of SABC independence.....	186
2. A background to tensions: The ANC’s struggles within a struggle	193
3. The ANC's power of appointment and the political conceptions of SABC independence.....	201
4. The ANC's control of the SABC's operating environment and the pushback by SABC staff ..	214
5. Conclusion	221

Chapter 6: Executive lawlessness, accommodation and submission in the SABC editorial	223
1. Background to the impacts of commercialisation and ANC power struggles on the SABC editorial	223
2. The impact of ANC power struggles on editorial	231
3. The impact of commercialisation on programming content	252
4. The influence of commercialisation on programming content	254
5. Conclusion	265
Chapter 7: SABC 'independence' conceptions and dilemmas of universality: An analysis, reflections and implications for further research	266
1. Introduction: A rejection of universalism in SABC 'independence' understandings.....	266
2. The impact of a weak state on SABC 'independence' conceptions	271
3. Whither SABC?	282
4. Concluding remarks, limitations and suggestions for further research	296
 Table of Interviews	 311
 Bibliography	 313

Chapter 1: Introduction: Key concepts for understanding the 'independence' of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)

1 A vocabulary of 'independence' and thesis outline

This thesis grapples with the contested idea of media 'independence'.¹ The case study used is that of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). To develop a deeper understanding of the contested idea of media freedom, I delve into relationships of power, knowledge and identity, which are central concepts in the complicated issue of 'independence'. These relationships shape the logic of domination and oppression that structure the world of SABC staff and therefore their subjectivity.² The centrality of subjectivity is important in addressing the complex relationship between power, knowledge and identity in understandings of independence in this study. 'Independence' therefore means different things to different stakeholders involved in the SABC. I focus, in particular, on how the notion of 'independence' is understood by the staff of the SABC, a public service broadcaster (PSB). By focusing on SABC staff, I, by design and on two levels, discuss these perspectives of 'independence' from a subaltern location.³ That is, first, I discuss the perspectives from the position of the SABC staff themselves, and, second, I discuss them from the location of the Global South, in which the SABC exists.

¹ I place the term 'independence' in single quotation marks to avoid essentialising it, since this thesis contests its meaning.

² Subjectivity refers to the way knowledge practises are informed by conditioned ways of knowing and consciousness as the way of understanding the self, the lived experience and the world that the individual inhabits.

³ The thesis however emphasises the difference between epistemic location and social location which denotes that one who is socially located in the oppressed side of power relations does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location.

The central task of this thesis is to critically examine the concept of 'independence' through engagement with issues of power, knowledge and identity. By power, I refer to means of control, by a person or institution over the minds, livelihoods and beliefs of others. This includes the discussion of power in relation to subjectivation, that is how power creates particular beings, who even without coercion may think in particular ways shaped by power. By 'knowledge', the thesis refers to ideologies that inform the views of 'independence' held by PSB staff.⁴ These ideologies may range from nationalist perspectives to neo-liberal ones. Therefore knowledge denotes ways of knowing and how staff knows about independence. 'Identity' is two-pronged: First, at an organisational level, it refers broadly to what the SABC staff perceives, feel and think about the PSB and its role. 'Identity', in this case, is assumed to refer to the collective, commonly shared understanding of the PSB's distinctive values and characteristics. These values are important because they also inform the staff's perspectives of 'independence'. Therefore identity can also be about the staff's subjectivity and subject positions, how they reproduce power matrices such as nationalist or global matrices in their perspective of the role of the PSB. Second, and at a national level, 'identity' refers to the SABC as a microcosm of the larger South African society. Consequently, the PSB's role is defined by and is a reflection of a South African society facing the challenge of cultivating a sense of common belonging within a newly conceived post-apartheid identity (i.e., the identity of being South African), among constituents and individuals who never imagined themselves to be part of the same

⁴ R Peet, *Geography of power: Making global economic policy* (Zed Books, London and New York 2007)1

nation.⁵ By engaging with issues of power, knowledge and identity, the thesis illustrates how 'independence' is not an objective or neutral phenomenon, but, rather, a concept capable of masking power relationships. The thesis argues, therefore, that, in order to understand the 'independence' of the SABC, one must acknowledge that the SABC is an institution informed by the interrelationships of power, knowledge and identity struggles.

The 'independence' of a PSB is, consequently, a socio-legal phenomenon, since it is related to issues of institutional power and position in relation to the government and the market (be these issues dominant or subordinate). It is, therefore, illuminating to pay attention to the political content and the politics of interview respondents' analyses in order to understand more about what SABC 'independence' truly entails. In particular, we can further explore the ideological

⁵Legacies of colonialism and apartheid have complicated the nation building efforts in South Africa. Chipkin and Johnston divide the post-apartheid South African nation into four genealogical trajectories: First, the 1920s English nation, largely viewed as promoting the interests of foreign capital. Second the 1940s to 1994 Afrikaner nation which promoted Afrikaner nationalism and idea of national capital. Afrikaner nationalism is viewed as having to die so that a democratic South Africa could be born. Third, a civic nation, which provides a platform of legitimacy for constitutional democracy and was key in the transition to democracy in 1994 and fourth, a post 1994 African nation, founded on ideology of African nationalism which itself is divided into a number of nationalism such as Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the ANC and other black movements . The varying ideas and different objectives of nationalism in the black groups is brought together by seeing nationalism in terms of resistance. Construed in terms of opposing European colonialism, racial segregation and apartheid. The idea and contestation is that all the nationalism should die so that the civic nation can thrive. See I Chipkin, *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, democracy and the identity of the people* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg 2007) and also A Johnston, *South Africa: Inventing the nation* (Bloomsbury, London and New York 2014)3-7

perspectives reflected in interview respondents' views, especially with regard to their nationalist and neo-liberal ideas.⁶ In the context of the interviewees' responses lies the relevance of the distinction between nationalist and neo-liberal ideas. 'Nationalist' ideas, within the African context in general and within the South African context in particular, operate within democratic constraints, such that the party that is voted into power (in this case, the African National Congress (ANC)) is expected to control the state and other government institutions.⁷ Interview respondents, in this case, supported and were aligned with the state's decisions with respect to the SABC. This perspective can be juxtaposed against the 'neo-liberal' perspective, which is viewed as being hostile to the interests of the voting majority. This perspective eschews the state, upholding, instead, the idea that the market is best suited to control institutions like the PSB. On one hand, neo-liberals fear that state control could reduce the PSB to a propaganda tool, while, on the other hand, nationalists fear that the whims of the market may allow apartheid remnants with economic power to encroach on the SABC.

Thus, it is important to recognise that the SABC is imbricated in complex power relations. These power relations exist, for the most part, between South African politicians, civil society, internal hierarchies amongst SABC staff and power relations between the SABC and advertisers, all of which need to be situated within the larger global power matrix. The global power matrix generally refers to the formal system of political domination by Western societies through key

⁶ Neo-liberalism, in this thesis, refers to the theory of political economic practises that proposes that human well being can best be advanced through the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practises. State intervention in markets, once created, must be kept to a bare minimum. See D Harvey, *A Brief History of Neo-Liberalism* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007) 2.

⁷ Refer to Chapter 4 for an extensive discussion of this argument.

institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), that control the main lines of power and the distribution of world resources, both materially and ideologically.⁸ These power relationships are underpinned by particular types of knowledge. At a macro level, these power relationships have to be understood within the context of the post-World War II ideological battles between Keynesian democracy and neo-liberal democracy. On one hand, Keynesian democracy is characterised by an interventionist state committed to achieving full employment and income for everyone, while stabilizing accumulation and democratic benefits. On the other hand, neo-liberal democracy partially withdraws the nation state from macro-economic management through the displacement of power to the market and the limitation of the powers of the state. This tension between neo-liberal assumptions and the state that I argue also influences interpretations of the key processes that shape staff understandings of SABC 'independence': namely, the commercialisation of the SABC and ANC political power struggles.

The central point here is that traditional discussions of 'independence' as a neutral phenomenon, which give the term a fundamental ontological status, hide asymmetrical power relationships. By unmasking these hidden relationships of power, we can help to understand the context from which respondents develop their views. Hence, the thesis focuses on the internal construction of SABC 'independence' conceptions: that is, the understandings of 'independence' held by

⁸ For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term 'Washington Consensus' to refer to these institutions. This term comprises specific economic prescriptions designed to address the developing crisis by Washington-based institutions, such as the World Bank, the IMF, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation(NATO) and the U.S. Treasury Fund. See John Williamson, 'What Should the World Bank Think About the Washington Consensus?' (2000) 15 The World Bank Research Observer 251, 264.

the staff within the SABC. However, if the analysis were to focus solely on the micro context, this would imply a failure to connect 'the local' to wider power structures, which, themselves, are linked to the global sphere and its power matrix. Attempts to portray 'independence' as an objective phenomenon ignore the larger framework of power relationships and how these intersect with the local. This thesis, therefore, argues that it is impossible to point out what 'independence' is without highlighting its relations to larger global power processes. The position here is that, due to the overbearing global power matrices, there is no local without the global. I argue, however, that what *can* be examined is how 'independence' is constructed. Only then can we then seek to explain the idea of 'independence' itself. First, however, in order to unpack the meaning of 'independence', we need to ask: 'independence' from what?

This thesis seeks to accomplish two things. First, it attempts to move away from thinking about the 'independence' of a PSB on the basis of the limited epistemological assumptions of Eurocentric perspectives on the roles of PSBs. In the case of South Africa, it is not only the 'watchdog' role of the PSB that is central, but the 'nation building' role. The SABC was meant to play a critical role in promoting the transition of South African society from apartheid to an egalitarian democracy, in part by building a vibrant public sphere. Second, in questioning the limited epistemological assumptions of Eurocentric perspectives, this thesis is concerned with giving staff working within the SABC a voice, a voice that has, thus far, been ignored in traditional discussions of the 'independence' of a PSB dominated by Northern perspectives.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. This chapter outlines the background, theoretical perspectives, objectives, methods and techniques employed in the study. It examines the rationale for focusing on the independence of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), and, particularly, explores how staff within the SABC understands independence. The next chapter traces the close connections between traditional understandings of PSB 'independence' and traditional Western liberal democratic theory, with a particular emphasis on the role of Western liberal theory in shaping universal PSB 'independence' discourse. The chapter discusses the degree to which PSB 'independence' meanings have depended on the power of Europe and its discourses and how non-Western ideals are not explored in a full or inclusive manner. The critique does not downplay the extent to which some values, such as PSB vocabularies and roles, are shared transnationally, however, it does emphasise the distinctions in the contexts and roles of the existing inequalities between states in the Global North and South.⁹

Three key themes have been dominant in the literature of the 'independence' of PSB. These themes, which frame and illuminate the understanding of PSBs in the Global South, are explored in this chapter. The themes are: 1. challenges to the mandated role of PSBs in transitional democracies, 2. understanding SABC 'independence' within South African ambiguities of reform and 3. de-Westernising/decolonising the media in the Global South. The study uses the critical political economy of the media (CPEM) to critically examine the SABC

⁹ The Global North and the Global South are divided by an imaginary line (i.e., not necessarily a geographic demarcation) that separates more economically developed countries, located largely in Europe and North America, from less economically developed countries, located largely in Africa, South America and India. The South is largely viewed as poor and politically unstable, whereas the North is largely viewed as the opposite. In addition, the Global South shares the fact that its countries have historically been colonized.

by examining the ways in which staff at various tiers of the organisation are affected and how staff interpret the socio-economic system, particularly the commercialisation of the SABC and ANC political struggles, in relation to their understanding of 'independence', as informed by global-economic processes. The CPEM is a Marxist approach to the study of the media. It examines how power relations shape media discourse. The CPEM draws links between economic and other areas of social life.¹⁰ Within the media, it is critical to examine power, and particularly in the context of the relationship between capitalist enterprise and public intervention.

The argument in this chapter is that the SABC staff's conceptions of 'independence' are determined first by their real life experience and second by the larger horizons of the political economy. It is, therefore, important to understand that the SABC staff's constructions of 'independence' hinge largely on their interpretations of other social institutions, such as the larger horizons of the political economy, in this case, commercialisation and ANC political struggles (which, themselves, are rooted in the larger global matrices of power). In particular, CPEM also directs our attention to concepts like citizenship, the public interest, the national interest and democracy, which will help us gain insight into how SABC staff members construct their conceptions of independence.¹¹

Chapter three picks up where chapter two takes off from where chapter two left: It traces the inter-connections of the asymmetrical power relations linking the

¹⁰ Gary Browning and Andy Kilmister, *Critical and Post-Critical Political Economy* (Palgrave, New York 2006)3

¹¹ The public and the national interest are two different concepts in South Africa. National interests are the interests of the nation, as represented by the government, whose legitimacy exists through the vote. The national interest is defined by politicians. While, on the one hand, the national interest is state-led, on the other hand, the public interest is in the interest of civil society, the media or aggregated individuals who make up society (as distinct from state institutions).

North and the South by tracing the different macro-economic strategies adopted in post-apartheid South Africa. The adopted post-apartheid macro-economic strategies are discussed as both effects and consequences of the Euro-centric/Global North matrix of power, which dictates structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). The location of the South African nation state within the larger global matrices of power and how this location informs the sense of identity and/or role of the SABC within the embryonic post-apartheid state gains prominent focus in this chapter. The struggle between Keynesian democracy and neo-Liberal democracy is made even clearer in this chapter by the drawing of links between the respective early post-apartheid macro-economic policies (for example the Reconstruction and Developmental Programme (RDP), the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) approach and the Developmental State Model (DSM)) and Keynesian and neo-liberal visions of democracy.¹²

In doing so, references are made to the local and global principles and factors that served as the foundation for both commercialisation and the internal ANC struggles that played out within the SABC. Chapter four examines how the SABC staff understand the process of commercialising the SABC in relation to their work and how this understanding contributes to their understanding of independence. The chapter explores the relationship between the PSB and the market and examines the SABC staff as articulators of this impact of the market. Pro-

¹² The RDP was an economic policy based largely on Keynesian principles of participation, democracy, development and state intervention. GEAR, in line with the Washington Consensus obligated the South African government to recognise the superiority of market forces. Austerity measures, such as the cutting of state deficits and a less-interventionist state, characterized the management of the economy. According to COSATU, the ANC did not only follow IMF policies, but also liberalized the economy far earlier than expected. See Vishnu Padayachee, 'Debt, Development and Democracy: The IMF in Post-Apartheid South Africa' (1994) 62 *Review of African Political Economy* 585, 597; Vishnu Padayachee, 'Progressive Academic Economists and the Challenge of Development in South Africa's Decade of Liberation' (1998) 77 *Review of African Political Economy* 431, 450.

commercialisation and nationalist perspectives emerge in this chapter, and they shape three conceptions of 'independence': namely, the political, anti-establishment and legalistic conceptions.¹³ Exploring the 'independence' of the SABC from the perspective of the staff also symbolises a shift from understandings of 'independence' based on the perspective of either state or global power matrices. The chapter also considers articulations by Ramon Grosfoguel, a decolonial thinker who argued that the key problem is that even those who are socially located on the oppressed and exploited side of global power ultimately end up thinking epistemically, like those on the dominant side of global power.¹⁴

Chapter five outlines the internal ANC succession tensions and then traces how they play themselves out within the SABC. The focus in this chapter is on how these political tensions shape SABC conceptions of 'independence' and on how the staff interpret the tensions in relation to their work. Emphasis is placed on the shifting sands of politics and power within the ANC and how these sands are the foundations upon which 'independence' is constructed. The chapter also illustrates how these ANC political power struggles and their impacts on the SABC lead to the problem of the objectification of 'independence' by other stakeholders, such as opposition parties and civil society. Due to the ANC's interference in the running of the SABC, different stakeholders end up holding the perspective that 'independence' is an objective phenomenon that can be attained by shifting the state away from PSB affairs. These groups shape some of the interview respondents' perceptions of 'independence' as total autonomy from the state.

¹³ The four conceptions of 'independence' are defined in the third section of this chapter.

¹⁴ Ramón Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political Economy Paradigms' in (2007) 21 (Cultural Studies) 203, 246.

Finally, this chapter discusses all four key conceptions of 'independence' as the outcome of state interference: namely, the political, legalistic, professional and anti-establishment conceptions.

In chapter six, the focus is on programming content as a key empirical reference point through which different understandings of 'independence' manifest themselves. The chapter explores how commercialisation and the ANC power struggles affected the production of editorial content and how this, in turn, gave rise to specific conceptions of 'independence' among staff within the SABC. The chapter also explores the determinants of SABC programming content.

Chapter seven, the final chapter, presents final observations and limitations of the study. The chapter argues that it is essential to draw attention to local forms of agency, rather than solely larger structures, in the understanding of media 'independence' in the Global South. The SABC's role and the conception of 'independence' cannot be divorced from the wider web of social relations. In this web, there are structured, asymmetrical power relations that hide complex relations among power, knowledge and identity, particularly between the dominant Global North and the subordinate Global South. In the next section, I discuss the genealogy of the SABC in order to provide insights into the discourses and constitutions of various conceptions of 'independence'. The section does not only intend to emphasize the origins of the PSB, but also to serve as a bridge that highlights the complex and, at times, contradictory history of the SABC, which reveals the influence of power in the definition of the role of the PSB and the understanding of its 'independence' thereof.

2. Foundations of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) in South Africa

The contribution of this section is to provide an analytical background to the history of the SABC. This involves excavating the founding ideologies, problematical historical processes, configurations and reconfigurations of structures of power that produced the SABC as a PSB entity. In addition, these complex historical processes help us understand the evolving history of the SABC in the writing of the present, particularly since the SABC's history is intricately linked to understandings of its 'independence'.

The South African model of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) was initially patterned on the Reithian principles of PSB that guided the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) under the supervision of Lord John Reith in 1936.¹⁵ Lord Reith was the first Director General to see the BBC as a model for a publicly funded independent broadcaster whose mission was to educate, inform and entertain the whole nation, whilst remaining free from political interference and commercial pressures.¹⁶ These BBC principles were premised on a single, rational, public, English sphere whose identity was largely homogenous. However, as it progressively emerged, the conditions characterising South Africa were at odds with the BBC model.

The South African reality includes multiple public spheres and fragmented identities, a situation that contradicts directly with the foundation principles of PSB, which were based on homogeneity. These South African fragmentations range from multiplicities of ethnic groups and languages to sharp inequalities among

¹⁵ Eric Rosenthal, *You Have Been Listening: The Early History of Radio in South Africa* (Purnell, Cape Town 1974)

¹⁶ See R Tomasseli, *Currents of Power: State of Broadcasting in South Africa* (Anthropos, Bellville 1989); PE Louw, *South African Media Policy: Debates of the 1990s* (Anthropos, Bellville 1993)

classes. The BBC model in South Africa and, particularly, its multiple public spheres was, therefore, divorced from the realities on the ground. The principles that inspired the BBC were applied to the SABC at its inception in 1936, but rather than catering to the whole South African population (as the BBC strived to do in the United Kingdom (UK), the new service catered only to an English minority.¹⁷ Therefore, the BBC model could not fit in the South African context. The majority of South Africans, though conversant in English, speak up to ten other languages.¹⁸ This linguistic heterogeneity is a significant factor, since it requires the SABC to cater to all of these languages in their diversity, whereas the BBC must cater only to English, Welsh and Scottish people, all of whom speak English. The SABC's success in catering to these languages contributes to how 'independence' is understood, as I shall discuss in Chapter 6. With the ushering in of a democratic South Africa in 1994, issues such as language coverage were expected to be addressed.¹⁹

In 1994, with the victory of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa transitioned from the apartheid system of the National Party (NP) to a system characterized by majority rule. The NP model, as a system of apartheid, allowed only weak, white political parties to participate in elections against a dominant NP. Consequently, a single party guided by racist principles dominated South African public life. These authoritarian features were also evident in the public broadcaster, the SABC. For example, the NP made crucial

¹⁷ See Ruth Teer-Tomaselli and Keyan G Tomaselli, 'Reconstituting Public Service Broadcasting: Media and Democracy During Transition in South Africa' in MB Anderson (ed), *Media and Democracy* (University of Oslo, Oslo 1996).

¹⁸ According to South Africa statistics, as of 2012, Zulu's first language speakers constituted the majority of the population at 22.7%, with the other first languages as follows: Xhosa 16%, Afrikaans 13.5%, SePedi 9.4%, SeTswana 8%, SeSotho 7.9%, Xitsonga 4.5%, Swati 2.5%, Venda 1.6% and sign language (which is also an official language) at 0.5%.

¹⁹ Clive Barnett, 'The Limits of Media Democratisation in South Africa: Politics, Privatisation and Regulation' (1999) 21 MCS 274

decisions regarding appointments at the SABC and applied differential investments for different groups with regard to infrastructure and services.²⁰ It is these authoritarian features on whose foundation the SABC was built, thus give us perspective on power relations in post-apartheid PSB. By the virtue of its role as a South African public broadcaster in an apartheid era that prioritized one ethnic group over others, the PSB was already heavily involved in identity and power relations. A PSB, be it the BBC or the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC), cannot be a floating empty signifier, embedded nowhere. Consequently, the SABC and any understanding of its role are embedded in its location and the histories that come with its location; therefore, the PSB should be studied *in situ*. Studying the PSB *in situ* is critical to any interpretation of its role. If it is not studied *in situ*, then the PSB is studied out of context and it therefore does not provide an accurate picture of its associated culture.

The apartheid government practised central control over the SABC, since 'independent' broadcasting was seen as detrimental to the public interest (which, to the NP, meant Afrikaner interest).²¹ The SABC was the NP's tool for conveying its propaganda. It was accessible to almost everyone in the country and, therefore, was an ideal channel for mass communication. The NP created a monolithic ideological channel, through which it could further its policies with little regard for wider public interest. It had sole jurisdiction over the appointment of SABC board

²⁰ Clive Barnett, *Language, Media and Politics of Representation in South Africa* (University of Reading, Reading 1998) According to Barnett, in broadcasting, as well as in other sectors, a disproportionate amount was invested during this era in radio and television services aimed at white audiences. White audiences received preferential treatment, and African stations were heavily censored. For example, programming content for blacks was heavily determined by editorial departments.

²¹ AS de Beer, *Mass Media Towards the Millenium: The South African Handbook of Mass Communication* (2nd edn, Van Schaik, Pretoria 1998) 155. Apartheid describes a system of racist laws and policies of total segregation in South Africa that began in 1948, when the NP came into power, and ended in 1994, when Nelson Mandela was elected president in the first democratic elections.

members and staff, licensed broadcasters (through the Postmaster-General) and controlled editorial content and programming. This reality is substantiated by Tusi Fokane, who pointed out that the Broadcasting Act 1976, while it did not clearly determine the administrative control of broadcasting, left gaps for exclusive control by the incumbent government.²² Indicative of this exclusive control is the way in which various NP ministries were, over the years, responsible for the control of the SABC.²³

The SABC-NP relationship was shaped by partisan appointments and censorship. More than a hundred laws were introduced, including a law giving the NP power to veto any content.²⁴ These laws had direct implications for the SABC; for example, news deemed by the NP to be anti-government carried a prison sentence. This directly encouraged self-censorship. Oosthuizen also pointed out that, apart from laws and regulations, the apartheid government had other ways of exercising its influence, such as establishing Commissions of Inquiry.²⁵ For example, the 1980 inquiry into the security reporting of news suggested that the media censor itself when reporting activities of the state. This approach seemed to be resurrected during the ANC succession struggles, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The major problem with this process was that it lent itself to political interference (since the NP also used its power in Parliament to determine the

²² Tusi Fokane, 'The Transformation of Broadcasting in South Africa: A History of the Campaign for Open Media (COM) and the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting (CIB)' (2003) <<http://www.fx.org.za/PDFs/PDFs/Other/earchive/transformation.pdf>> accessed 16 June 2011

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Lucas Oosthuizen, *Media Ethics in the South African Context: An Introduction and Overview* (2nd edn, Juta and Co, Lansdowne, Cape Town 2002)

²⁵ *ibid* (n23)

composition of the board and senior management of the SABC), which, in the end, had a direct impact on content. When the ANC came to power, it publicly committed itself to restructuring the SABC in a transparent manner and, consequently, removed it from the tentacles of the NP.²⁶ Post-1994, the SABC underwent various transformations in its attempt to gain this 'independence'.

When apartheid was brought to an end and the ANC took the reins in 1994, democracy was expected to flourish. The abolition of the racist system and the emergence of the new ANC government were both supposed to be in the interest of all South Africans. One key player in this expected transformation was the SABC. Similar to many public broadcasters around the world, the SABC was meant to serve, not only as a conduit for information, but also as a channel through which to promote and encourage participation in democracy.²⁷ To effectively move away from state broadcasting, the SABC had to be independent, and there was legislation that secured its editorial, administrative and financial 'independence' from politics and commerce.²⁸ Consequently, studying the SABC *in situ* opens us to more ways of understanding PSB 'independence', such as how, in post-apartheid South Africa, the SABC being left to the whims of the market could be viewed by nationalists as consonant with entrenching white dominance, since apartheid ensured financial empowerment for white South Africans. On the other hand, liberals hold the perspective that the PSB should be independent from the nationalists who want to use it as a propaganda tool. As a result, and contrary to key legal definitions and guarantees of SABC independence, individuals'

²⁶ John Van Zyl, 'Civil Society and Broadcasting in South Africa: Protecting the Right to Communicate' (1994)20 (2) *Communicatio: South African Journal of Communication Theory and Research* 62,70

²⁷ Ruth Tomasselli, *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (Belville, Anthropos 1998)

²⁸ See Broadcasting Act 1999

conceptions of 'independence' depend on the constituents that the individuals serve.²⁹ It is, therefore, one of this study's focuses to investigate how the SABC's 'independence' is understood by the different constituents within the SABC.

3 Research questions and contribution of the thesis

At the core of this thesis are two questions: How do staff within the SABC construct and understand the meaning of 'independence' of the SABC, and what has influenced these conceptions in post-apartheid South Africa? My starting point for asking these questions is the widely held idea in South African PSB discourse that 'independence' is a clear-cut term that can be legally defined and is evidenced through compliance with legal provisions.³⁰ An example of this widely held idea is the criticism that the SABC has failed to maintain its mandated critical distance with the South African state in post-apartheid Africa, in general, and in the post-Mandela administration, in particular. For instance, some of my interview respondents who expressed this legalistic conception of 'independence' recognized that the SABC has a close relationship with the African National Congress (ANC) led government, in such a way that resembles the close relationship between the SABC and the government during the apartheid era.³¹ However, in contrast, as this thesis argues, the 'independence' of the SABC and its

²⁹ The SABC's 'independence' is defined and derived from a number of legislations, such as the South African constitution, the Charter, the BA Act and editorial policy. For example, Section 192 of the South African constitution is critically important for SABC 'independence' because it requires the passing of national legislation to establish independent media. The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA)3(4), therefore, requires that the SABC must function without any political or commercial interference. The SABC editorial policies on fairness and objectivity also state: 'We do not allow advertising, commercial, political or personal considerations to influence our editorial decisions....the SABC is not the mouthpiece of the government of the day, nor should it broadcast its opinion of government policies, unless they relate directly to broadcasting matters.'

³⁰ Civil society groups, such as Save Our SABC (SOS), have largely been vocal about 'independence', as defined by Broadcasting Act 1999 (no 4), which foregrounds the market and politics as the only threats to SABC 'independence'.

³¹ The SABC's mandate comes, first, from Section 6 of the South African constitution and, second, from various pieces of legislation discussed in the opening section of the chapter.

meanings are not fixed or preordained. They are the result of a number of factors operating both within and outside the SABC, including transformations in social relationships produced by dictated political and economic tensions within the ANC and the global economy. These tensions end up playing themselves out within the SABC.

Perceptions of the 'independence' of the SABC by civil society and opposition parties have also been highly critical. For example, the ANC and advertisers are generally considered to be encroaching on the 'independence' of the SABC.³² However, this view has also been constructed on the basis that 'independence' is a categorical and attainable trait, and little attention has been given to how the staff within the SABC think about independence. Pieter Fourie and David Wigston have analysed 'independence' with a focus on how formal structures, such as media policies and broadcasting legislation, protect and secure the SABC's independence.³³ Academics' other previous work on the 'independence' of the SABC has also followed the argument that structural factors namely, politics and advertisers are the primary, if not the only, determinative variables that shape the conceptions of the 'independence' of the SABC.³⁴ So far, the only study that has

³² Government Communications and Information System (GCIS), *2001 Annual Report*, 'Media Development and Diversity Agency Final Position Paper' (Johannesburg 2001)

³³ See Pieter J Fourie, 'The Future of Public Broadcasting in South Africa: The Need to Return to Basic Principles' (2003) 29 (1 & 2) *Communicatio* 148, 181; also, David Wigston, 'A South African Media Map' in PJ Fourie (ed), *Media Studies Volume 1: Institutions, Theories and Issues* (Juta and Co, Lansdowne, South Africa 2001) 3, 104

³⁴ See Jane Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-liberalism* (Freedom of Expression Institute and the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa, Johannesburg 2001b); Peter Fourie, *Media Studies: Media History, Media and Society* (Juta and Co, Cape Town 2007); Francis Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Zed Books & UNISA Press, London/New York/Pretoria 2005); Tawana Kupe and Kate Skinner, *How the SABC Can Gain Financial Health* (Johannesburg 2009).

attempted to analyse internal perspectives was conducted by Corinna Arndt.³⁵ Arndt, however, limits her study to the newsroom and does not analyse the views of staff across the entire organisation. In her study, Arndt analyses how the relationship between management and journalists/producers impacts editorial independence. However, like Fourie and Wigston, Arndt treats 'independence' as a fixed, determinate and taken-for-granted phenomenon.

This study is situated in the specific South African context, but the South African experience bears important lessons for other countries that have been struggling to reform their own PSBs, especially in Africa and, to a lesser extent, in Central and Eastern Europe. Studies of the 'independence' of newly established PSBs outside the South African context, and especially of Central and Eastern European PSBs, have largely treated 'independence' as an inert compilation of legal stipulations and texts. In the process, these studies have ignored how individuals may construct meanings of 'independence' through individual and collective interpretations of those texts, coupled with personal experiences gained through interactions with their respective PSB organisations, which have both epistemic and geographical dimensions.³⁶

Given this background, this thesis, therefore, seeks to examine the divergent conceptions of 'independence' held by staff at various levels within the SABC. In particular, it analyses how the meaning of 'independence' is shaped by different factors, including norms and structures of the SABC and its adopted macro-

³⁵ Corinna Arndt, *Managing Dissent: Institutional Culture and Political 'Independence' in the South African Broadcasting Corporation's News and Current Affairs Division* (Unpublished master's dissertation, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 2007)

³⁶ See L Remzi and Frrok Cupi, 'The Difficult Road to the Independent Media: Is the Post-Communist Transition Over?' (2002) 2 (1) *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 77; J Keane, *Media and Democracy* (Polity, Cambridge 1991); K Jackubowicz, *Rude Awakening: Social and Media Change in Central and Eastern Europe* (Hampton Press, New Jersey 2007)

economic strategies: namely, the RDP, the GEAR approach and the DSM. Particularly, in Chapter 3, I argue that these strategies are driven by global matrices of power. Norms refer to the organisational beliefs and values formed over time by staff through interactions determined by structures in the form of hierarchies across tiers within the SABC. As such, this thesis examines four key levels of staff of the PSB: the board of directors, senior management, middle management and journalists/producers. The thesis also examines the formal processes that may shape conceptions of independence. The phrase 'formal processes' refers to the thesis' approach to analysing formal 'independence', as reflected in the various Acts of Parliament, such as the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act 1993 and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) Act 2000. These acts have contributed to shaping interpretations of 'independence' within the SABC because members of staff tend to exchange ideas about the meanings of these texts. One of the main legal instruments for ensuring independence, from which some of the staff at the SABC draw in shaping their conceptions, is the Broadcasting Act (BA) of 1999. The BA details several obligations concerning 'independence' from the perspectives of politics and advertising. For example, Article 10 of the BA states:

The SABC must provide significant news and public affairs programming which meets the highest standards of journalism, as well as fair and unbiased coverage, impartiality, balance and independence from government, commercial and other interests.³⁷

Furthermore, an understanding of legal texts can also be gained through informal interactions between SABC staff. Informal processes refer to non-written mechanisms, such as those that develop within the SABC through staff interactions

³⁷ Broadcasting Act 1999.

with the organisational environment, that may consequently mould the meanings of SABC independence.

As a result of the above-mentioned gaps in the literature, this thesis also addresses the following sub-questions: Firstly, how does power shape conceptions of independence, and what identities and knowledges inform these perspectives? Second, what are the internal formal and informal norms, structures and processes that have shaped the conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC in post-apartheid South Africa? How have the commercialisation of the SABC and ANC political pressures impacted these formal and informal processes, and how do these impacts shape SABC staff conceptions of independence? Formal processes and norms refer to the legal provisions meant to protect the SABC's 'independence'.³⁸ Informal processes are the interactions and hierarchies, as well as the organisational pressures and tensions, within the SABC, such as censorship and ambiguous chains of command. Both formal and informal processes are significant parts of the matrix in which the various ideas of SABC 'independence' are formed.

Consequently, this study has a dual, interlinked analytical approach. Firstly, it traces the history of the evolving relationship between the SABC as a broadcaster and the post-1994 executive and legislative bodies. Secondly, it investigates how conceptions of SABC 'independence' emerge from its evolving identity, produced by ANC political tensions and structural adjustments and how members of staff interpret these tensions and adjustments in relation to their understandings of 'independence' and the PSB's location in the matrices of power, both locally and

³⁸ Informants from the two upper tiers (i.e., the board and senior management) seem to express the view that SABC 'independence' conceptions are built only on the legal framework.

internationally.³⁹ The focus on the internal changes within the SABC is, therefore, placed in the context of the wider historical shifts occurring within South African society. As the thesis will demonstrate, primarily in Chapters 4 and 5, at times, incompatible conceptions of 'independence' are held by different levels of staff, or even by members of staff within the same level. I will suggest that, consequently, some key conceptions of 'independence' are, at times, bound to the positions that individuals occupy within the SABC, as well as by the ideological positions that inform them. As a result, I support the argument that conceptions of SABC 'independence' are not uniform and homogeneous, but, instead, are subject to persistent struggles. This perspective is central to understanding how the meaning of SABC 'independence' is socially constructed in relation to global political-economic processes. I argue that it is, therefore, difficult to explain media 'independence' without an understanding of the influences of global ideological strategies.

Thesis objectives

The key objective of this thesis is to contribute to current 'independence' debates within PSB discourse, not only in Africa but across the world. In addition, the thesis seeks to link understandings of 'independence' with the role of the media in modernity. One of the most significant current discussions regarding PSB is the role these institutions may still play in a rapidly changing media environment characterized by the proliferation of content across different platforms, a modern

³⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, structural adjustment programmes refer to free market economic reforms designed to reduce government deficits and increase economic efficiency. These adjustments have an impact on our unit of analysis; for example, they streamlined SABC activities through fiscal disciplinary measures, such as commercialization, which, in turn, led to changes within the SABC, such as privatisation and downsizing.

reality that has challenged the function of PSB in both transitional and well-established PSB countries, like the United Kingdom and Australia. In South Africa, these challenges have led to progressive erosion of the distinction between PSB and commercial broadcasting, a point that is demonstrated in the responses from participants examined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The second objective is to reveal how conceptions of 'independence' are also informed by powerful global institutions, such as the IMF. These institutions dictate policies that redefine the roles of governments and key institutions, such as PSBs, in the Global South. For example, South African post-apartheid macro-economic strategies are largely influenced by the IMF and the World Bank.⁴⁰ In the end, dichotomous sets of knowledge inform perceptions of SABC 'independence', with nationalists on one end and neo-liberals on the other. Therefore, the issue of PSB 'independence' has received considerable attention. However, most studies have tried to contextualise PSB in a larger political ideology and ignored two key areas: first, how 'independence' is understood within a PSB, and second, how PSB staff interpret particular political ideologies in relation to their understandings of independence. For example, Francis Nyamnjoh, in his study of Cameroonian media, foregrounds the larger political environment by analysing the ownership and control patterns of the media in Africa, from the colonial to the post-colonial period. Nyamnjoh argues that threats to a free, open and participatory media system and society result as often from repressive governments as from rich nations, international financial institutions and communication multinationals.⁴¹ Peter Gross's study of Eastern Europe focuses on the relationship between the

⁴⁰ See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of this influence.

⁴¹ Francis B Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Zed Books, New York 2005).

state and civil society in shaping the role of the media. Gross argues that, because the social values consonant with a democracy are not ingrained in the political culture of Eastern Europe, citizenship is defined in a limited way that seems to detract from robust participation in voluntary and civic groups.⁴² In the United Kingdom, the BBC has enjoyed stability because of the key principle that broadcasting should be independent from the state; however, commercialisation has generated debates that the role of the BBC should move away from its present model through the liberalisation of the Communications Act 2003.⁴³ The three cases above reflect the importance of 'independence', albeit within a European context. Therefore, it is important to also use an outside-in approach to locate the study of PSBs within a larger contextual narrative of their respective nations.

This thesis adds a further dimension to existing PSB 'independence' debates by examining the various conceptions of 'independence' from the perspective of SABC staff. It seeks to illuminate a discussion of 'independence' from the inside. The thesis foregrounds competing conceptions of 'independence' as a site of ideological struggle that produces conceptions generated by different individuals. The SABC is the unit of analysis, and the individuals in their respective tiers are the units of observation. This allows the study to gain deep insight into how conceptions of 'independence' are constructed, developed through interpretive explanations provided by respondents within their working environments. Accordingly, by using various individuals within their tiers as units of observation,

⁴² Peter Gross, *Entangled Evolutions: Media and Democratisation in Eastern Europe* (John Hopkins University, Baltimore and London 1989)

⁴³ Media Monitoring Report, *Television Across Europe: Regulation, Policy and Independence* (Open Society Institute EU Monitoring and Advocacy 2008)1606

the study design provides a holistic understanding of the constructions of conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC across all levels.

The different levels also reflect an organisational hierarchy, since another point of this research is that organisational hierarchy may be significant for shaping professional roles and the ways in which people construct meaning. Different positions could mean different conceptions of independence. Since the SABC is an intersection of forces stemming from its organisational structures and dynamics, that are conditioned, but not totally determined, by larger socio-economic frameworks. One of the ways in which one can appreciate such links between what is going on inside the SABC in terms of how staff conceptions of 'independence' of the SABC are shaped and these wider socio-economic frameworks is the links between the staff inside the SABC and the social actors outside it. For example, the SABC board and the chief executive officers occupy positions that enable them to serve as a conduit between powerful elites, such as advertisers and politicians, and the SABC. Advertisers and politicians, in turn, can reflect wider socio-economic frameworks that shape the media landscape in South Africa, such as the economic developments of the three post-apartheid administrations.⁴⁴

The SABC is anchored within a specific political economy in South Africa, and, thus, this thesis facilitates an examination of how staff conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC are shaped by the wider political economy within which the SABC works, and, particularly, how SABC staff interpret those conditions set by the South African economy in relation to their understandings of

⁴⁴ See Chapters 2 and 3.

'independence'. As I will show in Chapters 4 and 5, for this reason and from an internal perspective, there seems to be a significant link between the top staff levels' positions in the SABC hierarchy and their conceptions of SABC 'independence' in post-apartheid South Africa. The top levels, such as the board of directors and executive management, largely express conceptions that draw upon formal structures, including the law. This approach results in a conception of 'independence' that is 'fixed' and unequivocal. For example, in their interview responses, members of the board and executive management at the SABC often evasively referred to political interference and advertisers as if they were the only factors that shaped 'independence' conceptions. However, other respondents at lower levels of the SABC (such as middle management, producers/journalists), as well as a few in the top level, rejected this conception. The journalists and producers generated meanings of 'independence' that focused on the SABC's internal experiences, such as censorship, deference to authority and factionalism. These experiences and the 'independence' conceptions they produced are substantively discussed in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. In these three chapters, I demonstrate how internal experiences are linked to external factors, such as the battle between neo-liberalism and Keynesian democracy, as promoted by various international institutions.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 in particular, I argue that there are a number of reasons that different levels of staff within the SABC hold different conceptions of independence. The differences can be partly explained by the working environments in which lower-level members of staff operate, where organisational constraints, such as those mentioned above, tend to influence how they interpret

their professional roles. In contrast, the board and the executive management are more likely to interact with politicians from the ANC and advertisers, thus giving greater weight to the wider socio-economic factors arising from the political economy of South Africa in terms of shaping their conceptions of independence. In their interactions, the advertisers and politicians appeared to reinforce inclinations towards a legal conception of independence.

Drivers of 'independence' constructions

As this thesis has illustrated so far, the phases of transformations of the SABC and the struggles characterising the constructions of meanings of its 'independence' have been significantly influenced by two interlinked and central external factors which, in turn and to a large extent, are products of intersections of power, including global, national, local and institutional. These external factors are: (1) the commercialisation of the SABC and (2) ANC succession power struggles in post-apartheid South Africa.⁴⁵ I argue that conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC have emerged from the respondents' interpretations of the changes brought about by these two key external factors, which have played decisive roles in the re-organisation of the SABC's organisational structure and identity.

As pointed out in the opening sections, for the purposes of this thesis, organisational identity refers to the internal system of shared meanings of an organisation, particularly with respect to how the organisation defines itself.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ In Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, I trace how these are linked and are a product of the larger Washington Consensus policy dictates.

⁴⁶ Dacin PA and TJ Brown, 'Corporate Identity and Corporate Associations: A Framework for Future Research' (2002) 5 (2 & 3) Corporate Reputation Review 254,263.

Identity refers to the way in which all members of an organisation think about themselves and the organisation itself, and it is built and communicated through organisational interpersonal relationships.⁴⁷ According to my interview respondents, externally driven factors, such as commercialisation and politics, contribute to the SABC's organisational identity shifts and, consequently, to related conceptions of 'independence'. For example, commercialisation may imply a change in stakeholders and, thus, contribute to changes in how members of staff within the SABC perceive themselves. For example, members of staff perceived themselves one way when they were accountable to the public; however, following commercialisation, they became accountable to the Minister of communication.⁴⁸ These fundamental changes in accountability, especially in cases in which a minister assumes control of the SABC through shareholder power, could mean that such arrangements may erode any form of 'independence' by creating gaps for political interference. In addition, they create confusion regarding to whom the organisation should be accountable. Such institutional arrangements impinge upon the very concepts on which PSB is founded. That is, the SABC is meant to be free from the vestiges of both politics and commerce. The SABC's articulations of 'independence' fed off of these contestations, which were brought by numerous identity shifts that impinged upon key SABC identity determinants, such as

⁴⁷ DA Gioia, 'Individual, Image and Issue Interpretation; Sense-Making During Strategic Change in Academia' (2003) 41 *Administrative Science Quarterly* 370, 403

⁴⁸ I differentiate between organisational identity and organisational image—although, at times, the two can be used interchangeably. Organisational image concerns how internal staff believe that the outside world perceives their organisation. It can be divided into two aspects: Intended image, which concerns what the organisation wants others to think about it, and construed image, which concerns what the organisation believes others think about it. See Whetten I, 'Theory Development and the Study of Corporate Reputation, Corporate Reputation' (1997) *Review* 26, 34; Boros Smaranda, 'Identity and Image: The Soul and Face of Organisations' in *Exploring Organisational Dynamics* (Sage, London 2009)

appointments, funding structures and content. These shifts can be understood by tracing the socio-economic trajectories of both the SABC and South Africa.

In 1994, South Africa inherited a declining economic situation, which was made worse by the increasing government debt left by the National Party.⁴⁹ Despite adopting a socio-economic programme that focused mainly on addressing shortfalls in social services and alleviating poverty through extensive government intervention, it was clear that the ANC-led government was going to join the ranks of countries that had adopted the World-Bank- and IMF-supported macroeconomic adjustment programmes that liberalised trading policies.⁵⁰ From the 1980s to the early 1990s, the ruling National Party had already followed that particular route, as illustrated by plans to privatize public companies like ESKOM (electricity), ISCOR (steel), SASOL (oil and gas) and TELKOM (telephone services), amongst many other companies.⁵¹ The SABC, which was formerly a state broadcaster with a different legal personality, was, in post-apartheid South Africa, moved towards commercialisation in response to the ANC's attempts to tackle the twin challenges of economic and political restructuring.⁵² The move towards the commercialisation

⁴⁹ W Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001); MM Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2005)

⁵⁰ The first socio-economic framework adopted by the ANC was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which was adopted in 1994 and replaced by the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan in 1998. The RDP focused on the equitable distribution of resources. It assumed that the market, on its own, would not be sufficient to ensure freedoms and that the government would not be able to unleash the resources and stunted potential of the country and its people while minority domination of state and civil institutions persisted.

⁵¹ At this point, in the 1990s, the SABC was already restructuring (albeit not formally) towards commercialisation. These commercialisation inclinations had begun in the 1980s. The PSB had been running at a loss, and the situation was worsened by competition in the form of M-Net, a commercial broadcaster that made the broadcasting of popular national events, such as sports, expensive for the SABC. Consequently, the SABC introduced a restructuring exercise in 1989 that, according to Wynand Harmse, the CEO, was to introduce a shift from a bureaucratic entity to a commercialised one. The move saw the SABC making a profit of over 100million rands in 1992, which critics argued was not from efficiency, rather, from retrenchments and rationalisation.

⁵² I do not use commercialisation and privatisation interchangeably. Commercialisation, here, refers to a market-driven system that pursues profit. Privatisation does the same, but the ownership is different

of the SABC was prompted by a number of factors resulting from South Africa's core-periphery relationship in the global capitalist economy dominated by dictates from the Washington Consensus. First, like other state enterprises, the SABC was incurring losses that continued to be cushioned by limited government revenues. Second, the low efficiency of the SABC continued to be a source of government criticism. For example, civil society organisations continued to criticise the financial inefficiencies of the SABC.⁵³ Third, the government anticipated that proceeds from the commercialisation of the SABC would generate revenue for the PSB. However, though the SABC made significant revenues from the sale of its assets, the money was retained by the Treasury. This point will be discussed further in Chapter 4, which focuses on how commercialisation shaped conceptions of SABC 'independence'. Fourth, and perhaps more importantly, it was assumed that the commercialisation of the SABC would increase financial efficiency and accountability.

I argue that, contrary to the idea that the commercialisation of the SABC began with GEAR, the PSB's shift to a profit orientation began with the Triple Inquiry Report in 1995. In 1994, the IBA, in a move to ensure the political 'independence' and financial sustainability of the SABC, called for an inquiry into the feasibility of the SABC, particularly with regard to its ownership rules and content provisions. In 1995, the IBA adopted the Triple Inquiry Report's recommendations, the most outstanding of which was an affirmation that the SABC

because the company is in the hands of private individuals. Commercialisation can exist in various forms of ownership that may include individuals or be mixed with government ownership.

⁵³ See D Martins, 'State Broadcasting to Public Service Broadcaster: A Case Study of SABC TV News 1994-1996' (Paper presented at SABC Stock Taking Conference of the FXI 2000)<<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:4dclRrPPVYJ:africa.org?>> accessed 5 November 2010

was financially viable and that there was no need to place a cap on advertising. This led to the early stages of commercialising the SABC, which, at the time, was already considered to be part public broadcaster and part commercial broadcaster. Implementing these recommendations saw the SABC move away from the PSB model characterised by a democratic participatory ideal, in which all stakeholders were consulted before any crucial decision was taken, to a new model, in which the private consultants McKinsey and Co. were hired to drive the process of commercialisation.⁵⁴

Commercialisation is defined as the streamlining of enterprises either wholly or partially owned by the government, such that these enterprises operate as profit-making commercial projects without financial backing from the government.⁵⁵ In Chapter 4, I will further examine the drivers of commercialisation of the SABC and present some key manifestations of commercialisation that underpin the understandings of 'independence' held by SABC staff. In brief, in the context of the SABC, commercialisation manifested itself through the application of the Triple Inquiry Report proposals, including the corporatisation of the SABC. This refers specifically to the formal changing of the SABC's structure so that it operated on business lines, with a mandate to trade profitably and an obligation to account to the government for its financial performance. The commercialisation of the SABC also shapes the four key conceptions of 'independence' discussed in this thesis: namely, the anti-establishment, professional, political and legalistic

⁵⁴ Prior to commercialisation, the SABC's decision processes were deeply participatory, and the South African citizens, in their entirety, were actively involved in these processes. For example, in the past, the appointment of board members would be done live on TV through a public participatory process. Even the designing of symbolic images, such as the SABC logo, was done through a participatory process.

⁵⁵ P Preston, 'Competition in the Telecommunications Infrastructure; Implications for the Peripheral Regions and Small Countries in Europe' (1995) 19 (4) Telecommunications Policy 253-271; also see HR Zayyad, 'Privatisation and Commercialisation in Nigeria' <<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/aapam/unpan028228.pdf>>

conceptions. However, it should be noted that these conceptions are not cast in stone. Before I discuss the fluidity of the conceptions, it is important to stipulate the distinctions among them:

(1) The conception of staff throwing off an identity that they view as residue of a system of oppression through a subtle form of radicalism, in which they disengage from authority through acts of insubordination or through disengagement from SABC activities, such as training workshops. I call this the *anti-establishment conception*.

(2) The conception that, to be professional and independent, the SABC staff should have unfettered control over their own work. This conception is inspired by the way in which SABC staff believe that colleagues have a degree of control over their work. In this case, professionals serve as intermediaries between the citizens and the state. Consequently, SABC staff should not be under political, hierarchical or commercial control. For example, when an individual on the SABC board or senior management is perceived to be inclined towards a particular political party or organisational faction, the individual is automatically perceived to be unprofessional and/or to be an instrument of the particular political party or faction. Moreover, if another individual's political orientations are unknown, the individual is perceived to be a professional.⁵⁶ I call this the *professional conception*.

⁵⁶ Senior appointments at the SABC are clouded in controversy during the Thabo Mbeki era. Unlike the RDP era where national nominations were done for the board and interviews done live on national television, the Thabo Mbeki administration did the opposite. First the SABC was established as a public company and a Memorandum and Articles of Association was concluded between the SABC and the Minister of Communications. In terms of Clause 11.1 of the articles the minister can effectively veto over the appointment of any three directors (the Group chief executive officer (GCEO), the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and the Chief Operating Officer (COO) the top three managers at the SABC. The board's lack of power in the appointment process of senior managers limits its role and also determines how 'independence' is understood.

(3) Linked to the professional conception is the way in which SABC staff perceive themselves to conduct their work without any sort of interference, whether in the form of threats or of inducements by politicians. I call this the *political conception*. This conception is different from the professional conception in that it focuses on politics and the impact of politics on the organisation as whole. This includes events ranging from political appointments to budget allocation, whereas the professional conception refers only to forces that seek to directly deny staff control over their own work.

(4) This conception draws heavily on ‘independence’, as defined in various broadcasting legislation. As stated in broadcasting legislation, this conception considers politicians and commercial power to be factors that shape our understanding of SABC independence. I call this the *legalistic conception*.

These conceptions of ‘independence’ are not fixed; instead, they are in a constant flux, since they may be imagined differently depending on various settings within the SABC. For example, political interference in the work of journalists could generate a political conception of ‘independence’ and foster an anti-establishment attitude for journalists in the lower tier, but could be viewed as a legalistic conception by those in the upper tier, such as the board of governors and senior management. Therefore, the conceptions are not detached, but, instead, exist as a continuum. I further argue that the process of the commercialisation of the SABC can be further explained by reference to two competing perspectives on PSB. On one hand, there is a conservative, Reithian-inspired approach to PSB, which upholds the canonical values of universality of appeal and access, as well as the journalistic norms of objectivity, neutrality and fairness. These values demand the

SABC, not only to be accessible to everyone, but also to pursue programmes that are attractive to minorities, as well as mass audiences. The assumption here is that these values can be attained only through a PSB that is government funded and that any commercial inclinations on the part of the SABC are unfair, since they may cause the SABC to ignore minority tastes in its pursuit of mass audiences. On the other hand is a group of pro-commercialisation, neo-liberal, democracy-inspired backers that believe that commercialisation is a key condition for the 'independence' of the SABC, since it insulates the PSB against any form of state intervention and associated bureaucratic control. According to this perspective, the conservative approach is prejudiced against commerce. It is also considered to be elitist and paternalistic, since it presumes to know what is good for the public.⁵⁷ However, these two positions fall into a conceptual trap of forms of thinking that present 'independence' as a natural or divine edifice that can be attained. In addition, they both exclude subaltern voices, since they are both European-inspired solutions that masquerade as universal. Such forms of thinking, the thesis argues, mask the connection between interpretations of power and 'independence'. Apart from commercialisation, the thesis examines, as a second key factor, how internal ANC political power struggles shape conceptions of independence.

Scholarship and media reports have emphasised the role of politics (in this case, specifically, the relationship between the ANC and other political parties as an essential element to understanding the 'independence' of the SABC).⁵⁸ Yet, there

⁵⁷ Robert W McChesney, *The Problem of the Media, U.S Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (Monthly Review Press, New York 2004) 200

⁵⁸ Clive Barnett, 'Broadcasting the Rainbow Nation: Media, Democracy, and Nation Building in South Africa' (1999) 31 (3) (*Antipode*) 274-303; Max du Preez, 'I Smelled Mugabe in the SABC's Corridors' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 23 April 1999)

are problems inherent in such an argument: specifically, an ANC faced with its own internal struggles and factionalisms. My aim here is to shed light on the way in which the idea(s) of SABC 'independence' begins to take hold, but is also influenced by political tensions within the ANC, which is explained in Chapter 5. There, I further analyse the succession struggles between Thabo Mbeki and the incumbent Jacob Zuma and explain how they impact conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC. The ANC power struggles themselves are not only personal, but also deeply involved in the larger, global Keynesian versus neo-liberal debate that characterises the challenges faced by many countries in the Global South. For example, as Chapter 5 illustrates, the tensions began when Thabo Mbeki removed many left-inclined South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) ANC members from their positions, particularly during GEAR, a neo-liberal inspired macro-economic strategy that prioritised fiscal prudence. What is important, however, is how the staff at the SABC understand and give meaning to these contestations in relation to their constructions of 'independence' meanings.

In addition to other factors, the conceptions of 'independence' within both the Mbeki and Zuma factions were shaped by a process of succession, marginalisation, isolation and increasing factionalism in the struggle to create a new centre of power. For example, with the inevitable defeat of Thabo Mbeki, Zuma loyalists began to strategically position themselves within the SABC by clearly showing their allegiances. One example was the SABC CEO, Dali Mpofu, Thabo Mbeki supporter who crossed over to Zuma's camp and even had a t-shirt

displaying the message 'deployed cadre' at Polokwane, where Jacob Zuma was elected to the ANC presidency. The jostling for strategic positions played itself out, not only within the ANC, but also within the SABC.

As this marginalisation and isolation deepened, a new conception of SABC 'independence' emerged. Those individuals, groups and factions who were not accessible to the new representatives of power found themselves creating anti-establishment conceptions of 'independence' that countered the legalistic conceptions of 'independence' held by those close to the new centre of power, led by Jacob Zuma.

I, therefore, explore the character of these succession struggles and their relationship to the construction of conceptions of 'independence' at the SABC. I contend in Chapter 5 that a political conception of 'independence' is produced by these tensions. By the political conception of 'independence', I refer to the extent to which the SABC staff's understandings of 'independence' are linked to how they believe they are performing their duties without interference from politicians, either through formal or informal directives.

In Chapter 5, I also further examine the content of the new politicised narratives of independence developed by the staff within the SABC. Those who believed in Thabo Mbeki found themselves siding with their leader's ideals. There are also those who did not believe in Mbeki, but found refuge in Jacob Zuma's perspective. Still others hoped a reversal to RDP principles was inevitable with Zuma. Chapter 4, therefore, provides a background analysis that explores the origins of these tensions about succession played out between Mbeki and Zuma. It

then reverts the narrative back to how these tensions about succession shaped conceptions of 'independence' held by the staff within the SABC.

The SABC is very much part of a political culture of South Africa characterized by important, personalised leadership succession contests and is part of, a conduit for and the playground of those tensions. As a result, in ANC succession discussions, little value has been attributed to the ways in which the fragmentations within the ANC go back to the very core of the fundamentals of the struggle against apartheid. The tension between Zuma and Mbeki, which also played out within the SABC, therefore, did not begin in 2005 when Mbeki fired his deputy from government. Instead, in effect, the tension is deeply rooted in the difference in ideological preferences within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), which, along with the South African Communist Party (SACP), makes up the ruling government alliance with the ANC. Chapter 5 argues that these differences go back to the 1980s, but are primarily manifested in the early 1990s, before the first democratic elections. The differences hinge mainly on competing ideologies to which the ANC found itself subscribing. 'Independence' conceptions, therefore, materialize from factors internal to the SABC in response to these external factors and how they impact the PSB staff's perceptions of the values and ideologies that guide their work.

In order to further develop the argument that commercialisation and political power struggles within the ANC shaped conceptions of 'independence' held by the staff within the SABC, I examine in Chapter 6 how commercialisation and power struggles affected the production of editorial content, and how this, in turn, gave rise to specific narratives about 'independence' among SABC staff. This

further reinforces my analytical perspective on developing an understanding of the 'independence' of the SABC by examining how the organization's staff think about 'independence'.

Why this thesis matters

The importance of this thesis can be demonstrated by addressing four questions: Why is the study of the SABC important? Why the question of its 'independence' is important? How is this study important? And how do answers to the research question contribute to existing literature? In post-apartheid South Africa, the public broadcaster is meant to contribute to a broader process of social transformation. The SABC, as the country's biggest medium of mass communication, finds itself playing an important role in the democratic process. It is the only source of information that covers the whole of South Africa. For example, the latest statistics suggest that 86.6% of adults in South Africa watch SABC news.⁵⁹ The SABC is not only an important source of public information and channel of communication, but it also functions as an integrative tool in a profoundly divided society. It serves to convey the identities and interests of different social groups within South Africa in the pursuit of a common public sphere. In this capacity, the SABC helps to determine the relative powers, statuses and influences of various political and civil society groups. In addition, it provides an important forum for public debate and opinion formation in South African society.

Hence, the SABC is a key institution in the on-going democratisation of the South African political system. In addition, as outlined in the preceding sections,

⁵⁹ 2012 SABC Annual Report (Johannesburg 2012)

the SABC is South African; thus, it is embroiled in questions of identity, such as that of being South African, in a country whose people have never imagined themselves to be part of the same nation. Consequently, the SABC has also found it difficult to provide a common space for public communication. If anything, it has been used to reproduce ideas of difference. In South Africa, difference also translates into racism. Maldonado Torres calls this racial dimension, 'imperial manichean misanthropic scepticism' which he says is central to Eurocentric modernity. In this dimension, formerly colonised people's humanity is questioned, and their ability to run government or state institutions is under constant monitoring.⁶⁰ On the other hand, post-colonial governments also question and are in perpetual suspicion of the intentions of former colonial masters, represented particularly in civil society and opposition parties.⁶¹ The PSB's nation-building role becomes difficult to administer in such circumstances because of the tension resulting from, on one hand, civil society pursuing a watchdog role for the PSB, while on the other, tying nation-building objectives to the state and makes it difficult to separate the two. Consequently, an understanding of different conceptions of 'independence' is important for understanding what role the SABC can play in this ongoing process of building civil society and promoting the democratisation of South African public life. The study therefore expands frontiers of knowledge particularly in the fields of media and socio-legal studies. This thesis focuses on all four key levels at the SABC, a deviation from SABC literature that tends to focus on single entities as their units of observation. For example, when the literature on the SABC refers to SABC staff (which occurs rarely), it often examines a single level of the staff, such as the board.

⁶⁰ Nelson Maldonado Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the development of a concept' 21 (2-3) (Cultural Studies) 240, 270

⁶¹See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on Manichean scepticism.

Those academic accounts that do try to go beyond a single entity when discussing the SABC tend to treat 'independence' as a normative, uniform goal that can be attained. As a result, most of the literature focuses only on the macro-events, such as economic policies and, in the process, reject micro settings, such as organisational structures, and the ways in which SABC staff members interpret those macro-events. The thesis also contributes to the existing literature on the 'independence' of the SABC because it examines 'independence' from the 'ground up'.⁶² It provides deep insight into the lived organisational experiences of staff from the point of view of the staff themselves.

This approach contrasts with other research on the 'independence' of the SABC, which assumes that 'independence' meanings at the SABC are constructed solely in relation to issues of funding and the political relationship between the SABC and the ANC.⁶³ For instance, some of this research has focused on how the ANC has, in the past, been accused of interfering with the 'independence' of the SABC.⁶⁴ This thesis, instead, seeks to articulate how commercialisation and the ANC influence the constructions of 'independence' within the SABC. The thesis further analyses conceptions of 'independence' of the SABC in order to counter the

⁶² G Berger, 'Media and Democracy in Southern Africa' (1998) 78 *RSAPE* 599, 610; Jane Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-liberalism* (Freedom of Expression Institute and the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa, Johannesburg 2001b); Peter Fourie, *Media Studies: Media History, Media and Society* (Juta and Co, Cape Town 2007); Francis Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Zed Books & UNISA Press, London/New York/Pretoria 2005); Tawana Kupe and Kate Skinner, 'How the SABC Can Gain Financial Health' (Johannesburg 2009).

⁶³ L Mtimde, 'Broadcasting in South Africa' (2010) 3 (2) *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 173,179; RB Horwitz, *Communication and Democratic Reform in South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001); Ruth Teer-Tomaselli, 'Reconceptualising Public Service Broadcasting' in *Visions and Voices: Audio-Visual Media in the New South Africa* (Johannesburg: Open Window Network 1996) 17, 23. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli and K Tomaselli, 'Reconstituting Public Service Broadcasting: Media and Democracy during Transition in South Africa' in M Bruun Andersen (ed) *Media and Democracy* (University of Oslo, Oslo 1996) 217, 99.

⁶⁴ J Maingard, 'Transforming Television Broadcasting in a Democratic South Africa' (1997) 38 *Screen* 260,274.

idea that, in South Africa, the public broadcaster's 'independence' is often understood as a structural matter.⁶⁵ That is, 'independence' is provided and secured by both external and internal instruments, such as the South Africa Constitution, the different broadcasting acts and a number of the SABC's own legal documents, such as its Charter and Memorandum of Association. As pointed out in the previous sections, the thesis, therefore, argues that there are four main conceptions of 'independence' that apply in post-apartheid South Africa. These are the political, professional, anti-establishment and legalistic conceptions of independence. The purpose of the thesis is, therefore, to provide explanations for how and why ideas of 'independence' develop and sustain themselves within the SABC. I discuss whether staff within the SABC draw their understandings of 'independence' from their ideological contestations with senior management. I also explore whether and how senior management's understandings of 'independence' are influenced by their interactions with advertisers and politicians and by their own understandings of larger global processes.

There is an underlying thread that exposes a duality of thinking within the SABC staff's narratives about independence. First, when it comes to commercialisation, 'independence' interpretations hinged on ideological leanings regarding what the role of the PSB is. On one hand was a pro-commercialisation group of respondents, who rejected the traditional idea of universality of appeal or access as paternalistic and delimiting. They insisted that commercialisation is a key condition for SABC independence. On the other hand was the traditionalist group of respondents, who eschewed anything to do with commercialisation. This group maintained that public service duties cannot be left to the vagaries of the

⁶⁵ Ibid.

market. Consequently, the commercialisation of the SABC produces four conceptions of 'independence' resulting from these ideological leanings. The complexity of this duality is buttressed by one respondent, who pointed out:

It's a catch twenty-two situation: If I follow the faction in power or the ANC, I know one day Dali Mpofu [the former SABC CEO] will promote me, and if I get promoted, I will be given some independence in my work because they know where I stand. I cannot betray them [the ANC], but still, do you think under a business-minded SABC, if I do not toe the marketing manager's line, will I get promotion or be given some autonomy? I think not.⁶⁶

Second, this duality was also produced by the succession struggles of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma. During this period, SABC staff were divided into factions, depending on whether they chose Mbeki or Zuma. The tensions played out in the SABC in various ways, including partisan appointments, censorship and self-censorship. Examples included the banning of certain commentators, arbitrary suspensions and the firing of SABC staff members. These will be discussed in Chapter 5 in the context of how, after assuming power in 1999, Mbeki practised extensive clientelism in SABC affairs (particularly compared to his predecessor, Nelson Mandela). It is these factors that contributed to the evolving conceptions of independence.

The thesis, hence, argues that 'independence' is a not fixed entity, but, rather, a product of an evolving and complex matrix, in which the different tiers of staff within the SABC are constructing their own interpretations of independence, shaped by both organisational and external factors, such as politics and commercialisation. Parts of this matrix are undercurrents of competing discourses of public and national interest. The meaning of the SABC's 'independence' is

⁶⁶ Interview with former SABC Chief Operation Officer (COO), Johannesburg (Auckland Park 17 August 2011)

inextricably intertwined with and a product of the surrounding macro-economic environment, historical events and hierarchies and interactions within and outside the SABC. Therefore, understanding 'independence', the thesis argues, is best achieved by capturing the lived experiences of the actors and, consequently, following the interpretivist approach. SABC staff's social interactions do not simply happen; they happen within matrices, which include many social elements.⁶⁷ One of the fundamental claims of this thesis is that a phenomenon (in this case, independence) is socially constructed and is generally meant to undermine the previously held belief that the particular phenomenon is inevitable.⁶⁸ In his work, Hacking emphasised that the arguments for social construction are valid and that lived experiences do shape interpretations.⁶⁹ His argument shapes the thesis' central claim that 'independence' is a social construct and explains the positioning of the study within the interpretivist method. It is, therefore, important at this point to present the methodological approaches used in this study of SABC 'independence'.

4 Research framework: conceptual and methodological issues

This thesis draws on a qualitative empirical study that explores the meaning and origins of divergent conceptions of 'independence' within the post-apartheid SABC held by four different tiers of staff within the organisation. The thesis is located in the

⁶⁷ See Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Harvard University Press, London, Massachusetts 1999)

⁶⁸ Ibid 27.

⁶⁹ Hacking raises a three-pronged typology regarding the epistemic authority of knowledge. First, he argues that contingency in science is to be found in the framing of questions. Once questions are framed, the answers are non-contingent. The second type, he argues, is nominalism, which questions the relationship between names and categories as referents to the world as it is. The third is stability, which he argues questions whether the stability of knowledge is the result of correspondences between scientists' factual statements of the world as it is or the result of external factors, such as institutionalisation and social networks.

interpretive tradition. The interpretive approach is important for this study, as it places the social actors at the centre of a scientific explanation in order to unravel their subjective understandings of independence.⁷⁰ The reason for locating the study in the interpretive tradition lies in the argument that, within this perspective, social actors' interpretations involve entering into societal norms, where meaning operates and is found within the historical contexts of the interpreter.⁷¹ Even in social construction, according to Berger and Luckmann, perspectives of social construction are informed by the central concept that, over time, individuals and groups interacting together in a social system form concepts or mental representations of each other's actions and that these concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles. As a result, this thesis argues, the people's conception of reality becomes embedded in the institutional fabric.⁷² 'Independence', in this sense, is a social construction, as it is rooted in the social experiences of the SABC staff.

A critical political economy of the media (CPEM) approach

In this section, I discuss the CPEM approach and how it intersects with the interpretivist approach in explaining how staff construct conceptions of 'independence' at the SABC in the light of commercialisation and ANC political

⁷⁰ Mark Bevir and Asaf Kedar, 'Concept Formation in Political Science: An Anti-Naturalist Critique of Qualitative Methodology.' (2008) 6 (3) *Perspectives on Politics* 503, 517

⁷¹ T Butler, 'Towards a Hermeneutic Method for the Interpretive Research in Information Systems' (1998) 13 *Journal of Information Technology* 285, 300.

⁷² PL Berger and T Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books, Middlesex 1966). Berger and Luckmann have divided the process of social construction into three stages. First is externalisation, which refers to the creation of cultural products and how they become external to those who create them. Objectivation is the second stage, in which these cultural products begin to take on realities of their own and to begin to have objective existences, in which the progenitors actually lose the awareness that they are the ones who actually that created them. The third stage is internalisation, in which these values are accepted as reality and people rarely question the origins of their beliefs or the processes through which these beliefs arose.

succession struggles, which stem from the larger political economy of South Africa. The CPEM approach is, therefore, concerned, not only with the economy, but also with the transformation of the economy and its links to other areas of social life. The CPEM approach can help us understand how the macro-world, in the form of political and economic strategies, intersects with the micro-world of SABC work routines, how it meshes with and informs organisational perspectives of 'independence', and how this, in turn, is interpreted by the SABC staff through disparate experiences that feed into competing conceptions of independence. The critical political economy (CPEM) is centrally concerned with the balance between capitalist enterprise and public information and engages with moral questions of justice, equity and public good.⁷³ For that reason, it can be suggested that the CPEM is concerned with sets of social relations and the play of power.⁷⁴ Social relations include factors like patterns of interaction internal to the organisation, which also occur within the web of internal economic and political relations that play out within the organisation. Therefore, the analysis of the interplay of power and social relations in the CPEM attempts to examine how the making and taking of meaning is shaped at every level by commercialisation and ANC power struggles. Chapter 2, in its discussion of literature, highlights the insufficiency of the CPEM and, particularly, its inability to give a platform to subaltern voices. Decoloniality and de-Westernisation scholars argue that diverse societies have their own experiences that should be explained in their own terms.

⁷³ P Golding and G Murdock, 'Rethinking Mass Communications' in J Curran and M Gurevitch (eds) *Mass Media and Society* (3rd edn, Arnold, London 2000) 72

⁷⁴ Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago 1998) 23

Despite the limits of the CPEM approach, the logics of finance and political control play themselves out within the SABC through commercialisation and the ANC succession struggles. CPEM begins with sets of social relations and plays of power, and these sets of relations tend to change depending on which holds the power: commerce or politics. The SABC is then presented with a clash between the logic of PSB and that of commercial broadcasting. CPEM helps us investigate how this power, whether commerce or politics, plays out. For example, professional identities may change. For example, journalists within the SABC may experience a dichotomy in which their roles are at odds with a new system of power, such as commercialisation. As a result, their understandings of 'independence' may change with their roles.

This is where the interpretivist approach gives weight to inquiry by investigating how conceptions of 'independence' are formed.⁷⁵ As a result the interpretivist mode anchors our understanding of how commercialisation and ANC power struggles reject 'independence' as a rigid but socially constructed reality. Therefore, the critical political economy of the media serves to buttress the point at which the role of the SABC and conceptions of 'independence' vary depending on the nature of the group in power. Moreover, the contradictions brought by the changes lead to fragmented understandings of 'independence', which are socially constructed and tend to reject or build from the legal understandings of 'independence', as spelled out by the various broadcasting acts.

⁷⁵ See PL Berger and T Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books, Middlesex, England 1966). The emphasis here is that the social constructivist perspective and the interpretivist method share an importance of the actors at the centre of meaning construction.

As mentioned earlier on, this study uses an interpretive theoretical perspective. It seeks to understand the world of the staff working within the SABC, particularly their approaches to and perceptions of the 'independence' of the SABC. The study foregrounds the value of subjectivity in interpretations of meaning of independence, since the analysis of structures, such as macro-economic policies, alone prevents the study from appreciating the importance of meanings that are attributed to structures by the four different tiers within the SABC. According to Denzin and Lincoln, the interpretivist approach facilitates an analysis of the social phenomenon of 'independence' in its natural setting, as well as the attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.⁷⁶ Academic literature points out a number of advantages to the interpretive approach, including the flexibility to follow unexpected ideas during research and to explore processes effectively, sensitivity to contextual factors and the ability to study social meaning.⁷⁷

The main advantage, therefore, in using this approach to study the SABC is that the contrasting perceptions and meanings produced by the staff can be uncovered through the staff's day-to-day experiences within the corporation and across the four SABC tiers. For example, it is likely that lower-tier staff cannot have the same interpretations of 'independence' as upper-tier staff, or even as individuals, due to their different lived experiences within the PSB.

In discussing different conceptions of 'independence' and building on both the CPEM and the interpretivist approach, staff also drew on different

⁷⁶ NK Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd edition Thousand Oaks Sage, CA 2000).

⁷⁷ Ibid

understandings of a public sphere. By public sphere, I mean a space where all interest groups interact with one another to discuss issues concerning the society as a whole, it is a public space for interaction among citizens in political processes'.⁷⁸ In this case, the respondents are perpetually trying to make sense of the growing contradictions between commercialisation and political interventions within their work of serving the public sphere, such as the contradiction of providing public goods on commercial funding. The SABC is, therefore, a crucial piece and conduit for this type of public sphere. It is, however, faced with the challenges of constructing its public due to many fragmentations, which are exacerbated by commercialisation and overbearing ANC politics.

Methodological framework

This thesis is based on a qualitative empirical study of how meanings of 'independence' are constructed in a PSB context. The life-world interpretivist and the constructivist perspectives of the social world constitute the thesis' epistemological foundation. It uses the interpretivist approach to understand the conceptions of 'independence' held by SABC staff in a post-apartheid South Africa. To attain various viewpoints on the 'independence' of the SABC, over a period of three months, 36 in-depth interviews were conducted with four groups of interview respondents at the SABC: namely, board members, senior management, middle management and journalists/producers.⁷⁹ Outside the SABC, six respondents from civil society, including representatives of the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) were

⁷⁸ J Curran, 'Rethinking Media and Democracy' in J Curran and M Gurevitch (eds) *Mass Media and Society* (3rd edn, Arnold, London 2000)

⁷⁹ *Interviews were conducted in South Africa from 3 July to 28 September, 2011.*

interviewed, since these organisations have been consistent observers of the SABC since 1994. Three academics who have written extensively on the topic of the SABC were also interviewed. The reason for interviewing external respondents arose from the interviews at the SABC, in which interview respondents regularly referred to position papers and previous research findings regarding civil society in their responses. For example, evidence of the suspension or firing of staff, which could not be accessed at the SABC, was readily available in organisations such as the FXI. A number of interview respondents, especially in the lower tier, referred the interviewer to position papers and individuals in the two mentioned civil society organisations. Some of the informants preferred not to go into detail on issues of censorship and nepotism, despite assurances of anonymity. The reluctance to divulge information could be attributed to three main factors. First, despite knowing the interviewer's identity, the respondents did not know anything else about the interviewer; as a result, there was suspicion and mistrust. Second, there was a fear of reprisal by senior staff which, in itself, is a sign of lack of independence. Third, the interviewed respondents might not have been privy to the events about which they were interviewed or may have simply been part of the factions within the SABC.

The interviewees' durations of tenure at the SABC ranged from 1 month to 21 years. It was very important for the study to include people who had served in the organisation for more than 15 years, since they gave interesting accounts comparing and contrasting the present and the past, beginning with the last days of the De Klerk administration and going up to the Zuma administration.⁸⁰ Those who had served in the SABC for a short time also offered significant contributions,

⁸⁰ FW de Klerk was the last president of the apartheid South Africa.

since they could give accounts that were divorced from the organisational politics. For example, it would have been difficult for people who had served six months or less to belong to an SABC faction. The people interviewed included 8 current and former board members, 7 current and former senior management personnel (CEO, Chief Operations Officer (COO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO)), 10 middle managers and 11 producers/journalists.

It was challenging to obtain interviews with board members and senior management personnel. Initially, producers/journalists were not part of the target group; however, the interviews with middle managers raised the need to talk to producers/journalists. This was mainly because producers/journalists are at almost the lowest level of the organisation and are directly involved with programming content, which is used to gauge the success of the PSB. The four groups represent the broader organisational membership of the SABC. The board selects the highest level of management, including the CEO, and makes decisions on major budget allocations (although the appointment process is, at times breached by politicians, particularly the executive arm of the government). The SABC board, together with the senior management they select are involved in the strategic planning. In addition, they are the main link between the SABC and the external world. Middle management is the link between senior management and other lower level positions. Its position is to organise and lead the SABC towards a vision already planned and strategised by the board and the management. The

producers/journalists, as mentioned earlier, are directly involved in the day-to-day activities at the SABC, such as programme production.⁸¹

In addition to gathering interview data, I obtained and analysed archival data. The archival data came in a variety of forms, including the SABC intranet page (SABC restricted pages), SABC annual reports, internal SABC documentation and national newspaper articles about 'independence' from 1994 to 2011.⁸² It was, however, impossible to obtain minutes from meetings at either the board level or the producer level. Respondents were reluctant to release minutes. With management, it was more challenging to obtain minutes than it was to conduct interviews and often involved travelling to three different cities Johannesburg, Polokwane and Pretoria with no success. Minutes would have been very useful for my study, since they had the potential to provide historical reference points related to 'independence', such as how personnel related to each other in the three different epochs. For example, the board minutes related to the dismissal of Dali Mpofu, the CEO, and his dismissal of the Head of Editorial, Snuki Zikalala, would have given first-hand insight into the nature of 'independence' within the SABC, particularly with regard to the relationship between the board and the CEO. In the next chapter, using the CPEM and interpretivist methods, I illustrate how

⁸¹ This elite interviewing was shaped by the general PSB structure, which is a template also followed by the SABC. Consequently, the four tiers are distributed across four key areas of public broadcasting: governance, executive management, middle management and programming. In a cursory description, the top tiers are composed of the board and executive management. The SABC is governed by a board, which is obliged to submit an annual report to parliament. The board is the custodian of the SABC on behalf of the public and is responsible for ensuring efficiency and legality in the PSB's operations. The board is not involved in the daily operations of the SABC. The second tier includes the chief executive officer, the chief operations officer and the chief financial officer. These three are also ex-officio members of the 15-member board. Middle managers, who form the third tier, usually hold administrative roles. The fourth tier programming is concerned with output. In this tier are the producers/journalists.

⁸² I was given the permission to visit the basement archives at the SABC, where I was able to access material under the supervision of a librarian.

asymmetrical power relations within the SABC, at the national/local level and at the global level influence constructions of SABC 'independence' meanings.

Chapter 2: Critical political economy of the media explanations of SABC conceptions of 'independence'

2. A dual framework: The CPEM and interpretivist approaches

The objective of this chapter is to present the CPEM as an overarching conceptual framework for the empirical chapters in this thesis by reflecting the ways in which local and global matrices of power, together with Eurocentric broadcasting values, shape understandings of 'independence' within the SABC. The framework is important and relevant for the study because it recognises the links between economic and other areas of social life in explanations of independence. This chapter also illustrates the weakness of the CPEM by examining its failure to acknowledge the permanence of an abyssal line dividing the Global North from the Global South, as foregrounded by de-Westernisation and decolonisation literature.⁸³ The inability to recognise this abyssal line grounds a universalistic conception of truth, 'independence', objectivity and other 'neutral' terms that this chapter challenges. The line divides social reality in such a way that media experiences on the south side of the line are considered irrelevant and insufficient, and only the social reality of the north is taken into account, serving as the barometer for unfettered media roles.⁸⁴

The chapter, therefore, proceeds by highlighting three key areas of concern. First, it seeks to illustrate that the understanding of SABC 'independence' is influenced by and also obscures patterns of power and degrees of inequality, not only within the

⁸³SSD Santos, 'Epistemologies of the South' in *Justice Against Epistemicide* (Paradigm Publishers, London 2014) 71

There are a number of differences between decoloniality and post-coloniality. For example, post-coloniality's unit of analysis is culture, hybridity and creolisation and decoloniality's unit of analysis is power, being and structures. While post-coloniality's pillars are; Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and others, decoloniality relies on Frantz Fanon, Enrique Dussel, Du Bois and others. Post-coloniality foregrounds cultural encounters but decoloniality perceives the locus of enunciation as important (the geo and body-politic of the speaking subject is important)

⁸⁴ Ibid 80.

SABC, but at both the national and the global level. Second, and using the CPEM and interpretivist methods, the chapter also explores PSB discourse on role of the media in modernity, as raised by existing scholarship. It analyses the strengths and limits of this literature by tracing how SABC 'independence' meanings are largely two-pronged contestations between Keynesian-inspired nationalist and neo-liberal perspectives of the PSB's role. In general, nationalists tend to support the state and its decisions, whereas neo-liberalists promote the interests of capital and maintain the idea that PSB institutions should be insulated from the national government and the political influence of the presidency and parliament. On the other hand, governments are bound or suspected to convey, through their PSB accounts, ideas that buttress the relationship between the citizenry and themselves, often hidden under nation-building goals.

It is this triangle in which the SABC finds itself caught up. These shorthand political perspectives also inform SABC staff conceptions of the role of the PSB and, therefore, its 'independence'. Third, the three narratives find themselves trapped in the paradox that 'independence' is successfully promoted by all sides as an attainable, neutral phenomenon, when, in fact, it is not. Consequently, there is an asymmetry of power relations, in which powerful actors, whether pro-state nationalists or pro-market neo-liberals, have the coercive power to shape understandings of 'independence' in support of their own interests.

This chapter, therefore, moves away from discussing 'independence' as a fixed and immovable edifice by discussing various perspectives on understanding the conceptions of SABC 'independence'. It does so by using the CPEM approach and the interpretivist method as its explanatory frameworks. The chapter attempts

to provide additional insights into the various perspectives, which prove helpful in understanding how 'independence' meanings are constructed by multiple actors at the four distinct levels of the SABC in relation to the PSB and the larger horizons of political economy. Consistent with the *leitmotif* of the study, the chapter also reinforces the idea that 'independence' is a site of ideological struggle, rather than a rigid and attainable phenomenon. SABC staff understandings of 'independence' are, therefore, embedded in and shaped by the socio-economic and political environment in which the PSB exists at the local and global level. It is these hidden power dynamics in the various interpretations of 'independence' that the chapter seeks to unmask. As a result, the dual approach complements this analysis by foregrounding, first, the external environment, including the larger political and economic environments, and second, how 'independence' meanings are derived by SABC staff from dialogues and interactions within the PSB. For example, it explores the way in which SABC staff interpretations of the external factors, such as commercialisation and ANC power struggles, shape their conceptions of SABC independence. In a nutshell, the strength of this dual and multi-focal approach is that the chapter examines, not only discourses related to political and economic issues, but also the realm of the organisation, and it does so by exploring how the staff within the SABC interpret both political and economic factors in relation to their understandings of SABC 'independence'.

The CPEM approach, both in this study and in various literatures, is understood as the strand of political economy that is concerned with how the making and taking of meaning are shaped at every level by the structured

asymmetries in social relations.⁸⁵ Golding and Murdock have been especially influential in discussions of the CPEM.⁸⁶ A key concern of the CPEM is that it shows how particular micro-contexts are shaped by general economic dynamics and the wider structures they sustain, such as the government and the financially powerful.⁸⁷ By emphasizing the interplay among economic organisation, political and cultural life, this approach is relevant for understanding how SABC 'independence' conceptions are constructed within these sets of social relations and the play of power.⁸⁸ Two key aspects of the CPEM are important for this study. First, the approach is historical; that is, it examines the growth of the media, the extension of corporate reach, commodification and the changing roles of state and government intervention.⁸⁹ Second, and related to the first aspect, the CPEM approach allows the study to focus on how conceptions of 'independence' relate to and are shaped by the contexts in which interview respondents exist.⁹⁰ Using the interpretivist method, I present insights on 'independence' conceptions from the perspectives of SABC staff.

The interpretivist approach is both a theoretical perspective and a method that complements the CPEM. The interpretivist approach seeks to provide insight

⁸⁵P Golding and P Murdock, *Rethinking Mass Communications* in J Curran (ed) *Mass Media and Society* (3rd edn, Arnold, London 2000) 18.

⁸⁶Ibid (n1).

⁸⁷Ibid (n1) 22.

⁸⁸P Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship, Democracy and the Media* (Sage, London 1995) 28

⁸⁹ ANC power struggles and the commercialisation of the SABC, the two key factors that shape SABC 'independence' conceptions, fit well into this historical perspective. See P Golding and P Murdock, *Rethinking Mass Communications* in J Curran (ed) *Mass Media and Society* (3rd edn, Arnold, London 2000) 19.

⁹⁰ According to Golding and Murdock, instrumentalists focus on the ways in which capitalists use their economic power within a commercial market system to ensure that the flow of public information is consonant with their interests. Structuralism argues that owners, advertisers and key political personnel cannot do as they would like because they operate within structures that both constrain and facilitate, simultaneously imposing limits and offering opportunities. CPEM, therefore analyses the nature and sources of these limits.

into phenomena by interpreting meaning within a particular social and cultural context, with the intention to uncover meaning through a dialogical interaction between the researcher and participants.⁹¹ This approach assumes that reality is inter-subjectively constituted and shared within a particular historical, political and social context and that the researcher is the vehicle by which this reality is revealed, through a process of capturing the quality of people's interpretations.⁹²

The advantage of the interpretivist approach is that it presents the complex world of lived experience from the points of view of those who live it.⁹³ For the purposes of this study, 'independence' conceptions are based on the SABC staff's interpretations of independence. My ontological position is that SABC 'independence' conceptions comprise a reality that is specifically constructed by SABC staff in their human actions and interactions, as dictated by larger horizons of the political economy of the media. Consistent with the argument of the study from the assertions in the previous chapter, SABC 'independence' conceptions are not objective; instead, they are bound by identities, power plays and knowledges at particular times and in specific contexts.⁹⁴ The interpretivist approach, therefore, helps the study develop an understanding the SABC from the inside, through the perspectives of SABC workers' lived experiences and how the staff interpret external phenomena in relation to the knowledges that inform their positions.

⁹¹ DC Cantrell, 'Alternative Paradigms in Environmental Educational Research: The Interpretive Perspective' in R Mrazek (ed) *Alternative Paradigms in Environmental Educational Research* (NAAEE, Leithbridge 1993) 84

⁹² TA Schwandt, 'Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA 1994) 118, 137

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ See EG Guba and YS Lincoln, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA 1994) 105, 117.

Thus, we can see that there is clear merit in adopting both a critical political economy of the media approach and an interpretivist method. This approach seeks to locate the constructions of SABC 'independence' conceptions within context-specific, political and economic frames, which are critically reflective of the patterns of power that manifest themselves through exclusion, factions, censorship, inequality and so forth within the SABC. The dual approach, therefore, lends weight and support to all levels of the study's analysis. The levels of analysis range from understanding the historical changes in post-apartheid South Africa, such as different leaderships and macro-economic strategies, to how SABC staff interprets these key social processes in relation to their understandings of independence. The analytical focus, therefore, proceeds from the CPEM and foregrounds common points using the interpretivist approach. These mutual points enable a holistic approach, which places the analysis at the level of the PSB, while also explicating the PSB's relationship with the larger horizons of political economy. Through its multi-focality, the dual approach helps the study explain the subject of 'independence' more precisely. The SABC and its 'independence' is, therefore, a complex coalition of vested interests, both internal and external, informed by leftist, neo-liberal and nationalist narratives that are embedded in history and, most importantly, a broader set of power relations that compete to present their respective ideologies as 'truth'.

In order to make explicit our understanding of the complexity of SABC 'independence' as masking asymmetrical power relations, the chapter proceeds by presenting three dominant themes that emerge in PSB 'independence' scholarship—whose epistemes, I argue, have influenced the respondents' locus of

enunciation.⁹⁵ The key themes are, namely: 1) the role of PSBs in transitional democracies, 2) understanding the SABC within the ambiguities of South African reform and 3) de-Westernisation and decoloniality. All the three themes explore and illuminate issues related to the role of PSB and its 'independence'. In particular, the decoloniality epistemic perspective and literature strengthens the CPEM by speaking more effectively to power, knowledge and identity. The CPEM largely speaks to political and economic hierarchies of power but the decolonial epistemic perspective identifies *heterarchies* of power. Understanding these is important for the study because the SABC is also entangled in *heterarchies* of power internal and external, ranging from organisational hierarchies to liberal and nationalist power struggles. In the concluding section, I return to the CPEM to further illuminate the relationship between external dynamics and institutional transformations, particularly with regard to how external drivers shape knowledges and are interpreted by staff within the SABC. I begin by examining the existing literature on challenges faced by PSBs in transitions.

2.1 Challenges to a PSB's role in transitional democracies

A common theme in relation to PSB 'independence' has been the challenges faced by PSB organisations in their pursuit of shifting roles in the context of post-autocratic regimes in general and of the post-apartheid regime in South Africa in particular.⁹⁶ It is, however, necessary to understand in more detail what informs these perspectives of transitions. Addressing the nature of transitions unmask the

⁹⁵ The locus of enunciation generally refers to the geo-political and body-political epistemic location within the structures of power and knowledge from which an individual speaks.

⁹⁶ Ruth Tomasselli, *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (Anthropos, Belville 1998); Francis B Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Zed Books, New York 2005).

⁹⁶ Peter Gross, *Entangled Evolutions: Media and Democratisation in Eastern Europe* (John Hopkins University, Baltimore and London 1989); N Ndlela, 'African Media Researching the Globalization' (2009) 1 (1) *Journal of African Media Studies* 55, 68, doi:10.1386/jams.1.1.55_1

neo-liberal interpretations of transitions as parts of the knowledges that that shape SABC staff conceptions of 'independence'.

South Africa, like many other countries in the Global South, has looked largely to the Global North, particularly the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), for its reconstruction.⁹⁷ In doing so, it has also appropriated Eurocentric knowledges and even intellectual and ideological contexts that inform the role of the SABC and, therefore, ideas of its 'independence'. This Global North outlook, in line with the post-Keynesian democracy, represents the 'liberal model' supported by Hallin and Mancini, who depict it as a barometer for all 'independent' PSBs in fully-fledged democracies.⁹⁸ According to Hallin and Mancini, an independent broadcaster should cater to all interest groups and be characterised by neutrality, fairness, low levels of state regulation, objectivity and commercialism.⁹⁹

While Hallin and Mancini's approach is a helpful one, particularly when one focuses exclusively on Western media systems, it does not allow for a dynamic examination, nor does it consider individual PSBs' geographic, ideological and epistemic locations.¹⁰⁰ In addition, its claims to objectivity and neutrality demonise non-Western regimes as ideologically and intellectually inadequate. Consequently, PSBs in the Global South or in transition are largely defined by the Global North

⁹⁷ Jane Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-Liberalism* (Freedom of Expression Institute and the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa, Johannesburg 2001b)

⁹⁸ Daniel C Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004).

⁹⁹ *ibid.* Also see Katrin Voltmer, *Building Media Systems in the Western Balkans: Lost between Models and Realities* (Analitika, Sarajevo 2013).

¹⁰⁰ *ibid* 83.

theorists as deficient. Moreover, they are expected to embrace the values of objectivity, commercialism and neutrality. Wendy Willems has countered these assertions through observation that there is a predisposition among Global North theorists to represent media systems in the Global South as negative imprints of a presumably superior, Western liberal-democratic model of media-state relations.¹⁰¹ This inclination to view PSBs in the Global South as being dominated by partisan journalism and state intervention, Willems argued, is profoundly interconnected to the broader role of geo-politics in creating an ideological division of the world into so-called 'superior' and 'developed' and 'inferior' and 'underdeveloped' regions.¹⁰²

Willems' view is buttressed by Joseph Manzella, who located transformations of the media within the specific South African context.¹⁰³ Manzella looks at the broader politics of knowledge production by focusing on ideologies that inform perceptions of the role of the media in South Africa through what he calls an ideological schemata.¹⁰⁴ Manzella argues that the media in post-apartheid South Africa has been struggling for a sense of identity and a clear notion of the role of the press. He classifies these challenges into two areas, providing a useful means for understanding the ideological schematas that may influence media organisations' evolutions in South Africa. First, he traces how the media in South Africa is rooted within two key English traditions. As discussed in the preceding sections, the English media has a long-established ideological frame, in which the

¹⁰¹ Wendy Willems, 'The Ballot Vote as Embedded Ritual: A Radical Critique of Liberal Democratic Approaches to Media and Elections in Africa' (2012)71(1) *African Studies* 91, 107.

¹⁰² Wendy Willems, 'Provincializing Hegemonic Histories of Media and Communication Studies: Toward a Genealogy of Epistemic Resistance in Africa' (2014) 24 *Communication Theory* 415, 434.

¹⁰³ Joseph Manzella, 'The Star's First Draft: A News Organization Revises the Next Narrative of Race in Post-Apartheid South Africa' (2008) 14 (3) *Culture and Organisation* 261, 277.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

media functions as an oppositional watchdog for authority. The English press also effectively played this role in apartheid South Africa.¹⁰⁵ The second tradition is that the media should be a mirror or reflection of reality. It is this second role that Manzella argues is a shorthand for the Western conceit that the press is an objective and neutral observer of society. It is what African scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong'o 'glimpses of the colony from the imperial centre.'¹⁰⁶This chimes with Willems' argument that;

Global South continues to be theorized from the vantage point of the Global North. Instead of understanding the Global South on its own terms, scholarship frequently appreciates the role of media and communication only insofar as it emerges from, represents the negative imprint of, or features the active intervention of the Global North.¹⁰⁷

The second area that has shaped the evolution and, therefore, the identity and perceptions of the role of the media in post-apartheid South Africa is race.¹⁰⁸ SABC 'independence' debates anchored on objectivity, neutrality and a dis-embedded PSB have successfully hidden these racial tensions. Manzella argues that the split along racial lines has complicated how the media in post-apartheid South Africa defines itself. To support his point, Manzella uses the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) report, which, in its findings, stated that the media cater to 'white interests and reflects the world view of the white minority, and news stories and columns stereotype blacks as corrupt and incompetent'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ See Ruth Tomasselli, *Currents of Power: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (Anthropos, Belville 1998)

¹⁰⁶Thiong'o Ngugi W, *Globalectics: Theory and the politics of knowing* (Columbia Press University, New York 2012) 21

¹⁰⁷ Wendy Willems, 'Provincializing Hegemonic Histories of Media and Communication Studies: Toward a Genealogy of Epistemic Resistance in Africa' (2014) 24 *Communication Theory* 415, 434.

¹⁰⁸Joseph Manzella, 'The Star's First Draft: A News Organization Revises the Next Narrative of Race in Post-Apartheid South Africa' (2008) 14 (3) *Culture and Organisation* 261, 277.

¹⁰⁹SAHRC Report, *Faultlines* (Johannesburg 2000) 20, 21 in Joseph Manzella, 'The Star's First Draft: A News Organization Revises the Next Narrative of Race in Post-Apartheid South Africa' (2008) 14 (3) *Culture and Organisation* 261, 277.

Consequently, 'a story about corruption in government would not be perceived as a newspaper genuinely doing its job by holding a public official accountable, but as a way of proving that blacks are inherently crooked or incompetent'.¹¹⁰ Race, therefore, remains a factor in understanding definitions of the role and the identity of the media in post-apartheid South Africa. This view is also supported by a former news editor, who said, 'there are many divisions, but racism we have learnt to live with'.¹¹¹ The struggle that South Africa faces in trying to unite a divided society has played itself out in the media, where practitioners are seemingly failing to construct a common platform. On one hand, there are some who vehemently defend any government position, and on the other, there are those who assume that reporting on government means taking an oppositional role, which some perceive as racist. The SABC, as a macrocosm of South Africa, has also faced the challenge of creating a new identity, and, as a result, of determining what it should be independent from.¹¹² The ideologies that inform the role of the media in post-apartheid South Africa have proceeded from a number of incompatible sources. The watchdog, nation-building and mirror roles have resulted in an identity crisis fuelled by power dynamics. In particular, the watchdog and mirror roles have grown out of Western beliefs and have not fit well in South Africa. The nation building role has also exhibited some apartheid elements, such that the nation and its interests were imagined as Afrikaner interests, while, in post-apartheid South Africa nationalist-inspired state interests are largely viewed as national interests. At the centre of the struggles is the appropriation of Western media values into the Global South.

¹¹⁰ Ibid 92.

¹¹¹ Interview with former news editor (Johannesburg 23 July 2011)

¹¹² Clive Barnett, *Language, Media and Politics of Representation in South Africa* (Reading, University of Reading 1998)

Western media values draw largely from the traditional theories of liberty of the press, which, a significant number of theorists have argued, have become obsolete in the 21st century for a plethora of reasons, ranging from the evolving forms of state censorship to new digital technologies.¹¹³ John Keane traces how traditional theories of the liberty of the press originate from the perspective that, if the state remains unchecked, it is bound to become despotic, and how the media and, particularly, public services should play the crucial role of the fourth estate.¹¹⁴ Walter Lippmann shares a view similar to that of Keane, terming the media a 'watchdog' that provides checks and balances for established political and economic powers.¹¹⁵ It follows that PSBs should not only be free from the control of established powers, but should also alert the public of any intrusion by the established powers.¹¹⁶ Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, however, add a new twist to the fourth estate/watchdog discourse. They offer a distinctly Marxist reading, which claims that the media will always be a dependent variable that reflects the

¹¹³ John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge, Polity Press 1991)

¹¹⁴ John Keane develops what he calls four key species of philosophical discourses that inspire the liberty of the press theories. First is the *theological* approach, which criticises state censorship in the name of the God-given faculty of reason that should be enjoyed by individuals. The second philosophy is guided by the *rights of individuals*; it dismisses religious justifications of press censorship and is against theocratic rule. The third is the theory of utilitarianism, which views state censorship of public opinion as a license for despotism and as being contrary to the principle of maximising the happiness of the governed. Finally is the idea of attaining the *truth* through unrestricted public discussions among citizens. This fourth type of discourse relates to the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, which will be discussed in the third section. The fourth estate is a phrase attributed to Edmund Burke that refers to the media as a fourth branch of government that is important for a functioning democracy. Generally, it refers to a force outside the power structure. John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge, Polity Press 1991).

¹¹⁵ Walter Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy* (Mentor, New York 1955)

¹¹⁶ Winston Mano presents another way through which the media can be used by established powers by using a Zimbabwean example. He points out that in any organisation, it is expected that new recruits undergo a re-orientation process. However, he points out that in Zimbabwean media organisations this re-orientation largely turns out to be a thorough ideological repositioning of new recruits according to the proprietors' policies and politics. See Mano Winston, 'Press freedom, professionalism and proprietorship: Behind the Zimbabwean media divide' *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 2005 (University of Westminster, London), Special Issue, 56, 70

system of social control in which it exists.¹¹⁷ Consistent with the argument of this thesis, Hallin and Mancini acknowledge that political culture is important, but that media institutions have an impact of their own on other social structures. Throughout their book, they argue that the relationship between media systems and social systems has not yet been analysed. Mancini and Hallin are, however, also stuck in the PSB transition debate, which treats 'independence' as an objective phenomenon. This thesis, instead, seeks to add insight by going further into the PSB and understanding constructions of 'independence' from the perspective of those who work within the media in general and with the SABC in particular and by offering alternatives to the subordination-autonomy literature, which emphasises the need for 'independence' to be defined in relation to its distance from the state, which always seeks to subordinate the PSB to its whims.

This body of literature is clearly concerned with PSB independence; however, the literature has so far not recognized or accounted for the importance of interpreting 'independence' through the lens of the Global South or through what Schwandt calls the complex world of lived experiences from the points of view of those who live it.¹¹⁸ This literature has generally fallen short when it comes to explaining 'independence' from the perspectives of the relevant actors in this case, PSB staff. The weaknesses of the approach have not gone unnoticed. Gwyneth Henderson, a former long-serving BBC, points out this oversight:

¹¹⁷ See DC Hallin and P Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three models of Media and Politics* (University Press, Cambridge 2004) 8

¹¹⁸ TA Schwandt, 'Constructivist, Interpretivist Approaches to Human Inquiry' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA 1994) 118, 137

We have underestimated the nature of the organisational dinosaurs that were, and still are, in most places and in state media, hugely over-staffed and riddled with bureaucratic structures and procedures.¹¹⁹

Henderson's proposed analytical focus for examining the bureaucratic structures and procedures of PSBs supports the objective of this chapter and the study: that there is a significant dearth of PSB literature concerning understanding 'independence' from an interpretivist perspective and from within the organisations themselves (i.e., through the inside-out approach outlined in the first chapter). Therefore, this study does not take SABC 'independence' as a solid edifice; rather, it views it as a phenomenon constructed by many agents, resulting in various conceptions of 'independence'. The study, therefore, challenges the conceptions of 'independence' offered particularly in official government legal documents. The idea is to move away from analytical methods that produce objectified versions of 'independence', which subsume people's actual speech and what they have to say about their own experiences. After examining the traditional literature in this section, it is also important to explore the SABC within the dynamics of reform in South Africa.

2.2 Understanding SABC 'independence' within the South African ambiguities of reform

The reform of broadcasting in South Africa is aligned with democratic reforms. As a result, the SABC functions as a tool for inclusive political communication.¹²⁰ While the SABC cannot, by itself, secure democracy, it is still a significant conduit for open discourse, secured through its mandate to broadcast in the public interest.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Gwyneth Henderson, 'State Media, A History of Lost Opportunities' (Contribution to the Conference on Media for a Democratic Europe, Transformation of Broadcasters, in Fry, Belgrade, December 10-12, 2000) <<http://archive.medienhilfe.ch/Archiv/2000/statemedia.htm>>

¹²⁰ This functionalist perspective supports Fackson Banda's point that PSBs in Africa are used to promote state objectives.

¹²¹ See SABC Broadcasting Charter

Consequently, the SABC is an arena for active citizenship and democratic participation in post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, through its role of broadcasting in the public interest, the SABC should be free from political and economic control.¹²² However, the South African case raises important questions regarding the meanings and conceptualisations of citizenship, public spheres, the public and the national interest. To understand staff constructions of SABC 'independence', it is important to also understand the environment that informs and shapes their outlook and how the staff themselves interpret their own environment.

A cursory glance reveals that citizenship in its broadest sense refers to the legal status providing rights and duties to members of a nation state. This definition derives from Thomas Humphrey Marshall, who does not necessarily define what it means, but, rather, how it works. Marshall suggests that citizenship is about the development of civil, political and social rights, especially because it is a restricted description of citizenship and because this definition does not take into account social inequalities. Nevertheless, traditional PSB arguments are built on this notion of citizenship. The PSB tries to minimise these inequalities through, for example, its educative function. This chimes with Habermasian ideas of the public sphere. Habermas conceptualizes the public sphere as the realm of social life in which the exchange of information and views on questions of common concern can take place so that public opinion can be formed.¹²³ In contemporary society, the PSB provides and is the platform for this third social space: the public sphere.

¹²² IBA Act 1999.

¹²³ Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere; Citizenship, Democracy, Democracy and the Media* (Sage, London 1995) 9

Karol Jackubowicz illustrates how public sphere citizenship and civil society work. He argues that citizenship is the foundation of the edifice of democracy and that the democratic state and civil society are the walls that keep each other in place and preventing the edifice from collapsing.¹²⁴ The public sphere is the roof. He defines the public sphere as the space between government and society, in which private individuals provide formal and informal control over the state through the election of government and the pressure of public opinion.¹²⁵ Habermas reiterates Jackubowicz's point by stating that:

It is the formal vote and the actual opinion and will-formation of individual voters that together connect the peripheral flows of political communication in civil society and the public sphere with the deliberative decision-making of political institutions at the centre, thus filtering them into the wider circuitry of deliberative politics.¹²⁶

The logic of citizenship and the public sphere is eclipsed by practical difficulties in the prevailing political and economic climate of South Africa, which lead to redefinitions of citizenship and, therefore, the reconstruction of PSB.¹²⁷ These inequalities are largely shaped by, as shall be argued in the following chapters, the subordination of redistributory objectives to fiscally oriented macro-economic strategies dictated by the Washington Consensus and an interventionist ANC government. According to critiques of Marshall and Habermas' concept of citizenship and the public sphere, there are always inequalities created by the ever-existing power structure, which may distort the deliberative nature of the public sphere.¹²⁸ As such, it is important to trace and clarify the natures of the African

¹²⁴K Jackubowicz, 'Stuck in a Groove or Why the 60s Approach to Communication Will No Longer Do' in S Splichal and J Wasko (eds), *Communication and Democracy* (Ablex, Norwood 1996).

¹²⁵ibid12.

¹²⁶Habermas Jurgen, *The Structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a bourgeoisie society* (MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts 1991)

¹²⁷ibid (n45)

¹²⁸ See Habermas (n126).

public sphere in general and of the South African public sphere in particular, as these may influence the role of the SABC.

Dahlgren argues that the public sphere exists in particular relational settings that include varying cultural and political practices. This perspective raises the need to interrogate the scope of democratic practice in South Africa, leading to the question of who the public is in South Africa.¹²⁹ Linz and Stepan poignantly argue that the development of a public sphere, within which civil society institutions and social movements can deliberate their positions and engage the state, is a central ingredient in democratization and in the consolidation of a new political culture following a transition to democracy in constitutional terms.¹³⁰ South Africa, as an emerging democracy, has ideas congruent with the above argument because the post-apartheid government has actively convened a public sphere bristling with institutions and policies designed to facilitate public deliberation, especially during the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) era.¹³¹ The RDP was an economic policy adopted in 1994 that was based on redistributory goals, democracy, participation and development. Rather than follow the perspective that economic growth and redistributory goals are contradictory processes, the RDP tried to merge the two.¹³² It has been widely argued that the post-apartheid government has not been consistent with that of the early RDP. For example, during the Growth Employment and Distribution programme, a macro-economic policy that succeeded the RDP, the 'public' began to mean the ANC-led government, as the majority party in parliament and, therefore,

¹²⁹ *ibid* (n53) 136.

¹³⁰ *ibid*.

¹³¹ The next chapter discusses the three key post-apartheid macro-economic strategies in more detail.

¹³² R Peet, *Geography of power: Making global economic policy* (Zed Books, London and New York 2007) 136

decision-making.¹³³ Consequently the general consensus is that, in South Africa, what constitutes the 'public' is highly fragmented. This fragmentation is the greatest challenge to defining what public means.¹³⁴

The assumption is that continued development of a Habermasian public sphere in its ideal form would contribute to the transformation of South Africa into a more vibrant democracy. It would help facilitate the creation, at least, of a single public, and, therefore, a clearly defined PSB. The South African public sphere is, however, hindered by many inequalities, including differences in socio-geographic patterns, such as divisions between rural and urban areas and different races and inequalities of wealth and power. While it is important to point out the weaknesses of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, this approach does give us a perspective from which to think about the problem of citizenship in South Africa. Kaarsholm suggests that the South African situation is challenged by the fact that its sense of citizenship is characterized by a plethora of ideas conceived in terms of a historical narrative that espouse different ethnic, geographic and cultural identities.¹³⁵ Kaarsholm's argument has value, but he overlooks the vital point raised by the African scholar Peter Ekeh regarding the two African publics: the primordial and the civic. Kaarsholm overlooks the two African publics because he tries to shoehorn the Western type of citizenship into the South African arena. He also ignores Dahlgren's argument that the public sphere exists in particular relational settings that include varying cultural and political practices. Ekeh argues that the experiences of colonialism have created two publics in post-colonial Africa.

¹³³ C Barnett, 'The Limits of Media Democratisation in South Africa: Politics, Privatisation and Regulation' (1999) 21 MCS 274. GEAR, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, is a macro-economic policy that prioritizes the reduction of fiscal deficits, the lowering of inflation and the liberalization of capital flows.

¹³⁴ Preben Kaarsholm, 'Public Spheres, Hidden Politics and Struggles Over Space: Boundaries of Public Engagement in Post-Apartheid South Africa' (2009) 35 SD 411

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

His argument is based on the idea that the post-colonial present, as well as its ideologies, politics and spheres of morality, have been, to a large extent, shaped by its colonial past.¹³⁶ Ekeh points out that many of Africa's political problems are due to the dialectical relationships between the two publics fashioned by the colonial experience.¹³⁷ The first of the two publics is the primordial public realm. The primordial is closely identified with primordial groupings, ethnic loyalties, sentiments and activities, which are said to influence individuals' public behaviours and to operate on the same imperatives as the private realm. The second is the civic public realm. This realm is associated with colonial administration and is based on structures like the civil service, police, military and other structures that include state institutions. This realm is amoral and has no obligations to the private realm, as can be found in the primordial public.¹³⁸ Ekeh argues that these two publics exist side by side and that a great deal of modern post-colonial politics owes much to their existence. He also argues that educated African citizens are part of both: On one hand, they belong to a civil public, from which they gain materially but to which they give grudgingly, and on the other, they belong to a primordial public, from which they derive few material benefits but to which they give generously.¹³⁹ Ekeh argues that modern African politics are, in large measure, a product of the colonial experiences that created the two publics. He contends that the historical context of African politics, especially as it emerged from colonialism, has given a different character to African conceptions of citizenship from the Western model, and, in effect, that citizenship has acquired a variety of meanings,

¹³⁶ Peter Ekeh, 'Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement' (1975) 17 AHS 91

¹³⁷ Peter Ekeh, 'Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement' (1975) 17 AHS 91

¹³⁸ *ibid* (1366).

¹³⁹ See Ekeh (n136)

which depend on whether it is conceived in terms of the primordial public or the civic public.¹⁴⁰

The individual sees his/her duties as moral obligations, which benefit and sustain the primordial public of which he/she is a member. The citizenship structure of the civic public is different because it is amoral, and there is a great deal of emphasis on its economic value.¹⁴¹ An interesting facet of these two publics is how they engage in dialogues with Marshall's concept of citizenship. Marshall emphasizes that the citizen has rights to be on equal terms with other citizens and that these rights are directly associated with institutions, such as civil courts of justice, parliament, councils of local government, educational systems and social services. One would add the public broadcaster as a public sphere and civil society institution. On one hand, the citizen does not only enjoy rights; he/she also has obligations to the state, including paying taxes and giving back to the state. Rights, duties and obligations, as espoused in Marshall, are completely met in the primordial public. However, rights in relation to the state (e.g., political and civil rights) are not central to the primordial public, but are, instead, aspects of civil public life. On the other hand, with the civic public, the individual seeks to gain, but has no moral urge to give back. Most educated Africans, Ekeh adds, are citizens of two publics in the same society. They belong to a civic public, from which they gain materially, but to which they contribute grudgingly.

According to Ekeh, in the post-colonial era, there are two critical bourgeois groups that influence African politics. The first is the colonial administrators, who, after colonisation, were defeated at the polls and largely occupy spaces in civil

¹⁴⁰ Ekeh (n136) 10

¹⁴¹ Ekeh (n136) 12

society and in opposition parties. The second group is the former African bourgeoisie, born out of the colonial experience, whose members occupy governing positions in post-colonial Africa. Consequently, post-colonial Africa, according to Ekeh, is fashioned by the tension between these two groups in their attempts to influence and legitimate their rule over ordinary Africans.¹⁴² Ekeh's argument provides a firm foundation for understanding the South African nationalist versus neo-liberal contention, particularly where the SABC is concerned, as discussed in the first chapter. These two publics are essential in understanding ideologies that inform issues of power, knowledge and identity in post-colonial Africa. In South Africa, these two groups advance ideologies that favour their own respective interests and are both largely anchored in the Keynesian nationalist-inspired democracy versus neo-liberal democracy. The primordial public advances loyalties, particularly those created during the struggle against colonisation. These loyalties, which are, at times, racial, and were created over time during the struggle, largely inform the nationalist perspective in post-apartheid South Africa, in which individuals support and defend state decisions. This primordial public is set against the neo-liberal democracy-inspired civic public, which is generally viewed by the nationalist as a remnant of colonialism. Others have argued that the civic public preaches democracy, good governance and 'independence' while actually hiding a neo-liberal agenda of leaving state institutions to the whims of the market. Moreover, the market in South Africa is entangled with racial explanations, since the market is white due to the economic gains resulting from the apartheid. According to nationalists, in reality, the neo-liberal agenda is questioning the

¹⁴² Ekeh further breaks down the primordial loyalties and points out how they also influence tribalism in African politics.

ability of the native to occupy Western-created institutions, such as the PSB, and is the continuation of a strategy to keep the native away from such institutions through the mask of a benevolent intervener, which extends from the idea of the colonialist as a humanist intervener. It is these ideological leanings that find themselves informing people about what citizenship is, what the role of the PSB is or what the 'independence' of the PSB is. 'Independence', therefore, becomes a term used by both sides to mask their respective struggles to legitimize their own power. Consequently, conceptions of 'independence' are influenced by these ideologies, which are bourgeoisie in their pursuit and largely represent a governing elite and a non-governing elite that have become entangled in an ideological conflict in their efforts to unseat each other.¹⁴³

Mahmood Mamdani adds an interesting dimension to the two publics. Mamdani points out that the history of civil society in Africa is laced with racism, since it was, first and foremost, a society of colonizers and an invention of the colonial state.¹⁴⁴ His assertion is congruent with that of Ekeh; he says that, while civil society was racialised, native authority was tribalised.¹⁴⁵ This argument buttresses the idea that post-colonialism was not a rapture, but a continuation. In both eras, the colonial and post-colonial, the larger public has had its voice stifled by those in power, who claim to represent it. Mamdani adds that the 'independence' of African states has tended to deracialise the states, but not civil

¹⁴³ Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks, *Communication and Citizenship; Journalism and the Public Sphere* (Routledge, London 1997).

¹⁴⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Colonialism* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1996) 1.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

society, and that historically accumulated privilege, usually racial, has been embedded and defended in civil society.¹⁴⁶

The current South African President, Jacob Zuma, has, in the past, added his voice in support of Mamdani's argument. In response to attacks from civil society, he has been quoted as saying, 'public opinion is a dissident voice because it is the surviving voice of the minority informed by the historical, social and political position of this minority'.¹⁴⁷ Mamdani underscores these sentiments by declaring that, following the deracialisation of the state, racial privilege not only receded into civil society, but defended itself in the language of civil rights, individual rights and institutional autonomy, while, on the other hand, the victims of colonialism formulated their demands in the language of nationalism and social justice. Mamdani's argument rejects Ralf Dahrendorf's assertion that authorities play an indispensable role in introducing and respecting civil, political and elementary social rights and in the creation of institutions that safeguard their exercise.¹⁴⁸ Mamdani's view is that these civil societies and institutions are already laced with prejudices emanating from historical legacies. It is these historical legacies that inform how key terms, such as national and public interest, are understood within respective African contexts.

In South African discussions of SABC 'independence', it is critical to interrogate key terms, such as national and public interest, because they are the foundations upon which PSB is built.¹⁴⁹ PSB always has a specific responsibility to

¹⁴⁶ Mamdani (n143) 20.

¹⁴⁷ (Staff Reporter) 'Where to civil society?', *The Sowetan*, (Johannesburg 13 October 2003) 4

¹⁴⁸ Ralf Dahrendorf, 'The Changing Quality of Citizenship' in Bart Steenbergen (ed) *The Condition of Citizenship* (Sage, Newbury Park, California 1994).

¹⁴⁹ Normally, PSBs attempt to promote deliberation and dialogue among citizens, and PSB staff members emerge as facilitators by both framing and presenting issues with no interference from powerful interests, such as politicians and advertisers.

broadcast material in the public interest, as its remit is one of public service.¹⁵⁰ Such a description dictates tension for the African PSB, which is often used as a conveyor of developmental objectives, as argued by Banda and Nyamnjoh.¹⁵¹ A situation in which the PSB is used as a government tool could blur the lines between public, government and state broadcasting. State broadcasting is controlled by the state for state interests, and government broadcasting is controlled by the government of the day and represents viewpoints of the executive.¹⁵² In South African definitions, developmental goals may not necessarily be in the public interest because the two concepts clash by definition.¹⁵³

The abrupt discontinuation of the RDP programme, the re-distributory and participatory approach that was replaced by GEAR and other macro-economic strategies, meant an increase in the need for distinct definitions of public and national interest due to manifest strains of authoritarianism and partisanship. In cursory terms, the national interest became an elite contract in South Africa. The difference between the national and the public interest definition became clear in 2002, when Joel Netshitenze of the ANC contrasted the two concepts as follows:

National interest cannot and is not defined or decreed as such in any statute. One can refer to it as a sixth sense which evolves out of experience, with the evolution of a nation and a nation state. Often it is invoked by an ultimate social authority which is the state...it is viewed as being of a higher social order, and appeals practically to everyone within a given nation...on the other hand, public interest can be viewed as being in the interest of a section of a polity or nation state, usually civil society or the aggregate of individuals who make up society as distinct from state institutions. It eschews formal authority and expresses itself as being autonomous of

¹⁵⁰ See E Etzioni-Halevy, *National Broadcasting under siege*, (St Martins Press, New York 1987)

¹⁵¹ See Banda and Nyamnjoh.

¹⁵² Ibid (n146)

¹⁵³ See section below for the definitions of national interest and public interest.

government or and society or the courts can invoke the...it also evolves with a nation.¹⁵⁴

According to Netshitenze, the national interest never sits comfortably with the public interest because, by definition, they are offset against each other.¹⁵⁵ However, in a socialist state, the 'national interest' would not necessarily be elitist. The elitist nature of the national interest in post-RDP South Africa was, therefore, apparent when Joel Netshitenze, the head of the Government Information and Communications System (GCIS), was asked whether the SABC should serve the national or public interest. His response was, 'My answer is South Africa should serve both...overall, there will be those who do not accept the national interest. It is their right but don't let them claim to speak on our behalf. Don't let them draw us back'.¹⁵⁶

Netshitenze view is interesting because it justifies control of the SABC by any government in power. It is nationalistic in perspective. As a result, debates about the 'independence' of the SABC tend to centre on whether one adopts the national(istic) interest perspective of 'independence', which pushes the SABC to promote developmental objectives, or the public interest conception, which, according to Netshitenze, is informed by neo-liberal perspectives that hold the

¹⁵⁴ Government Communication Information Systems (GCIS), *Position Paper 27* (Unpublished 2002)

¹⁵⁵ The two terms national interest and public interest have always resisted precise definitions and have remained unclear concepts that rely on context for definition. breaks the national interest definition into two levels: the aspirational and the operational. First, the aspirational level refers to the vision of the good life an ideal set of goals that the state would like to realise. Second, the operational level refers to the sum of interests and policies pursued, which represent the predominant concern of the government and/or party in power and are less easily tolerated by other groups, such as civil society, due to problems of implementation and their inherent contradictions .Joseph Frankel, *National Interest* (Macmillan, London 1970) 55

¹⁵⁶ Joel Netshitenze, 'Should the Media Serve the National or the Public Interest?' (Paper presented at Media Freedom Day, held at the University of the Witwatersrand Graduate School of Humanities, 19 October 2002)

perspective that the market is important and can act as an insulator to any political forces that seek to encroach on the SABC.

Nonetheless, the national interest as a concept is meant to define the aggregate of things that guarantee the survival of a nation state and a nation, and it is directed from the top. Public interest is meant to represent the interests of the aggregate collective of citizens independent of state institutions. The national interest, as set by the ANC, is bound to contrast with the public interest. For example, the developmental state model propagates the idea that South Africa should be represented in a positive light by the media for investment purposes (e.g., in the national interest, the government may prefer for crime stories not to be broadcast in order to attract foreign investment). However, the public interest which is defined by the ANC as the domestic interest, may require these broadcasts so that members of the public can be aware of their environment. Consequently, understanding the tension between the two terms enhances a meaningful grasp of our understanding of SABC 'independence' conceptions since, at their core, they incorporate an understanding of the dynamics of citizenship, the public sphere, and democracy within the South African context, which shapes, not only the role of the SABC, but also SABC staff understandings of 'independence'.

Discussions of SABC 'independence' are, therefore, embedded in a plethora of interrelated processes and factors, such as identity, power, citizenship, the public sphere and the public interest. However along these processes, it appears that objectivity is at the centre of PSB 'independence' discussions. Objectivity itself has been questioned and labelled as Eurocentric in decoloniality literature regarding the Global South. Within decoloniality literature, objectivity, a pillar upon

which 'independence' is built, is criticised as a fundamental Eurocentric premise that assumes a sole epistemic tradition from which truth and universality can be achieved and, in the process, hiding the reality that individuals speak from particular locations of power. Consequently, according to decoloniality scholarship, Eurocentric media theories presuppose that the Global North is a model for media freedom and that the Global South is an example of restrictive regimes with firm control on the media. Peruvian scholar Anibal Quijano calls this approach the colonial power matrix, an organising principle involving exploitation and domination exercised in multiple dimensions of social life, from economic, sexual and gender relations to political organisations, structures of knowledge and state institutions.¹⁵⁷ In the next section, I examine how decoloniality scholarship confronts the Eurocentric emancipatory imagination of the media role in the Global South in general and in the South African PSB in particular. The focus moves away from the critical thinking that focuses on class struggle and acknowledges the validity of ethno-cultural-racial struggles.¹⁵⁸

2.3 Independence, decoloniality and the de-Westernisation of public service broadcasting

The decolonial epistemic perspective seeks to question the seamless imposition of Western ideas on all facets of life in the global South by analysing experiences created by colonialism and sustained by coloniality. The perspective does not dismiss Western epistemic perspectives, instead it provides a located framework for debates on modernity by foregrounding what Mignolo calls 'the critical thoughts emerging in the colonies and former

¹⁵⁷ Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Ethnocentrism and Latin America' (2000) 1 (3) NEPANTLA 533-580.

¹⁵⁸ BDS Santos, 'Epistemologies of the South' in *Justice Against Epistemicide* (Boulder, London 2014) 26.

colonies'.¹⁵⁹ Mignolo's perspective is further buttressed by Vattimo Gianni who stresses that the decolonial perspective is not a theoretical cul-de-sac but the search for other possible knowledges and worlds.¹⁶⁰ To understand decoloniality it is important to first point out the difference between colonialism and coloniality.

Maldonado Torres defines colonialism as a political and economic connection in which the sovereignty of a nation rests on the power of another nation, which makes the nation in control an empire.¹⁶¹ While colonialism has been dismantled coloniality remains the residue. Coloniality therefore refers to long-standing patterns of power that have emerged as a result of colonialism and they define culture, labour, inter-subjective relations and knowledge production in a relationship of domination and subordination.¹⁶² In the light of the above, a decolonial perspective is an epistemic intervention that seeks to make visible the invisible by including the critical reflections of the 'invisible' people themselves by means of promoting a shift away from North-American and Eurocentric epistemic perspectives through analysing the mechanisms that produce the invisibilities.¹⁶³ This means the decolonial epistemic perspective also criticises the theories which are also critical of modernity, but which are within the bounds of modernity like post-structuralism, postmodernism and post-colonialism. Understanding this perspective calls for one to grasp its three

¹⁵⁹ Mignolo, Walter 'Coloniality of power and decolonial thinking', *Cultural Studies* vol 21 (March/May 2007 Taylor and Francis) 155-167

¹⁶⁰ Gianni V, *The End of modernity*, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University 1991)

¹⁶¹ Torres, NM, 'On the coloniality of being; Contributions to the development of a concept 'Cultural Studies vol 21 (March/May 2007 Taylor and Francis) 240-270

¹⁶² Ibid

¹⁶³ Ibid n(159)

key underpinning pillars, namely, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of power and coloniality of being.

Coloniality of knowledge is about the silencing and downgrading of other epistemologies to the margins. It hides its locus of enunciation by claiming to be objective, totalising and universal.¹⁶⁴ Coloniality of power speaks to how a crucial structuring process in the modern world system articulates power in order to systematize the world according to the dominant-subordinate Euro-American perception of the colonised subject. In support of the assertion, Immanuel Wallerstein points out;

For the last fifty years, peripheral states that are today formally independent, following the dominant Eurocentric liberal discourses, constructed ideologies of national identity, national development and national sovereignty produced an illusion of independence, development and progress. Yet their economic and political systems were shaped by their subordinate position in a capitalist world-system organised a hierarchical division of labour.¹⁶⁵

Coloniality of being refers to a world in which lordship and supremacy rather than generous interaction define social dynamics in society. The concept starts from a position of scepticism the humanity of the colonised is questioned.¹⁶⁶ This is emblematic of the endemic questioning of post-colonial institutions in the global South. For example, the presenting of PSBs in the global south as examples of 'non-independent' organisations in contrast to those in the West. Decolonisation is therefore an opposition to coloniality of power, being and knowledge that calls for pluri-versality where knowledges from the south are also given space.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid n(160)

¹⁶⁵ Wallerstein, I, *After Liberalism*, (New York, The New Press 1995)

¹⁶⁶ Ibid n(161)

Decoloniality scholars argue that Western particularism, through its epistemological colonisation, de-centres the context in which the Global South exists.¹⁶⁷ These scholars posit that, in order to gain a better understanding of the role of media and communication in the Global South, a shift has to be made from the Western-inspired comparative media systems approach to a more descriptive and contextual comparative media cultures approach.¹⁶⁸ Africanist scholar Wendy Willems argues that, through adopting the media culture rather than media systems as the object of study, it becomes possible to investigate the role of media in and from the perspective of people's everyday lives in the Global South.¹⁶⁹

Ramon Grosfoguel takes a step further by questioning the Western episteme, in line with Donna Haraway's assertion that all knowledges are situated, when he states that, in Western philosophy and science, the subject that speaks is always hidden and concealed from analysis.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, the disembodied and un-located neutrality and objectivity of what he calls the ego-politics of knowledge is a Western myth. Castro Gomez supports this view by emphasising what he calls 'point zero', saying that the Western canon is a point of view that presents itself as non-situated and masks itself as being beyond a particular point of view: a point of view that represents itself as being without a point of view.

¹⁶⁷ SJ Gatsheni-Ndlovu, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonisation* (CODESRIA, Dakar 2013); WD Mignolo, 'Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking' [2007] 21 (2/3) *Cultural Studies* 155, 167; N Maldonado-Torres, 'On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept' [2007] 21 (2/3) *Cultural Studies* 240, 270.

¹⁶⁸ W Willems, 'Provincializing Hegemonic Histories of Media and Communication Studies: Toward a Genealogy of Epistemic Resistance in Africa (2014) 24 *Communication Theory* 415, 434

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ R Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political Economy Paradigms' (2007) 21 (2/3) *Cultural Studies* 203, 246.

See Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives' [1985] 14 *Feminist Studies* 575, 599

African scholars like Sabelo Gatsheni-Ndlovu add weight to the claims by pointing out that the coloniality of power is closely linked to the coloniality of knowledge a useful concept in understanding how post-colonial Africa is subordinating others and colonising the imaginations of colonised peoples.¹⁷¹ Gatsheni-Ndlovu adds that the Western knowledge culture was integrated for the purposes of the reproduction of colonial domination, and the African continent has not yet managed to free itself from the colonisation of the mind and imagination.¹⁷² Gatsheni-Ndlovu links this naturalisation of ethics to authoritarian attitudes by African nationalists, whom he argues adopt the same domineering colonial psyche.

In media scholarship, there is overwhelming evidence of this domineering and colonial approach. There are misplaced notions that PSBs should, across the board, imitate developments in the West, especially the BBC, and adopt Western ways of interpreting independence.¹⁷³ This perspective is largely derived from the Eurocentric perspective of Daniel Lerner, who argued that, for the third world, the path to economic modernisation and democracy is linear and inevitable.¹⁷⁴ As a result, democratic institutions, including PSBs, in the third world should follow and reach the level of their Western counterparts. However, numerous commentators have identified the weakness of the linear development approach, pointing out the centralised nature of PSB in Africa and how the post-colonial state has not

¹⁷¹ SJ Gatsheni-Ndlovu, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonisation* (CODESRIA, Dakar 2013) 21.

¹⁷² Decolonial scholars distinguish between colonialism a colonial situation enforced by the presence of a colonial administration and coloniality the cultural, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and economic oppression of ethnic subordinate groups by dominant ethnic groups, with or without the existence of colonial administrations.

¹⁷³ See N Ndlela, 'Challenges and Prospects for Press Freedom; Comparative Perspectives on Media Law in Zimbabwe and South Africa' (Unpublished thesis, Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo 2003).

¹⁷⁴ D Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Free Press, New York 1958)

concealed its meddling with the media. It is in the ensuing debate over the tendency to overlook the distinctiveness of the context in which PSBs exist that we see two different strands of normative explanations about media centralisation in Africa.

The first strand is a two-pronged one that directs its attention to history. African scholars, such as Fackson Banda, argue that extensive state control of the media is a residue of the colonial approach to media, in which the vision was to further administrative efficiency.¹⁷⁵ Banda tracks connections between the colonial past, in which the media was used as a tool to preserve elite interests, and contemporary Africa, in which it continues to be a tool for the politically elite.¹⁷⁶ His argument is that the move from the colonial to the post-colonial was not a rapture, but a continuation. Banda is supported by McMillin, who points out that:

...colonialism and post-colonialism cannot be regarded as dichotomous phases where post-colonialism marks a rapture from colonialism or marks the point at which national consciousness emerged.¹⁷⁷

The other sub-strand Banda suggests is a reaction to the Lernerian linear perspective of development. In an attempt to dissociate itself from its colonial past, post-colonial Africa has adopted developmental state model strategies. Developmental state model approaches incorporate media into larger state objectives, which vary across countries but are usually defined by unity, reconciliation, nation building and so forth. In the end, the media becomes an

¹⁷⁵ F Banda, 'An Appraisal of the Applicability of Development Journalism in the Context of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB)' (Paper presented at the News Content Planning Workshop of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Boksburg, South Africa (2007)

¹⁷⁶ F Banda, 'An Appraisal of the Applicability of Development Journalism in the Context of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB)' (Paper presented at the News Content Planning Workshop of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Boksburg, South Africa (2007)

¹⁷⁷ *ibid* (n42) 71

instrument to advance various forms of nationalistic objectives, such as those mentioned above. For example, broadcasting corporations in different countries are used or appropriated into nationalist goals. A number of African countries have used the media as an instrument to carry a revolutionary purpose (for example *uJamaa* in Tanzania and *Hondo ye Minda* in Zimbabwe).¹⁷⁸ Scholars such as Wong have dismissed this appropriation of the media by such development objectives as nothing but a modern version of the traditional authoritarian feudal approach of the past.¹⁷⁹ In the end, PSBs become instruments of the dissemination of ideologies and the consolidation of power relations, which are textured by their political and economic environments.¹⁸⁰

Francis Nyamnjoh presents the second strand in the patron-client relationship between the post-colonial African state and the PSB in general. Nyamnjoh argues that this relationship is the result of the intersection of the neo-liberal objectives of the IMF's and World Bank's structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and authoritarian African governments.¹⁸¹ Consequently, liberal objectives and authoritarian governments complement each other, and, in the process, it becomes difficult to extricate a post-colonial developmental state-modelled PSB from a state broadcaster. His argument is that the post-colonial African state is inherently strong and authoritarian. In contrast, I will argue in Chapter 7 that the

¹⁷⁸ *uJamaa* was Julius Nyerere's adopted model of development, based on what he called scientific African socialism. *uJamaa* was derived from a Swahili word that symbolises the importance of family and community. In Zimbabwe, the ZBC was used as an instrument to promote *Hondo yeminda*, a radical land resettlement programme adopted by the ruling party, ZANU PF. The term can be loosely translated as 'War over Land'.

¹⁷⁹ K Wong, 'Asian Based Development Journalism and Political Elections: Press Coverage of the 1999 General Elections in Malaysia,' (2004) 66(1) *Gazette* 7, 24.

¹⁸⁰ In the end, PSBs become PSBs only by name, as they exhibit characteristics of state or government broadcasters.

¹⁸¹ FB Nyamnjoh, 'Rethinking Communication Research and Development in Africa', Keynote address at IDIA Conference, University of Cape Town (2010)

South African state is weak. In effect, the Washington Consensus has weakened many African states. For example, the South African state is weak and inefficient because of its inability to formulate its own macro-economic strategies. As a result of this weakness, it tries to muzzle public discourse through authoritarian means, since free speech could signal an end to its government. Decolonial analysis is, therefore, valuable in emphasising the distinctiveness of the African experience when it comes to explaining the 'independence' of PSBs. It recognises the conditions of PSBs' existence: particularly, power, knowledge, class and race.

A number of scholars have expressed the need, not to only de-Westernise the field of media, but also to go beyond what Willems calls normative de-Westernisation: an act of representing the other, but from within the prism of the self. Such a move, they argue, will go a long way in moving away from the representation of the Global North and its values of objectivity and neutrality as the beacon of media freedom and, consequently, moving away from the four theories of the press that have perpetually portrayed Global South media as a domain of state-controlled media. The lack of deviation from the Global North normative lens, as decolonial scholars argue, has denied the understanding the Global South through its own experiences. However, it must be said that decolonial literature has managed to relate the Global South experience to the broader set of power relations that characterise global relations and have successfully offered an approach that has not isolated the local, but, instead, has analytically connected the local to the global, despite its emphasis on context-specificity.

The perspectives in the preceding sections go a long way in explaining the context that influences conceptions of SABC ‘independence’, but also to locate the study within the context of the rich body of existing PSB literature. These perspectives namely, PSBs in transition, SABC reform in South Africa and de-Westernisation illuminate the study by illustrating how the SABC is anchored within the specific politically economy of South Africa and the globe. However, the study seeks to go deeper through its dual approach of the CPEM and the interpretivist approach. In the following section, the CPEM is essentially interested in the way in which the SABC’s understanding of ‘independence’ can be structured through the unequal distribution of material and symbolic processes, such as power. The section also shows how the interpretivist method is critical to giving an emic perspective by explicating how the world looks like to those inside the organisation and, particularly, how the staff interpret the external world.

3. The CPE and the interpretivist method: A return to ‘independence’ through the SABC lens

The preceding sections have advanced our understanding of the institutional arrangements in which the SABC exists within its South African, African and global settings. In this section, I address the interpretive frameworks of SABC staff, the ways in which these staff situate themselves within wider institutional arrangements and the ways in which these arrangements shape their perspectives and interpretations of SABC ‘independence’. The study foregrounds the importance of analysing political and economic frames, which are critically reflective of patterns of power. Using mainly data from interview respondents, I shall argue in the following chapters that the commercialisation of the SABC and ANC power struggles are the key factors shaping SABC independence. From this perspective, it

is clear why the study should adopt a dual approach involving both CPEM approach and the interpretivist approach.

A focal question for the CPEM in this study is to explain how changes in the array of forces that exercise control over cultural production and distribution shape SABC staff members' perspectives of 'independence'.¹⁸² In the South African context, political and economic institutions are central to the changing conceptions of the SABC. First, a strong party in the form of the ANC may preside over participation in the running of the SABC through the placing of party cadres in important positions.¹⁸³ Civil society could also push its own agenda in an attempt to propel members into the ruling elite, in the process constructing its own notion of independence. Second, advertisers may, through their financial muscle, seek to control the SABC and mask their intentions by clamouring for 'independence' from a political sphere. According to scholars, 'independence', in its positivist form, can be an economic problem as well as a political one.

The critical political economy of the media thus helps to analyse the conceptions of 'independence' in the South African public broadcasting service remit, because it takes into consideration both economics and the socio-political in power relations. CPEM therefore provides a robust theoretical framework to examine the crucial link between democratic self-governance, 'independence' of PSB and communication.

Chin-Chuan Lee questions the uniform approach to the West and the third world in CPEM analyses and advances a comparative analysis of the media. She

¹⁸² Golding (n22) 70.

¹⁸³ See Chapters 4, 5 and 6 for interview respondents' perspectives.

calls for a re-orientation of Western-based media studies, asserting that Anglo-American literature is unresponsive to comparative studies and insensitive to the (authoritarian) political and legal determinants of news production.¹⁸⁴ Her argument supports that of Downing, another comparative method proponent, who postulates that theories derived from the traditional milieu of affluent, industrialized and politically stable nations have failed to account for the dynamics of regime changes and democratic consolidation and their implications for PSB.¹⁸⁵ Lee suggests two entry points that could provide substantive foci for thinking about CPEM in different contexts (although without suggesting that they provide the essential definition that captures the totality of the field). In particular, recommends the liberal-pluralist approach and the radical-Marxist approach.

The liberal-pluralist approach is, she says, applicable to developing and third world countries, and it emphasizes the freedom and 'independence' of the media, since, in former autocratic states, the government dominated the political and economic resources on which the media depends.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, the radical-Marxist approach emphasizes equality and is applicable in advanced capitalist countries, which already live by principles of democracy but which are often criticised for reproducing structural inequalities from a Marxist perspective. Lee suggests that applying both perspectives to one scenario is wrong because, inevitably, there are different conceptions and imaginings of independence.

¹⁸⁴ Lee Chin-Chuan, 'Rethinking Political Economy: Implications for Media and Democracy in Greater China' (2001) 8 TP 82.

¹⁸⁵ John Downing, *Internationalising Media Theory; Transition, Power, Culture* (Sage, London 1996).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid (n85), See also F Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (Zed Books & Unisa Press, Pretoria 2005) and W Dallas Smythe, 'On the Political Economy of Communications' (1960) 37 (4) *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 563, 572; W Dallas Smythe, 'New Directions for Critical Communications Research' (1984) 6 (3) *Media, Culture & Society* 205, 217.

Lee further breaks down political economy into two frames, which she calls the 'political' political economy and the 'economic' political economy. She deviates from many proponents of political economy, such as Dallas Smythe, whose political economy focuses on production, quality and allocation and on the roles of capital, state organizations and control in the media and communication industries.¹⁸⁷ According to Lee, the 'political' political economy is a theory for analysing the authoritarian media, whereas the 'economic' political economy is a theory for analysing the liberal capitalist and democratic media. The 'economic' political economy's proponents include Schiller and Garnham, who view the market as betraying the ideals of democracy and distorting the public sphere, and who chastise other scholars for paying too much attention to the state-media relationship and insufficient attention to the impact of privatized capitalism on the means of communication.¹⁸⁸ Lee declares that the 'political' political economy should be used to analyse authoritarian media systems in the developing world; seldom have Western scholars come to grips with the authoritarian state. Peter Gross, however, vehemently challenges Lee's theory by disputing the notion that Western media is experienced from relatively favoured social circumstances.¹⁸⁹ Gross, consistent with Lerner, still considers North American and British media and their journalism or, rather, the liberal democratic ideals on which they are based to be models against which all others should be measured.¹⁹⁰ Despite the varying schools of thought in the critical political economy, this theory helps us understand how the macro-world, in the form of political and economic strategies, intersects

¹⁸⁷ Ibid (n85) 18. See also N Garnham, 'The Media and the Public Sphere' in C Calhoun (ed) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (MIT Press, Cambridge 1992)

¹⁸⁸ Ibid (n85).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid (n31).

¹⁹⁰ Gross (n31) 9.

with the micro-world of SABC work routines and how it meshes with and informs organisational perspectives of independence.¹⁹¹ While the CPEM approach may help analyse the macro-world, the interpretivist method gives weight to inquiry by seeking to understand 'independence' through the eyes of the staff working at the SABC.

As it is the premise of this study, there is no single concept of independence. As a result, arguing for 'independence' conceptions as social constructs merits the application of the interpretivist approach.¹⁹² For the purposes of this study, it is, therefore, important to understand the motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences that are time and context-bound in relation to SABC 'independence' constructions. The emphasis of the dual approach allows a full illustration of how 'independence' meanings are formulated at both the macro and the micro level.¹⁹³ The dual approach explains how 'independence' meanings are shaped from specific factors, as examined by the CPE through the lived experiences of SABC staff. 'Independence', therefore, remains a fluid and negotiated concept.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Eurocentric media theories have largely failed to connect with Global South media contexts. If anything, in this literature, the West has been portrayed as a beacon of media freedom, and the Global South has been represented as the West's anti-thesis. While the chapter has been concerned with the importance of meaning and context in explaining the role of the media, it has also highlighted how the focus on the micro-context could be limiting, as it falls short of

¹⁹¹ See A Schutz, *Collect Papers, Volume 1: The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff and Common Sense and Scientific Interpretations of Human Action* [Wiley Publishers] 1962) 3, 47; "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences" 48-66; "On multiple realities" 207, 259

¹⁹² See opening section of this chapter.

¹⁹³ EG Guba and YS Lincoln, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research' in NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks Sage 1994) 105-117.

connecting the local to larger structures, power relations and global processes. It is equally important to focus on local forms of agency and on larger structures. The study, therefore, uses the CPEM approach and the interpretivist method to explain how the local space needs to be understood as the space in which global forces become recognizable inform and practice as they are enmeshed in local human subjectivity and social agency.

The dual approach of the CPEM method and the interpretivist method also seeks to provide an explanatory framework based on the premise that power does play a key role in the construction of 'independence' conceptions; however, 'independence' is a negotiated concept that can be understood through the perspectives of the people within the SABC and how they interpret both the local power struggles and the external forces impacting their work. The next chapter presents the macro-economic framework within which the SABC exists in order to illustrate how the macro-world may inform the ways in which 'independence' is understood by SABC and not in its rigid form, as defined by law.

Chapter 3: The early transition of the SABC from state broadcaster to post-apartheid broadcaster

1 Introduction: The making of the SABC's crisis of independence

This chapter examines the unique features of the SABC's transformation through the lens of larger South African reforms. It explores how the larger transition processes, from apartheid to democracy, as well as the macro-economic strategies adopted by the different post-apartheid administrations, influence transitions and 'independence' conceptions within the SABC. The chapter also illustrates how South Africa, as a peripheral nation state, today lies under the regime of global coloniality imposed by the United States and other powerful states through the IMF, the World Bank and NATO. In addition, despite the fact that most Global South development in general and African development in particular has been either socialist or liberal, neither has worked, since the states lost their roles as re-distributors of wealth by way of fiscal policies established and developed, both geo-politically and ideologically, in the Global North.¹⁹⁴

This status quo, I argue in the chapter, renders the state weak because of its inability to meet service delivery obligations. Consequently, the state uses force, including controlling the media, in order to consolidate its power. This position finds support in macro-economic strategies imposed by the ANC government in post-apartheid South Africa, which had a huge impact in shaping the media's role. The role of the media in any context is the platform from which any understanding of its 'independence' can begin. Therefore, it is important to trace how

¹⁹⁴ African scholar Sabelo Gatsheni-Ndlovu points out that what is distinctive about neo-liberalism is its anti-statism philosophy, which culminated in the impositions of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in Africa and other parts of the world, which became known as 'conditionalities' that eroded social programs of the postcolonial state and, in the process, took away the little that remained of African control over economic policy. SG Ndlovu, 'The Entrapment of Africa' (2013) 29 (4) *Journal of Developing Societies* 331, 353.

Euro/North-American-driven South African policies, such as GEAR and the DSM, have shaped South Africa's subordinate position in a capitalist world system. This subordination has also shaped ideas concerning the role of the SABC in post-apartheid South Africa and the PSB staff's conceptions of 'independence'. Understanding macro-economic strategies is important, but it is even more important to understand how staff at the SABC have experienced the contradictions of macro-economic strategies in relation to their work. This consideration gives the most insightful entry into understanding the constructions of conceptions of 'independence' from a ground-up perspective. As such, meaning is attached to the ideas of individuals and their experiences within the PSB in relation to both internal and external forces that impact their work.

The chapter argues that the lack of a stable and preferred macro-economic strategy, coupled with a poor inherited economy, created fertile ground for control of the SABC by the ANC-led government, which altered the PSB's identity through changes in personnel and policies. As a result, through commercialisation brought about by successive macro-economic strategies, the SABC remained vulnerable to control by the state and powerful commercial forces. In addition, the disagreements within the ANC regarding macro-economic strategies created factionalism and power struggles that ended playing themselves out within the SABC.¹⁹⁵

This chapter, for the above-mentioned reason, investigates whether these transformations had any meaningful impact on the PSB staff's conceptions of 'independence'. It demonstrates that it is always going to be difficult to imagine an

¹⁹⁵ See Chapters 4 and 5 for an extensive discussion on commercialisation and ANC power struggles.

SABC isolated from the society in which it operates, including the larger global matrices of power. As a result, it is impossible to discuss SABC ‘independence’ in isolation from broader considerations about our understanding of the nature of the society in which the PSB exists.¹⁹⁶ This is because the SABC has always reflected local and global political features, since its trajectory has always been set by those in power.¹⁹⁷ It is, therefore, important to conduct a socio-historical analysis of the SABC within the larger South African socio-legal landscape.¹⁹⁸

In South Africa, democracy emerged out of a process of transition from apartheid. During apartheid, the dominance of politics by the ruling National Party (NP) could be traced over the entirety of South African public life, including the SABC.¹⁹⁹ This historical background also meant that the ‘independence’ of the SABC was a key part of the larger South African reform from apartheid to democracy. The pre-condition for the emergence of an independent PSB was, therefore, the ability to move from state to public, which made the SABS distinct from the older and failed form of PSB (namely, one that was subjected to the whims of politicians).²⁰⁰ Expectations were that the new legal framework would routinely produce an independent SABC; however, the changing relationship between the SABC and the larger political environment appeared to constantly alter perceptions of

¹⁹⁶ Collin Sparks and Anna Reading, *Communism, Capitalism and the Mass Media* (Sage, London 1998) xii

¹⁹⁷ See J Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-Liberalism* (FXI, Johannesburg 2001); P Fourie, *Media History, Media and Society* (Juta & Co, Cape Town 2007).

¹⁹⁸ Discussions of adopted macro-economic strategies call into examination the relationship between policy/law and development in the Global South. This examination extends to public service broadcasting services, too. SABC staff are not just passive recipients of legal structures mandated by the state under the duress of the Washington consensus; instead, they have particular perceptions and responses towards the South African legal/macro-economic environment in relation to their work.

¹⁹⁹ Tusi Fokane, *The Transformation of Broadcasting in South Africa: A History of the Campaign for Open Media (COM) and the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting (CIB)* (Project number 1.3.410) (Freedom of Expression Institute and Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa 2003)

²⁰⁰ Interview with former SABC CEO (Auckland Park, Johannesburg 23 August 2011)

independence. These perceptions had been frequently generalised from a particular understanding of the historical experience of the SABC under the NP. 'Independence', then, was largely viewed from the perspective of politics, even though the SABC was supposed to be free from the politics of the NP.

The SABC's evolution was, therefore, based on Western PSB values, as seen through the dozens of Australian, British and Canadian broadcasting mentors that came to train staff in the newly democratic South Africa.²⁰¹ However, the SABC emerged in an externally and internally unstable environment. Externally, South Africa was born and caught up in a fading socialist past and a rising capitalist period. Despite this challenging bind, the new South African government had the responsibility of addressing inequalities of the past, which presented further difficulties with regard to the choice of macro-economic strategies. Internally, in line with the new government's macro-economic choices of correcting imbalances, there were various problems, such as overstaffing, inexperienced staff and retrenchments, which increased tensions between old and new staff within the PSB and complicated the search for a new identity.²⁰² Therefore, the legacy of apartheid, together with post-apartheid transitions (with their mixture of the half-baked socialist policies of the RDP and Washington-Consensus-driven policies like the Developmental State Model (DSM), the fiscal austerity policies of GEAR and the ANC power struggles) shaped, not only the SABC, but also its staff's 'independence' conceptions.

²⁰¹Demetri Martins, 'State Broadcasting to Public Service Broadcaster: A Case Study of SABC TV News 1993-1996' (Unpublished paper presented at the SABC stock taking conference of the FXI, 4-5 November 2002)

²⁰² Interview with former SABC head of news (Auckland Park, Johannesburg 23 August 2011)

The argument in this chapter is that, if we are to understand the SABC's and its staff's conceptions of 'independence', it is important to highlight the context in which the SABC exists and the transitions thereof. In a changing environment, the SABC has been obliged to constantly negotiate its identity and its role, and the process has had a significant bearing on how 'independence' is understood within the organisation. The particular complex discourses generated by these transitions also represent a key location for and construction of SABC staff's 'independence' conceptions. As pointed out in the preceding sections and chapter, the South African socio-political landscape is a crucial reference point for understanding more about what 'independence' means for staff at the SABC, since this environment does inform SABC activities. Three key post-apartheid macro-economic strategies that promptly succeeded one another were significant for the SABC's identity and, therefore, for its understandings of independence. The first of these three macro-economic strategies was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which was concerned with integrating the previously disenfranchised majority into the mainstream economy through redistributory policies. The RDP coincided with Nelson Mandela's tenure in office as the first democratically elected South African president; however, it was short-lived. The RDP lasted only eighteen months, from 1994 to 1996. In its place, in June 1996, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) method, which committed the government to a tighter fiscal policy, was introduced. In 2002, the Developmental State Model (DSM), a strategy that called for a high degree of state intervention in all areas of the economy, succeeded the GEAR approach.²⁰³

²⁰³ The DSM is, however, discussed as a consolidation of GEAR. It is different from GEAR, but it has the same effects on the SABC. For example, the ANC uses commercialisation to hide its interference in the

These macro-economic strategies also dictated changes in the SABC, particularly in key areas of governance, finance and programming. These three areas play a major role in shaping SABC staff conceptions of 'independence'. For example, with regard to governance, different administrations have engaged in different levels of interference in SABC governance, and a certain degree of interference could lead to cadres being appointed to board positions. Because of these constant changes, an identity crisis began to emerge. The key question was: For what purpose does the SABC exist in South Africa's ever-changing environment?

This chapter draws some comparisons between these three key macro-economic strategies.²⁰⁴ The comparison of macro-economic strategies seeks to show how the concept of 'independence' is constructed, while also highlighting how staff at various tiers hold particular conceptions of 'independence' at particular times. This chapter, therefore, locates staff conceptions within the SABC's larger socio-economic and political context in order to examine how SABC 'independence' conceptions are informed and related to wider social relations of power.²⁰⁵ However, before discussing the macro-economic strategies, the chapter presents a brief outline of the South African broadcasting regulatory framework. The examination of the broadcasting and regulatory framework is important, particularly when it comes to the role of the PSB, because SABC policy is guided by

running of the SABC. The DSM allows the ANC to interfere with the running of the SABC (albeit in a more obvious way), and dis-empowers parliament even more through the executive. The DSM also called upon the SABC to reflect South Africa in positive light in order to attract foreign direct investment.

²⁰⁴It is also important to note that, despite the differences in approach, all the post-1994 macro-economic strategies were developmental in character, with the intention of building a viable economy and addressing sharp inequalities in South Africa.

²⁰⁵ Consistent with the thesis's argument, the macro-economic strategies are informed by two key ideologies: the nationalist and the neo-liberal democracy ideologies. These also inform and are informed by intersections among power, knowledge and identity.

regulations enforced by ICASA. In addition, by prescribing quotas that it monitors for the SABC, ICASA automatically becomes the custodian of the PSB and is, therefore, a key reference point in discussions of SABC 'independence'.

The South African broadcasting and regulatory context and national identity creation

In a nation whose individuals had never imagined themselves as 'one', the post-apartheid ANC government set out to reconcile its constituency's different groups, encouraged by the apartheid regime. Ideologies of nation building, nation solidarity and nation formation were promoted in the early years. In this attempt to build a national identity, the idea of the 'rainbow' nation was advanced. In this approach, the different colours of the rainbow were made to symbolise the embracing of South Africa's different groups, which, together, formed a nation. The SABC was also born out of these deliberations and was tasked with being a conduit for advancing the co-existence of collective and individual identities. In its own version of the rainbow nation, the SABC developed the jingle 'Simunye', meaning, 'we are one'. Moreover, in line with the goals of one nation, the SABC was mandated to broadcast local content that enhanced the capacity of South Africans to produce programmes that reflected their own lives, along the lines of nation solidarity and nation building goals. As a result, broadcasting regulatory authorities were established in order to enforce local content regulations.²⁰⁶ The current state of broadcasting in South Africa came about as a result of advancing

²⁰⁶ The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) was established in 1993, and in 2000, it was replaced by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa.

the one nation ideology. It began with the formation of the IBA Act 1993.²⁰⁷ Alliances of anti-apartheid groups united under the Campaign for Open Media (COM) in 1990 to fight against the state-controlled broadcasting landscape. COM and the Campaign for Independence Broadcasting (CIB) were instrumental lobby groups who co-ordinated the movement's resistance to the ruling NP's domination of the airwaves.²⁰⁸ Their objective was to free the airwaves from state monopoly and commercial priorities, which did not necessarily address the need for a plurality of voices to reflect South African society.²⁰⁹ The IBA Act was created on 30 March 1993 as an act of parliament. The establishment of the Act was regarded as one of the key developments in South African broadcasting policy and regulation, since it called for the regulation of broadcasting in the public interest and the provision of a diverse range of sound and television broadcast services.²¹⁰

The IBA Act 1993 was, therefore, established with the purpose of ensuring fairness and a diversity of views, broadly representing the South African society. This was quite a departure from the more propagandist, state-controlled broadcasting that characterised the apartheid era. This prioritisation of broadcasting facilities is also evident in the democratic (post-1994) South Africa, in

²⁰⁷ During political negotiations in 1993, a decision to create independent broadcasting regulatory mechanisms was reached. Consequently, in October 1993, the Transitional Executive Authority passed the IBA Act 1993. Various political parties were involved in this decision, as it was viewed as a matter of urgency that broadcasting be made independent of direct government interference (as it was in the apartheid era). The ANC, on the one hand, did not want the SABC to be in the hands of the NP, and on the other hand, the NP did not want the ANC taking control of the PSB.

²⁰⁸ Ibid (n165).

²⁰⁹ L Mtimde, *Radio Broadcasting in South Africa* (2000) 3 (2) International Journal Of Cultural Studies 173, 179.

²¹⁰ 'Public interest', here, loosely means that citizens must define what broadcast is, meaning that broadcast should reflect their diverse interests, class and ethnicities. However, due to changes in administrations and different approaches to the SABC, the public interest came to be understood as civil society, which constitutes various non-governmental associations that act as checks on the state and on the monopolisation of power. This definition plays a key role in defining the political conception of 'independence', which will be discussed in the following sections.

which the broadcasting field is divided into three tiers commercial, community and public to cater to the diverse needs of the nation.²¹¹ Moreover, the creation of tiers has been seen as ideal for assisting in the creation of collective stability through the use of broadcast media. In particular, the three tiers exist on complementary planes in order to cover all of the diverse communication needs of South African society.

First, the PSB, as one of its key obligations, is mandated to make its services available throughout the Republic and in all twelve official languages.²¹² Its content is supposed to inform, entertain, educate and reflect both the unity and the diverse multilingual nature of South Africa, inclusive of its cultures and regions. Section 7 of the IBA Act 1993 declares that, 'the state, upon incorporation, holds hundred per cent of the shares of the corporation'.²¹³ The public broadcaster is, therefore, governed by a board of twelve non-executive members. The chief executive officer (CEO), the group chief operations officer (COO), the group chief financial officer (FCO) and the twelve non-executive members of the board are appointed by the president on the advice of the National Assembly. The members are supposed to be appointed in a manner that ensures public participation in the nomination process. The public broadcasting service can get its finances from licenses, advertising, sponsorships, government subsidies and other sources, but only in ways that ensure its financial and political independence.²¹⁴ The second tier is the commercial tier, which has private shareholders as owners and whose main objective is profit. The service draws mainly from advertising and sponsorships. It

²¹¹ See IBA Act 1993 (153).

²¹² See Broadcasting Act 1999 (no 4)

²¹³ *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *ibid* (n176)

is, therefore, logical that, unlike a fully-fledged PSB, it will provide programming that is attractive to advertisers. The third tier is the community tier, which is defined as being 'initiated and controlled by members of a community of interest, or a geographical interest'.²¹⁵ These community broadcasters are expected to be non-profit and only cover radius of fifty kilometres.

Together with the changes in administrations and macro-economic strategies, the IBA Act 1993 was replaced by the ICASA 2000 with regard to the regulation of the broadcasting sector. There were some inadequacies in the IBA Act; hence, a new policy was established to amend certain provisions of the Act, such as the clarification of the powers of the Minister of Communications. First, the Broadcasting Act of 1999 was introduced and assented in April 1999. In May 2001, the ICASA, no 13 of 2000, was established. This act was designed to provide for the dissolution of the IBA as the regulator. Consequently the ICASA subsumed the IBA Act 1993, the Broadcasting Act 1999 (as amended) and the South African Telecommunication Authority 1996.²¹⁶ The ICASA 2000 served as the framework for making regulations that govern broadcasting and telecommunications and for monitoring the environment; enforcing compliance with rules, regulations and policies; and deciding on complaints. Both the IBA Act and ICASA have had a history of controversy where they pertain to the SABC. A number of respondents, as shall be discussed in Chapter 6, pointed out that the ICASA has always upheld all decisions made by the SABC, such as the unfair dismissal of employees. The

²¹⁵ *ibid* (n175).

²¹⁶ The ICASA Act was amended in 2006 to include postal services, which were previously regulated by the Postal Authority, into ICASA's mandate. ICASA derives its mandate from various primary pieces of legislation: the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Broadcasting Act 1999 (no 4), the electronic Communications and Transaction 2002 (ECT) Act (no 25), the ICASA Act 2000 (no 13) and the Promotion of Administration Justice Act (PAJA) 2000 (no 3).

regulatory body has been perceived by some to be weak and to be controlled by the ANC which, in turn, allegedly controls the SABC.²¹⁷

It is, therefore, this regulatory context that sought to support ideas of reconciling separate sub-group identities encouraged by the divisive apartheid regime. The context set the broadcasting scene, partly drove PSB transformations, set standards and conditions for broadcasting licenses and secured compliance. The regulator's effectiveness when it came to programming issues also contributed to how 'independence' was understood by SABC, particularly with regard to their legalistic conceptions. However, the attempt to reconcile identities in all-inclusive South Africa faced many challenges in what Santos calls a global design with a local history.²¹⁸ On one hand, the national identity that the post-apartheid regime was trying to forge was facing globalisation, which was not only eroding borders but was also driven by neo-liberal ideas. On the other hand, the national identity in South Africa faced its own local challenges, through which the national identity and nationalism were clearly at odds. Nationalism was born out of the struggle against apartheid, and national identity is about identifying oneself as a member of a nation. As a result of reconciling two warring groups the victors and the defeated the nationalists and the neo-liberals posed even greater challenges for ICASA and the SABC with regard to determining their roles in post-apartheid South Africa and, therefore, the role of the PSB. Furthermore, the globalisation process reinforced South Africa's reliance on the IMF, the World Bank and NATO. These international institutions influenced the adoption of macro-economic policies in post-apartheid South Africa. Consequently, when apartheid ended, South Africa moved into global

²¹⁷ An extensive discussion is found in the empirical Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

²¹⁸ Boaventura De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: A case against epistemicide* (Paradigms Publishers, Boulder 2014)

structures of power, which decoloniality scholars call the invisible matrices of power.

In the next sections, I discuss the various macro-economic strategies adopted by the post-apartheid administrations and how the SABC remained susceptible to these realignment strategies. The SABC was easily permeated by the different administrations' interests, which were determined to bring the PSB and, therefore, its board, senior managers, middle managers and journalist/producers in line with the different administrative goals. The SABC found itself serving as an instrument of a powerful ANC and its adopted macro-economic strategies. It is also these three key macro-economic strategies that drove the key determinants of 'independence' constructions: namely, commercialisation of the SABC and ANC political power struggles. Commercialisation of the SABC and ANC power struggles appeared to move the SABC away from its mandate of serving the public interest.

The SABC is meant to be a representative of the public and is expected to drive and be a conduit for the public interest, despite the fact that the South African public is fragmented, primordial and civic. Furthermore, due to political interference, the SABC has faced a civil society and unions that have made contradictory demands.²¹⁹ As a result, the understanding of 'independence' has become relational and is marked largely by interpretations according to tiers occupied by different SABC staff. Particularly, four conceptions of SABC 'independence' began to circulate: namely, the anti-establishment, legal, professional and political conceptions. These circulating conceptions have, at times, overlapped one another and/or countered one another. The clashing images of

²¹⁹ Freedom of Expression Institute Report, *Crumbling Under Its Mandate: The SABC as Public Broadcaster* (FXI, Johannesburg 2002) 2.

what 'independence' is, stratified along the lines of staff tiers have exposed the plasticity of independence, which the Broadcasting Act 1999 only defined in rigid lines of politics and commerce.²²⁰

This chapter has been following the trajectory that, in post-apartheid South Africa (as in many other functioning democracies), politics are centrally tied to the role of the PSB. I emphasise that the universal condition of the PSB is that it is subject to the constitutions, administrative regulations, judicial decisions and executive orders of administrations in which they exist. Often, individuals are appointed into governing structures by the executive. The decisions of these persons in the governing structures appointed to manage the SABC are constrained, not only by internal rules, but also by external ones. This chapter, therefore, enables us to both develop a background to the post-apartheid broadcasting landscape and explore the scope and significance of the broader macro-economic strategies that influence SABC 'independence' conceptions.

Despite arguing that the SABC and its understanding of 'independence' are subject to political influences and that the various administrations have had their own preference orderings of issues such as austerity and redistribution, I do emphasise that there was a marked difference between the short-lived RDP of Mandela and the authoritative GEAR and DSM, whose effects played out within the SABC during the Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma administrations.²²¹ Towards the end of the RDP, two political cultures began to exist side by side. On one hand was the dying, less authoritarian and bottom-up redistribution-based RDP, and on the other hand was the emerging authoritarian, top-down GEAR. The development created

²²⁰ Broadcasting Act 1999 (no 4).

²²¹ Chapters 4 and 5 give detailed analyses of how these factors shaped SABC staff's 'independence' conceptions.

discernible differences in the 1996 transition from RDP to GEAR, which involved the executive appointing ANC-affiliated top-level managers within the SABC.²²² What began to emerge was a political conception of 'independence' in which the SABC was viewed by its staff as largely reverting to an apartheid way of doing things. This inability of the SABC to escape its apartheid past saw the deepening of a culture of self-censorship and factionalism, as well as the absence of a shared identity and the rise of the elite. The rise of the elite has seen individuals strategically located to become the main beneficiaries of SABC transformations through a revolving door policy, in which the same people tend to rotate the high management positions within the SABC.²²³ These elites are in-different to the problems of the SABC; instead, they exist to consolidate power. In the end, we see a rise in what is called the national interest, which is defined as what the ANC government believes is right for the South African public as a whole. The national interest becomes set against the public interest.²²⁴ It is, therefore, important to analyse this change and its implications for the ways in which SABC staff think about 'independence' through this socio-historic perspective, which allows us to understand the SABC within its specificity.

In the next sections, I highlight three key macro-economic strategies of the ANC-led South African government's approach to post-apartheid transition, as well as central elements of South Africa's transition. I then relate these transformations to the SABC and the constructions of its 'independence' in these contexts. The three

²²² See Chapters 4,5 and 6.

²²³ Elaborated on in Chapter 5. Fired or suspended individuals would leave with their teams, and, when a new executive was appointed, the same individuals would come back with their teams.

²²⁴ The definitions of public and national interest are key to explaining SABC 'independence' conceptions because the two concepts inform the role of the PSB. In Chapter 7, I argue that the two concepts were also at the centre of constructions of SABC 'independence' conceptions.

macro-economic contexts I choose to discuss are the RDP, GEAR and the DSM.²²⁵ Three other macro-economic strategies were adopted after these, but these are merely manifestations of the first three, and some, such as the Accelerated and Shared Initiative Growth for South Africa (ASGISA), were short-lived and ill-defined, while others, like the National Development Plan (NDP), are still in their infancy. The first three are, therefore, key. They took place in the first fifteen years and, consequently, set the scene for transformation. However, the RDP and GEAR are very important for two reasons. First, both succinctly capture the shift from Keynesian democracy (defined by structural transformation through democratic, participatory and state interventionist means) to neo-liberal democracy (defined by the foregrounding of market forces, fiscal prudence and structural adjustment programmes). Second, both are reflections of how global power matrices can intersect with and shape local matrices. A cursory analysis is given the DSM, the approach that is most like GEAR, since it follows the developmental discourse that stems from neo-liberal monetarist policies, despite its promise of social democracy. For a nuanced understanding of how the three macro-economic strategies might have shaped conceptions of independence, I discuss, under all three, the sub-themes of governance, funding and programming. The chapter concludes by discussing the different conceptions of 'independence' and how they are constructed across the four tiers of the SABC with reference to the three key macro-economic strategies.

²²⁵ The DSM is discussed only briefly, since its manifestations are the same as those of GEAR.

2 Political visions of the RDP and mixed consequences for independence

The ascendance of Nelson Mandela to the presidency of the newly democratic Republic of South Africa saw the adoption of the ANC's blueprint for post-apartheid transformation, the RDP. The RDP, a macro-economic policy for social transformation, focused on the equitable redistribution of resources.²²⁶ Its vision was one of democratizing power, and it was intimately linked to the reconstruction and development of South Africa.²²⁷ The RDP's argument was that the government would not be able to unleash the resources and stunted potential of the country and its people as long as minority domination of state and civil institutions persisted. As a result, legislation that insulated the SABC from the reach of political power was formulated. In this case, what emerged as a guarantor for political 'independence' was the location of substantial power in the hands of an independent broadcast regulator in the form of the IBA Act 1993.²²⁸

The RDP gave the mass media a pivotal role in the drafting of democratic media policy, offering a vision of participatory democracy and decision-making that presupposed widespread access to basic means of communication.²²⁹ The Telecoms Green Paper, for example, stipulated that communication was an important means of building democracy, giving citizens access to information and telecommunications services that would enable them to participate effectively in

²²⁶Devan Pillay, 'Media Diversity and the Contested Character of the Post Apartheid State' (2004) 31 (2) *Politikon* 167, 184. The RDP assumed that the market, on its own, would not be sufficient to ensure freedom of expression and access to information for all citizens. Pillay adds that the new democratic state responded to pressures from progressive civil society to pursue democratic goals and to fulfil particular objectives of the RDP (namely, the creation of a more equitable media environment, which would give meaning to the freedom of expression and access to information guaranteed in the South African Constitution).

²²⁷African National Congress, *1994 Report* (Pretoria 1994).

²²⁸Guy Berger, *Contested Media Environments in South Africa: The Making of Communications Policy*, (Presentation for 'After Apartheid Conference', Connecticut 2006) <<http://www.yale.edu/macmillan...//berger2PDF>> accessed 30 November 2011.

²²⁹Clive Barnett, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* (The University of Reading, Reading 1999) 352.

the decision-making processes of society.²³⁰ The RDP, therefore, supported Marshall's view of citizenship, which points out the three basic dimensions of citizenship: the exercise of civil, political and social rights.²³¹ The idea of this type of citizenship is that policy is introduced through a dual effort, involving engagement of both the authorities and the people.²³² In this case, the RDP was deeply participatory, and the citizens were actively involved in and committed to the preservation and exercise of democratic values by participating in policy-making, particularly in broadcasting reform.²³³ For example, in August 1990, over two thousand people converged on the Auckland Park headquarters of the SABC, demanding for the restructuring of broadcasting to take place on a democratic basis.²³⁴ This march was organised under the banner of the COM, and it was the first of a series of high-profile public events involving members of civil society, the trade unions, civic organisations, cultural and political formations and other formations that were mobilising, for the first time in South African history, ordinary members of the public around matters related to broadcasting.²³⁵ This was the beginning of events in which civil society and the wider public were not only equal powers, but also brokered and drafted media legislation.

Another characteristic of the RDP era is that its precepts agreed with the common values of PSB, including universal availability, universality of appeal,

²³⁰ Telecoms Green Paper (Johannesburg 1996).

²³¹ TH Marshall, *Class, Citizenship and Social Development* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1964).

²³² K Jackubowicz and JP Madeira, *Public Service Broadcasting and Democracy: The Architecture of Democracy in the Finish National Commission for UNESCO, Public Service Broadcasting and Editorial Independence: Strengthening Democratic Voices* (Report of the International Seminar, Tampere 18 June 1997); Ralf Dahrendorf, *The Changing Quality of Citizenship* in Bart Steenbergen (ed) *The Condition of Citizenship* (Sage, Newbury Park, CA 1994)

²³³ Asgar Adelzadeh, *From RDP to GEAR: The Gradual Embracing of Neo-Liberalism in Economic Policy* (1996) 31 Transformation 66

²³⁴ *Ibid* (n 175)

²³⁵ PE Louw, *South African Media Policy: Debates of the 1990s-Studies on the South African Media* (Anthropos, Bellville 1993)

widespread participation, provisions for minorities, serving the public sphere and 'independence' from vested interests, such as politics and the market. This RDP participatory approach contrasts with the approaches undertaken during apartheid and the two subsequent administrations of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, which pushed participation into the background.

It is, therefore, important to trace how the RDP shaped a political conception of 'independence' in which the people working in four different tiers of the SABC considered the NP to be a threat to the public broadcaster's 'independence'. This conception of 'independence' at the SABC is directly linked to and is a product of the larger South African socio-economic environment. Dialogue in the literature has now acknowledged that public broadcasting influence is significantly related to political systems adopted by governments.²³⁶ In the process of defining and understanding these systems, media personnel try to bring meaning and interpretations to the system and, as a result, negotiate their own places within the political system. For example, in this thesis, some journalists/producers in the fourth tier perceived the SABC organisational imperatives to be hindrances, while others viewed them as enhancing the realisation of professional ideals. Independence, in this case, may, therefore, be understood in terms of organisational factors' relations to the adopted macro-political and economic strategies.²³⁷ As pointed out in the opening section, to understand a public broadcaster, it is important to look at the social system in which it functions, since the public broadcaster is always a dependent variable in

²³⁶ Daniel C Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004) 8

²³⁷ Organisational factors may include the type of leadership, communication, hierarchy or chain of command.

relation to the system of social control that it reflects.²³⁸ It is, therefore, important to understand how these four SABC tiers are influenced by the RDP in constructing the four different 'independence' conceptions that they hold.

These four tiers trace how the SABC has been affected by the external forces of politics and the market, including the macro-economic strategy. The discussion is designed to understand and bring meaning to the SABC's 'independence' in relation to how it is defined by the IBA Act 1993 and the South African Constitution.²³⁹ The chapter and thesis pursue the narrative of SABC 'independence', but depart from the idea that there is a true essence of 'independence' that can be attained. The thesis, therefore, foregrounds the concept of 'independence' as a social construct that may be imagined in contrast to different contexts within the SABC. It acknowledges that there are competing versions of what 'independence' means, which come to the fore in the next two chapters. To illustrate this, the thesis discusses interview data from SABC staff across the four tiers.

It is these conceptions of staff 'independence' that enable the thesis to bring out the key factors of commercialisation and ANC political power struggles in the narration of SABC 'independence' in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Despite its controversies and shortfalls, which will be discussed in the following sections, the RDP period is still considered the 'honeymoon period' or 'golden era' of the SABC. As a result, the

²³⁸ FS Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press* (University of Illinois Press, IL 1956) 2. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm also argue that media systems are connected with socially shared conceptions about state, society, objectivity and the public interest.

²³⁹ Between 1993 and 1996, these two pieces of legislation, the IBA Act 1993 (a product of a participatory and deliberative stakeholder politics) and the South African constitution were the only ones that provided a framework for the 'independence' of the SABC. Guy Berger argued that, in 1992, the ANC did not give much attention to communications policy; as a result, policy was a domain of civil society and included participatory policy thrusts.

period serves as a launch pad for understanding how the RDP's succeeding macro-economic strategies, which coincided or brought about commercialisation and which served as outlets for ANC power struggles, became key shapers of SABC 'independence' meanings. It is, therefore, important at this point to trace how the RDP impacted key areas of governance, funding and programming while, in the process, influencing a positive view of the PSB of that era.

Governance, funding and programming challenges during RDP

The selection of governors, as outlined in the IBA Act 1993, required the non-executive members of the board to be appointed in a manner that ensured participation by the public in a transparent and open nomination process. According to the Act, the president, through the advice of the National Assembly, would then appoint from the nominated persons the final 12 members of the board, designating one of the members as chairperson and another as deputy chairperson. The Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) realised the potential conflict between the president appointing the board in what was called an 'open and participatory' nomination process. As a result, the FXI recommended that the law be amended to repeal sections that gave the president the right to appoint the board. As a result, a national nomination process that saw live TV interviews followed the appointment of the first board. This participatory and transformational process translated into other tiers within the SABC. According to one respondent, the SABC was the first state organ to successfully undertake transformation.²⁴⁰ A TNP Transformation Unit (TTU) composed of elected staff was

²⁴⁰ Interview with MWASA Secretary General, Houghton (Johannesburg 28 July 2011)

tasked with steering the transformation of the SABC from a state broadcaster to a public broadcaster with regard to staffing. According to the TTU report:

On the human resources front, the SABC proved itself a leader in the field of transformation. It set itself the target of achieving a ratio of 50% black (African, coloured and Indian) to 50% white people in its staff by the end of 1997, and it achieved this ratio a month ahead of the target date, when, in 1997, the national personnel corps tallied up as 1585 black and 1585 white staffers exactly. This was a measure of some pride, taking into consideration that, when the corrective action programme was begun in 1993, the staff ratio was only 27% black to 73% white.²⁴¹

According to 32 of the 36 respondents, the change in staff composition was a sign of transformation and was pivotal in changing the perception that the SABC was still a state broadcaster. Four of the 36 respondents, however, dismissed the change in human resources as an achievement leading towards transformation, with two of the four holding the perspective that the new employees were not agents of transformation, but, instead, agents of the ANC. These perspectives later grew in resonance as GEAR and the DSM were adopted as new macro-economic strategies. This enthusiasm for transformation and good governance was also translated into programming. A former SABC manager for Policy and Regulatory Affairs said of the board's then GCEO, Zwelakhe Sisulu:

Sisulu belonged to the royalty of the ANC because his father was in the top two. Besides that, he was a strong personality. There was no political figure who would give him direction; he was an untouchable.²⁴²

This quote shows the perspective that Sisulu's background worked as a check and balance on the 'independence' of the SABC, since he was 'ANC royalty' and no one dared to control him. This statement correlates very well with and was supported by people in editorial, who engage directly with programming. A former head of editorial illustrated that, at the beginning, ministers called in to give

²⁴¹ These retrenchments and appointment later proved to cause a great deal of fragmentation within the SABC, since staff kept being recycled. See Chapter 5

²⁴² Interview with former CFO, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 16 July 2011)

editorial direction, but that they resisted because Sisulu did not allow such direction.²⁴³ Some of the great achievements in transformation during the RDP included the introduction of new TV channels (namely, SABC 1, 2 and 3), which allowed the SABC to deliver full-spectrum programming. Moreover, there were many satellite SABC centres across the country, which countered any form of centralisation.²⁴⁴ However, during the commercialisation era, the SABC practiced bi-media, a process through which national stories from the various regions were gathered together and sent to an output editor based at the main SABC in Johannesburg, who chose which stories to publish.²⁴⁵ Of course, this approach necessitated centralisation. Nevertheless, the SABC was in its golden era during the RDP, as illustrated by one journalist/producer:

We received a lot of training, and there were always workshops and seminars. There was recognition for well-researched stories and a lot of awards to that effect. It was a great time to work at the SABC. The budget was unlimited, and there wasn't much bureaucracy, which we experience today. But I still think there is no journalist that will tell you they never enjoyed working under Zwelakhe Sisulu.²⁴⁶

By mentioning the unlimited budget, the respondent made an interesting point. Across all epochs, ranging from the RDP until today, the funding model for the SABC has remained consistent.²⁴⁷ Advertising constitutes a large percentage of

²⁴³ Interview with former head of editorial, Sunnyside (Pretoria 16 August 2011)

²⁴⁴ Interview with Strategic Manager for News and Current Affairs, Sophiatown (Johannesburg 18 August 2011)

²⁴⁵ Chapter 4 offers an extensive discussion of bi-media.

²⁴⁶ Interview with SABC producer/journalist, Sophiatown (Johannesburg 24 July 2011). This view was also supported by another former producer/journalist, who said: 'I would say so, too. This is not the SABC whose people, programmes, projects and products have won close on 1000 awards and accolades for broadcasting excellence. These were gleaned on many levels and on national and international platforms. There are not many organisations that can boast of such recognition for the quality of their people, their skills and their product.'

²⁴⁷ Section 10 (2) of the Broadcasting Amendment Act provides that the SABC public wing may draw revenue from advertising, sponsorships, grants and donations, as well as grants from the state and license fees levied with regard to the licensing of persons in relation to television sets. Section 11 (a)

the revenue; for example, from 1993 to 1996, the reliance on advertising showed a gradual increase, moving from 71% to 74% and then rising sharply to 78% in 1996.²⁴⁸ What has remained clear is that the SABC only made a significant profit of 500 million South African rands in 1995, after selling some of its stations. However, the rest of the time, it had been making losses. In 1996, the SABC had a deficit of 64 million, which led to further strides by the government to commercialize the PSB a move that, arguably, was a result of the new macro-economic strategy, GEAR.²⁴⁹ Before GEAR, the SABC was locked in a transformational milieu that pursued unity and reconciliation under the RDP. As this chapter has pointed out in its introduction, SABC 'independence' can be understood through power and knowledges. Power is produced in dominant centres and disseminated through neo-liberal discourses of development, which advance particular macro-economic policies. The RDP, despite its Keynesian characteristics of social democracy, was no exception, since international organisations contributed to its formation.²⁵⁰

This shaped the SABC's identity frames and, consequently, the political meaning of the 'independence' of the SABC. The pursuit of building a rainbow nation could have rendered other, differing conceptions of 'independence'

states that the commercial wing is to exist and function like any other commercial broadcasting unit. The IBA Act states that the SABC should be funded through a mix of advertising and sponsorship, license fees, government grants and other income, such as the merchandising of products and leasing facilities. No recommendations are made regarding the ratio of the different revenue streams.

²⁴⁸ SABC Annual Reports

²⁴⁹ See South Africa Broadcasting Corporation, *SABC Annual Report* (SABC Corporate Publications 1996)

²⁵⁰ RDP was driven by two organisations. The first was the Economic Trends (ET) Group, composed of leftist, union-oriented academics from South African Universities. The second was the Macro-Economic Research Group (MERG), which was founded in 1991 on the recommendation of a mission from the Canadian International Development and Research Centre. This was another Bretton Woods footprint in the designing of policy in South Africa. Interestingly, the World Bank was originally called the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, a name that chimes with that of the RDP. The Bretton Woods agreement was a product of the politics of development and modernisation and ideas for progress, and it was signed in 1945 by 44 countries that intended to build an international economic system.

unfashionable, thereby producing an anti-nation-building mentality. However, the adoption of GEAR, a strategy that eroded political participation in favour of stringent monetary and fiscal targets, signalled further transitions that that posed new interpretations of independence. Two macro-economic strategies, GEAR and the DSM, saw the foregrounding of commercialisation and ANC power struggles which were, themselves, a product of the ideological battles that occurred within the larger global power matrices, which ultimately became the key processes that influenced the understandings of 'independence' within the SABC.

3 GEAR, DSM and the manifestations of commercialisation and ANC power struggles

A central point raised in the opening section of the chapter is that broadcasting reform and the understanding of SABC 'independence' needs to be situated within the broader framework of the evolving political and economic agenda of the ANC-led government, together with its subordinate role in relation to the matrices of global power. The odd ideological terrain of a fading socialist era driven by social welfare, operating within an emerging neo-liberal world determined by commerce (into which South Africa was born) necessitated the sudden abandonment of the RDP in its first eighteen months in favour of GEAR.²⁵¹ These two alternative forms of democracy namely, a more radical and Keynesian substantive form of participatory democracy that emphasised the equitable distribution of economic surplus through state intervention and a liberal, procedural form of representative democracy that facilitated elite rule and economic growth through private enterprise shaped South Africa through the ANC's choice of strategy.²⁵²

²⁵¹ D Pillay, *Media Diversity and the Contested Character of the Post-Apartheid State* (2004) 31 (2) PN 18

²⁵² Adam Habib, *South Africa and the Global Order: The Structural Conditioning of Transition to Democracy* (1998) 16 JCAS 1.

GEAR was, therefore, a sharp move from the RDP blueprint, which was rooted in economic growth and development through reconstruction and redistribution.²⁵³ Instead, GEAR prioritised fiscal prudence and a commitment to reducing state involvement in the economy in order to minimize public funding.²⁵⁴ This shift in the broader South African economic policy provides context for two processes of transformation that significantly shaped the SABC's transformation and its staff's conceptions of 'independence'; First, it was the restructuring of state assets that led to the commercialisation of the SABC. Second, the shift created divisions within the ANC alliance and, in the process, created many centres of power. GEAR and its processes of restructuring state assets through commercialisation and privatisation did not sit well with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) or the South African Communist Party's (SACP's) key allies within the ANC, most of whom held top positions within ANC structures.²⁵⁵ These two groups preferred the RDP, which was a policy that was in line with their own objectives.²⁵⁶ In the end, Thabo Mbeki began to remove some of their members from prominent positions, beginning with shutting down Jay Naidoo's office, which was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the RDP.²⁵⁷ This removal from positions cut to the heart of the ANC political alliance, ultimately costing Mbeki his job. These ANC power struggles, which were impacted

²⁵³ African National Congress, *The Reconstruction and Development Programme: A Policy Framework* (Umanyano Press, Johannesburg 1994)

²⁵⁴ Clive Barnett, *The Limits of Media Democratisation in South African Politics, Privatisation and Regulation* (1999) 21 MCS 274

²⁵⁵ Interview with Mwasu Secretary General, Houghton (Johannesburg 28 July 2011)

²⁵⁶ As an extension to commercialization, the ANC-led government decided to unbundle white-owned corporations by creating what was called the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) group. This facilitated the emergence of black-owned corporations and the creation of a new elite, which further deepened tensions within the ANC alliance. The BEE group also had a significant impact on the SABC, since, during this period, the PSB decided to outsource programme production and, in all cases, the BEE production houses were owned by ANC cadres, which added another dimension to 'independence' understandings.

²⁵⁷ Adrian Hadland and Jovial Rantao, *The Life and Times of Thabo Mbeki* (Zebra Press, Johannesburg 1999)

by the global power matrices through the imposition of macro-economic strategies, began to play themselves out within the SABC, where factionalism began to rein. In the process, the struggles shaped the SABC staff's conceptions of 'independence', as shall be discussed in the next chapters. 'Independence', which had been taken to mean freedom from state interference, began to have different meanings in this changing environment. It is, therefore, important to discuss how GEAR came to be and how it impacted the governance, funding and programming of the SABC.

GEAR was a macro-economic strategy adopted by the South African Department of Finance in June 1996 as a five-year plan aimed at strengthening economic development and broadening employment.²⁵⁸ The ANC government had managed the transition from apartheid to democracy well with the socialist-inclined RDP blueprint, which encouraged the equitable redistribution of resources.²⁵⁹ There was a gap in the new macro-economic strategy with regard to how to integrate into the world economy. Unlike the RDP, which did not emphasize integration into the world economy, GEAR centred on integration. This approach led to the South African Foundation (SAF), a consortium of South Africa's 50 most powerful companies, which published its own macro-economic blueprint, Growth for All, in 1996. This blueprint, by and large, essentially followed IMF prescriptions.²⁶⁰ The strategy was adopted without any consultation of the ANC

²⁵⁸ Devan Pillay, *Media Diversity and the Contested Character of the Post-Apartheid State* (2004) 31 (2) PN 167

²⁵⁹ *Ibid* (n214)18

²⁶⁰ Habib (n213)67, According to Richard Peet, as a prelude to a \$850 million 1993 loan, the IMF published a report on the South African economy, stressing an outward-looking macro-economic strategy, with growth trickling down to the poor through increased private sector employment and government revenue. Moreover, a secret letter of intent was created between the ANC and the IMF, outlining a South African government committed to the responsible management of the economy (interpreted as the cutting of state deficits, the controlling of inflation, the imposing of wage restraints and, most importantly, the recognising of the superiority of market forces over state regulatory

alliance or even of the head of the ANC policy department, Labour Minister Tito Mboweni, and it was presented with the declaration that it was non-negotiable.²⁶¹

The adoption of the new macro-economic strategies signalled a number of new pieces of legislation for the SABC and the broadcasting landscape at large. In order to meet the new challenges brought about by GEAR, the SABC had to realign itself with provisions put forth in the various pieces of legislation. Important developments included the formulation of the White Paper on the Broadcasting Bill 1998, the Broadcasting Act 1999 and the Independent Communications Authority Act 2000, which were introduced between 1996 and 2000. The legislation had an impact on the entire SABC structure, including governance, funding and programming. It is very important to note that most of these pieces of legislation, just like the macro-economic strategy itself, were treated as rush jobs, and civil society had only a tiny window of opportunity within which to respond.²⁶² Given this context, a fundamental transformation programme for the SABC was needed. The Minister of Communication established a committee that developed the first Green Paper on Broadcasting in November 1997.²⁶³ The Green Paper contained proposals that involved changes to the SABC's board, programming, management and policies, both internal and external. They also included proposals for restructuring the organization, a policy on affirmative action and the board's adoption of a language

interventions). See V Padayachee, *Debt, Development and Democracy: The IMF in Post-apartheid South Africa* (1994) 62 *Review of African Political Economy* 585, 97

²⁶¹ Habib (n213) 43

²⁶² See B Ngwenya, 'The SABC and the Crisis of Independence' (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oxford, Oxford 2011)

²⁶³ Duncan (n164) 84

policy.²⁶⁴ The effect was to cut costs and to create the broad policy framework within which specific targets and programmes to transform the SABC could be developed.²⁶⁵

The situation had a profound effect on SABC governance, a key area in determining conceptions of independence. The new Broadcasting Act 1999 outlined the SABC board members as the governors of the institution.²⁶⁶ According to Section 13's appointment procedures, twelve members were appointed by parliament following a public participation process, and the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operations Officer were named as the executive members of the board. Apart from sitting in on board meetings, the executive members were responsible for the day-to-day management of the SABC and for the creation of an identity for the institution. On the other hand, the board's role was to focus on strategic issues and monitor performance not to interfere with the day-to-day running of the organisation.

The board could evaluate the management, but the law was silent regarding the evaluation of the board.²⁶⁷ Normatively, the board should have been accountable to the public through the minister and parliament. There was, however, no formal way for the public to air its concerns. This time, civil society was pushed to the margins, and organisations like the FXI, which had pushed for public participation in the appointment of the first board, were silenced. It seems that participation existed only in an abstract manner, such that, purportedly, the public nominated candidates for the board, and the final selection was done by

²⁶⁴ FXI (n132) 5

²⁶⁵ Martins Dimitri, *State Broadcasting to Public Service Broadcaster: A Case Study of SABC TV News 1994-1996* (Paper presented at SABC stock taking conference of the FXI, 4-5 November 2000) <<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:4dcIRrPPVYJ:africa.org/...> accessed 5 November 2010.

²⁶⁶ BA Act 1999 (no 4)

²⁶⁷ Ibid

parliamentary committee. In addition to the silence regarding the evaluation of the board, the law led to two problems pertaining to governance.

First, there was the view that the board was appointed and controlled by the ANC. This was plausible, since Matlare, the CEO, and Maphai, the board chair, were openly ANC members. The second problem was the high turnover rate. Over a period of six years, between 1994 and 2000, there were three different CEOs and three different board chairs.²⁶⁸ This was a clear situation in which the mandates of the macro-economic strategy dictated the internal policies of the SABC, reflecting a dual struggle over public broadcasting. The key issue at hand was how a commercialised broadcasting system could deliver on its PSB mandate to serve the diverse South African audience that faced a highly uneven distribution of resources (since the RDP had not achieved its redistributory objectives). It became, therefore, even more difficult to create a national identity, since nation solidarity and nation building had become virtually impossible due to the sharp differences in wealth.

This situation was exacerbated by the problematic funding model, which was one of the sources of the SABC's identity crisis. This crisis affects the SABC's ownership and programming structures, as well as the way in which it addresses its audience (i.e., as consumers rather than as citizens).²⁶⁹ The staff at the SABC found themselves in a situation in which they did not know whom to serve or whether to stick to their professional ideals or shift to the new commercialisation goals.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Interview with SABC COO, Auckland Park (Johannesburg, 1 September 2011)

²⁶⁹ Nyamnjoh (n117)

²⁷⁰ This is a point raised mainly by the anti-commercialisation camp, and it is explored in the next chapter. Chapter 6, however, questions this perspective, since there is little evidence in programming

The consequences of relying on advertisers for funding are further discussed in Chapter 6 and are briefly covered in the next section. Duncan noted that the minister's role contradicts one of the basic laws of company law: namely, the separation between ownership and control.²⁷¹ Moreover, it undermines the basic effects of corporatization. She further adds that the reason the government does not fund the SABC has more to do with specific political choices than a genuine lack of money.²⁷² Duncan's argument supports the COSATU position paper, which held that the government's decision not to fund the SABC was designed to cut social services in order to reduce debt and attract foreign direct investment. The position also substantiates the FXI position paper that, in terms of GEAR, the government had committed itself to a home-grown structural adjustment programme in order to reduce the country's significant debt, which was largely inherited from the apartheid.²⁷³ GEAR had its own advantages, however. Specifically, beginning in 2000, the SABC began to realise annual profits. The first GEAR CEO, Peter Matlare, left the SABC with 400million in its coffers.²⁷⁴ There were, however, complaints from civil society that the profit realised by the SABC came at the expense of programming content.²⁷⁵

Duncan's assertion was that the SABC had been focusing on the previously advantaged English-speaking audiences because they presumably met the

that commercialisation has compromised the identity of the SABC. However, literature as examined in the previous chapter, supports the anti-commercialisation perspective.

²⁷¹ Ibid (n164) 13

²⁷² Duncan (n164) 12

²⁷³ FXI (n132)

²⁷⁴ South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), *Annual Report 2005* (SABC, Johannesburg 2005)

²⁷⁵ J Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-Liberalism* (Freedom of Expression Institute and Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa, Johannesburg 2000)

standards and characteristics required by advertisers.²⁷⁶ Moreover, local programmes were more expensive to produce than cheap American imports. This view was, however, rejected by at least twelve of the thirty-six interview respondents. They argued that local programmes, such as the educational drama *Yizo-Yizo* and *Soul City*, topped the list of the most-watched films in the late 1990s and in the new millennium. Their argument was that, during GEAR, there was more money to spend on local programmes. Their views appear to be supported by the annual reports that state that the SABC met all of its programme quotas during the time.

The Broadcasting Act 1999, as amended, ensured, through a number of provisions, that there were sufficient South African programmes on the SABC. In its preamble, it stated that programmes must reflect the multilingual and diverse nature of South Africa by promoting the entire spectrum of cultural backgrounds and official languages in the Republic.²⁷⁷ In addition, the Act encouraged the development of South African opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity by displaying South African talent in radio and television programming. The legislation was further broken down into specifics with regard to television programming. In complying with the obligations outlined in terms of the Broadcasting Act 1999, a public television licensee must ensure that at least:

- (i) 35% of its drama programming consists of South African drama;
- (ii) 80% of its current affairs programming consists of South African current affairs;
- (iii) 50% of its documentary programming consists of South African documentary programming;

²⁷⁶ See Chapter 4

²⁷⁷ Broadcasting Act 1999

(iv) 50% of its informal knowledge-building programming consists of South African informal knowledge-building programming;

(v) 60% of its educational programming consists of South African educational programming;

(vi) 55% of its children's programming consists of South African children's programming.²⁷⁸

It is these quotas that the SABC argues that it has met. The change in governance structures, funding and programming created many tensions within the SABC, and these tensions informed the perceptions of SABC 'independence', as shall be discussed in the next chapters.²⁷⁹ The glaring issue with the regulator (for example ICASA) during this period was its silence, despite the controversial changes that threatened the SABC's 'independence'. The regulator's lack of intervention during this period could be attributed to a number of factors. First, the role of ICASA did not extend to corporate governance issues. As a result, the replacing of boards and senior management by the executive was guaranteed to not to receive any reaction from the regulatory authority due to the existing gap in legislation regarding who should adjudicate on corporate governance. In this case, it seems that the government, through the minister's shareholder powers, was more powerful than the regulator. This scenario saw the beginning of the government's reach of power into the governance of the SABC and, consequently, its threat to the institutional 'independence' of the SABC. In 2002, the situation was made worse by the adoption of another macro-economic strategy: the developmental state model.

²⁷⁸ Media Monitoring Report 2002

²⁷⁹ A detailed discussion that supports the SABC's argument is provided in Chapter 6, where programming content is used as an empirical reference.

The developmental state model

Despite divided opinion, GEAR brought significant financial gains, not only to the South African economy, but also to the SABC.²⁸⁰ As a result, the ANC-led government decided to develop a strategy that would redistribute the gains of GEAR. Thus, the developmental state model (DSM), a macro-economic strategy lifted from the booming Asian economies, was adopted.²⁸¹ The DSM was expected to play an active role in guiding South African economic development and in using the country's resources to meet the needs of the people. The idea was to try to balance economic growth and social development and, as a result, to merge (in a sense) RDP with GEAR. State resources in the form of gains made from GEAR were to be used by the state to address poverty and to increase economic opportunities for the marginalised.²⁸²

During this period, the ANC-led government played a major role in shaping the structure and output of the economy through various instruments, such as the use of fiscal and monetary policies to control key industries and achieve indirect state ownership through personnel deployed in those industries.²⁸³ The degree of state intervention was higher due to the abandoning of GEAR, which signalled the end of leaving economic development and redistribution to the whims of the free

²⁸⁰ SABC was profitable for five years in a row. The government had been successful in curbing inflation from an average of 8.6% in the 1990s to 6.7%, and the budget deficit had dropped from 4.6% to 2.4%. Economically, prosperity seemed clear, and such statistics would attract foreign investment.

²⁸¹ ANC Position Paper 2001. The DSM has defined South Africa since 2001. The incumbent, Jacob Zuma, has continuously reinforced the DSM in his annual State of the Nation Address (SONA). Opposition parties have argued since 2001 that the concept's ideological principles have not been defined and that there is no political document that sets out what the ANC's developmental state really is in relation to the state and the economy. The argument is that the model is lifted from economies with different experiences from South Africa and that, in the end, the DSM is a repressive model.

²⁸² Portfolio Committee on Communications, *Annual Report of the Portfolio on Communications* (Unpublished) 2001

²⁸³ Interview with former SABC Board Chair, UNISA (Pretoria, 8 August 2011)

market.²⁸⁴ Due to its state interventionist characteristics, the DSM did not sit well with PSB perceptions of autonomy. In development journalism, the state essentially dictates what the public interest is, and its footprint is seen in all of the SABC's activities. This was to be expected, since a developmental state must be able to direct and support economic development through the building of a strong public service, the effective use of state-owned enterprises and the driving of strategic investment initiatives.²⁸⁵ A Department of Communication spokesperson had this to say:

In South Africa, we have committed to building a developmental state that efficiently guides national economic development by mobilising the resources of society and directing them toward the realisation of common goals. We place the needs of the poor and social issues, such as health care, housing, education and a social safety net, at the top of the national agenda.

This was a clear statement that the state was to take the lead in defining a common national agenda, in mobilising all of society to take part in the implementation of this agenda and in directing society's resources, including the SABC, towards this shared programme.

In keeping with the objectives of the DSM, in 2002, the ANC-led government decided to exert more control over the SABC by introducing the Broadcasting Amendment Bill. This Bill sought to add to the minister's shareholder powers the power to control editorial policy. Although civil society resisted the move, the minister's powers were indirectly extended into editorial policies through the minister's new sole responsibility for approving business plans which, by and large, included plans on editorial. The blacklisting of commentators discussed in

²⁸⁴ Ibid

²⁸⁵ C Tleane and J Duncan, *Public Service Broadcasting in the Era of Cost Recovery* (FXI, Johannesburg 2003)

Chapter 5 could also trace its roots to this period. What became clear was that the ANC-led government was exercising greater control of the SABC under the pretext of developmental state model precepts. Tleane and Duncan argued that the main reason for executive attempts to control broadcasting was to ensure the attainment of developmental goals within the framework of GEAR's accumulation drive.²⁸⁶ Thus, in 2002, there was a shift towards centralised control. Succession struggles became clearer, and the ANC's control over programming content became even more pronounced. Programmes began to be taken off-air hours before broadcast, appointments became the deployment of cadres and, most importantly, the SABC became a mouthpiece for the ANC. In the process, the SABC became accountable to the minister and the ANC, instead of the public. In assessing the patterns of reform, the developmental state model and GEAR were at odds with the traditional precepts of PSB, such as commercialisation. The resulting situation contributed to fragmented conceptions of SABC independence.

The constant change in macro-economic strategies was proof enough that the ANC was not succeeding in delivering its re-distributory objectives and Richard Peet called the constant change of policy, a result of 'disciplining the ANC' by the world Bank and IMF.²⁸⁷ The shift in macro-economic strategies was three-pronged. First, it became a divisive political issue within the ANC (e.g., GEAR was not accepted by the left within the ANC). Second, fiscal prudence meant ignoring the plight of the poor. Third, GEAR and the DSM saw the rise of dissenting voices, which meant that the ANC had to control the main communication conduit (i.e., the PSB) and align it with its developmental objectives or risk losing power. The core of

²⁸⁶ Ibid (n244) 41

²⁸⁷ Richard Peet, *Geography of Power: Making global economic policy* (Zed Books, London and New York) 138

the argument, therefore, is that the ANC became weaker and more fragmented. As a result, in order to consolidate power, it had to control the SABC. On the surface, the ANC-led government could be seen as all-powerful and dominant, but, in reality, it was weak (hence, its need to curtail public discourse by controlling the PSB). The state, in effect, lost its role as the re-distributor of wealth through its own fiscal policies, becoming simply a guardian of the market's interests. This weakened position led the state to control key state institutions, such as the PSB in order to assert its authority and consolidate power. The state's policies also inform SABC 'independence' conceptions held by the staff.

4 How the four tiers construct the four conceptions of SABC independence

This section considers how the SABC is conditioned, but not totally determined, by the broader sphere of the South African socio-economic environment. It examines how the adopted macro-economic environment and the larger horizons of the South African political economy impact governance, funding and programming. This section places emphasis on the four tiers of staff, which are found throughout the governance, funding and programming spheres within the SABC. It introduces the four conceptions of 'independence' and provides an overview of the ways in which they are produced . Finally, it builds a foundation for understanding the analyses in the following chapters.

At the centre of understanding SABC staff conceptions of SABC 'independence' are the ideas of professionalism and identity. Professionalism was mentioned by all interview respondents, and one respondent defined it as the ability to work in an environment where one can make decisions (especially in editorial) without interference from the government, advertisers or senior

managers.²⁸⁸ This view appears to be informed by the purpose that defines the SABC, which is broadcasting in the public interest, independent of politics and commerce.²⁸⁹ As a result of this defined objective, SABC staff expect to be able to broadcast independent of political or commercial interests. However, the larger political economy playing itself out within the SABC appears to delimit such freedoms, which comprise the SABC's identity of professionalism. As a result, four conceptions of 'independence' are produced. These depend primarily on the level occupied by the staff, since the larger horizons of the political economy impact the staff in different ways. The different ways in which the staff experience and interpret the impacts of these macro-economic strategies, which manifest themselves through the commercialisation of the SABC and ANC political power struggles, influence the different conceptions of independence: namely, the anti-establishment, professional, political and legalistic conceptions of independence. The heterogeneity in the interpretation of professional values emphasises that the four conceptions of 'independence' are not cast in stone. Before I discuss the fluidity of the conceptions, I want to make some distinctions between them. These distinctions are important, since they provide insights into understanding 'independence' through the eyes of the staff. Particularly, they can be understood in terms of the positions occupied by the staff within the PSB.

First is the *anti-establishment conception*, which was largely held by lower-tier staff with the SABC (namely, the middle management and producer/journalist

²⁸⁸ All 36 interview respondents supported this view. Professionalism at the editorial level refers to a formal deference to objectivity, fairness and impartiality. However, it remains that professionalism is a socially constructed phenomenon that is determined by various factors, which may include country and personal experiences. It appears there is diversity among SABC staff with regard to how they experience and interpret professional roles and ethics, as shall be outlined in Chapter 6.

²⁸⁹ Broadcasting Act 1999.

tiers). This conception involves the staff throwing off an identity that they view as residue of a system of oppression through a subtle form of radicalism, in which they disengage from authority through acts of insubordination or distancing from SABC activities, such as training workshops. The SABC, particularly during the Mbeki and Zuma commercialisation and the ANC power struggles, began to see executive overstretch into its operations a situation that has strong parallels with the apartheid methods of control. Political appointments at the board and management levels began to reflect the goals of commercialisation and, of course, the ANC factions, which had a negative impact on staff in the lower-level tiers. These staff members, according to one interview respondent, became main actors in a movie they knew nothing about.²⁹⁰ In the end, the lower staff tiers found their professionalism eroded by these factors. The anti-establishment conception is linked to the second conception, the professional conception.

The *professional conception* of SABC 'independence' is also tied to the two lower tiers. This conception is inspired by how SABC staff perceive colleagues having a degree of control over their own work. This conception is largely held by people in editorial, who are responsible for programme output. These are the ones who suffer from interference in terms of the censorship and self-censorship of editorial direction. During the commercialisation era, there were numerous phone calls from ministers or directions from the president's office regarding which programmes to air and which not to air.²⁹¹ In addition, professionalism is

²⁹⁰ Interview with Journalist/Producer, Sunnyside (Pretoria 2 September 2011)

²⁹¹ See Chapter 5. The SABC had denied the existence of a policy within the SABC to blacklist disloyal political commentators. SABC spokesperson Kaizer Kganyago publicly denied that there was any form of blacklisting within the SABC, a perspective that was supported by the regulator ICASA. However, John Perlman, a former programme anchor within the SABC, contradicted Kganyago and made it clear that the blacklist was in place on SABC instruction. As shall be discussed in Chapter 5, the High Court of South

determined by how staff members within the SABC view each other. For example, when an individual on the SABC board or senior management is perceived to be inclined towards a political party, that individual is automatically perceived to be unprofessional and an instrument of the particular political party. Moreover, if another individual's political orientations are unknown, the individual is perceived to be professional.²⁹²

Linked to the professional conception is the way in which SABC staff members perceive themselves to conduct their work without any sort of interference (whether threats or inducements) from either external politicians or internal authorities. This conception is largely held by all four tiers. I call this the *political conception*.²⁹³

Finally, there is a conception that is largely held by the top two tiers and, to some extent, by those who are generally in support of the status quo across all of the tiers. This conception considers external politics and commercial power in the form of advertisers and financially powerful individuals to be the factors that shape the understanding of SABC 'independence'. This conception draws heavily on 'independence' as defined in various broadcasting legislations and is largely held by the upper tiers, who wish to make the rest of the organisation believe that it is

Africa ruled in 2011 that there was, indeed, political interference and blacklisting within the SABC in 2005.

²⁹² Senior appointments at the SABC were clouded in controversy during the Thabo Mbeki era. Unlike the RDP era, during which national nominations were held for the board and interviews were broadcast live on national television, the Thabo Mbeki administration did the opposite. First, the SABC was established as a public company, and a Memorandum and Articles of Association were concluded between the SABC and the Minister of Communications. Clause 11.1 of the Articles gave the minister the right to effectively veto the appointment of any three directors (i.e., the group chief executive officer (GCEO), the chief financial officer (CFO) and the chief operating officer (COO) the top three managers at the SABC). The board's lack of power in the appointment process of senior managers limits its role and determines how 'independence' is understood.

the only conception that exists. There are two reasons this conception is largely held by the upper tiers, the board and senior management. First, there is evidence that the ANC-led government appoints senior personnel. Holding this perspective is, therefore, a strategy to enforce silence and conceal the government's interference in the running of the SABC. Second, the upper tiers are, by virtue of their position, the conduit between power elites and the SABC; therefore, through their positions they can capture the larger picture and see how it relates to the entirety of the PSB. I call this the *legalistic conception*.

As I pointed out earlier, these conceptions of 'independence' are not fixed; instead, they are in a constant flux, as they are imagined differently depending on settings within the SABC. Moreover, the conceptions are not discrete, but, instead, exist as a continuum. In Chapter 5, I further demonstrate how these conceptions of SABC 'independence' interlink because they are products of conflicting SABC identities brought about by commercialisation and ANC power struggles. These SABC identity struggles can be further explained through two competing perspectives on PSB. On one hand, there is a conservative approach to PSB, which upholds the canonical values of universality of appeal and access and the journalistic norms of objectivity, neutrality and fairness. These values demand the SABC, not only to be accessible to everyone, but also to pursue programmes that are attractive to both mass audiences and minorities. The assumption here is that these values can only be attained through a PSB that is government-funded and that any commercial inclinations on the part of the SABC are unfair, since they may ignore minority tastes in pursuit of mass audiences. However, these values are also discussed as being informed by Eurocentric theories, which tend to hide the locus

of enunciation of those who up-hold them. On the other hand is a group of pro-commercialisation and ANC backers who support the status quo and are generally nationalist in approach. For example, the pro-commercialisation group holds the perspective that commercialisation is a key condition for the 'independence' of the SABC, since it insulates the PSB against any form of state intervention and associated bureaucratic control. According to this perspective, the conservative approach is prejudiced against commerce. It is also considered to be elitist and paternalistic, since it assumes to know what is good for the public.²⁹⁴ Pro-ANC groups hold the perspective that any responsible government should control the PSB and, particularly, its appointments since the PSB gets its mandate from the South African populace, which voted for the ANC in a free and fair election.²⁹⁵ The 'independence' conceptions are, therefore, a reality stemming from internal factors that cannot be divorced from the larger South African political economy horizon, which is also informed by larger matrices of power, including various knowledges and identities. The conceptions are also defined by the tension between the consolidation of the bureaucratic practices brought about by commercialisation and ANC power struggles and the long-established traditions of mass participation, which support traditional PSB values.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how the idea of media 'independence' should be understood as part of a complex and dynamic historical process, dictated and mediated by equally complex structures of liberal democratic order. The chapter has traced how the post-apartheid South African state has always been open to

²⁹⁴ Robert W McChesney, *The Problem of the Media, US Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (Monthly Review Press, New York 2004)

²⁹⁵ Interview with SABC News Bulletin Editor, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 12 July 2011)

manipulation and reconstruction by Bretton Woods institutions, such as the IMF, in establishing its fiscal policies. This reliance on externally dictated macro-economic policies has seen the post-apartheid state's failure to distribute material resources and freedoms and, in the process, its creation of animosity between the state and its citizens. This animosity has played itself out in key state institutions, particularly the SABC. Specifically, the already-weakened state denies the SABC certain freedoms or intervenes in its affairs in order to appear to be a strong state. The state is weak because it cannot provide material benefits to its citizens; consequently, it uses force and authoritarian measures to control its PSB. The chapter has, therefore, illustrated that, in order to understand the role of the SABC, one has to also examine its relationship with the larger, changing South African socio-economic environment, as influenced by global matrices of power and the SABC. It has also examined the progress of broadcasting reform since 1994 and situated the SABC within the wider context of the evolving political and economic agenda of the ANC, particularly in its subordinate role to Bretton Woods institutions. Moreover, the chapter emphasizes the complexity of understanding the role of the SABC in its struggle for an identity and a role in this changing environment, as well as how this struggle shapes understandings of 'independence' by SABC staff across all four tiers. The transition of power from apartheid to democracy did not represent a decisive episode in the transition of the SABC; however, there were fundamental changes. At the beginning, these changes occurred through the RDP, which was short-lived. Following the RDP, GEAR and the DSM saw the ANC and other commercial interests overreaching into the running of the SABC. According to some respondents, the SABC became more or less synonymous with the apartheid SABC. In the end, according to interview

respondents, the SABC after RDP did not generate a change in course; instead, if anything, it generated the opposite. Consequently, four conceptions of 'independence' began to emerge, centred on how the commercialisation of the SABC, together with ANC political struggles (which were interlocked with the adopted macro-economic strategies) impacted SABC staff in their respective tiers. The argument has been that the mandated role of the SABC was shaped and compromised by the larger macro-economic strategies. SABC reform broadcasting indicated the subordination of redistributive to austerity-based economic growth, resulting in the attenuation of participatory decision making in the formulation of broadcasting policy.

Chapter 4: Shaping of the meaning of SABC 'independence' during the commercialisation era

1 Introduction: Commercialisation as a Bretton Woods project

The previous chapter illustrated how the post-apartheid South African state lost both its role as a redistributor of wealth through fiscal policy and its position as the establisher of policies on employment, education, health, culture and communication through the adoption of Western-influenced macro-economic strategies. In other words, the state was reduced to the role of guardian of private interests and, consequently, despite having political power, the ANC found itself in deep crisis, since it was caught in the double bind of trying to address sharp social inequalities while, at the same time, promoting neo-liberal values of capitalism. The market, of course, promised economic efficiency and performance, but the reforms came with layoffs of workers and further inequalities, which carried the burden of cutting right through into the ruling party's popular support. This situation led to an uneasy relationship between the state and the citizens, in which the citizens needed firm state control and the government, as a result, began to resemble the old regime. In this chapter, I illustrate how these macro-economic strategies have manifested themselves through commercialisation of the SABC and how the PSB staff has interacted with these intrusive forces and interpreted them in relation to their understanding of independence. Instead of focusing only on external forces, in this chapter and in the next two chapters, I turn the perspective to the SABC itself by inhabiting the organization. Through this process, I seek to understand the impact of these external forces through the experiences of SABC staff.

In this chapter, I discuss the impact of the commercialisation of the SABC on the 'independence' conceptions of its staff. My key argument is that

commercialisation divided SABC staff into two camps. In one camp, interpretations of 'independence' were shaped by an anti-commercialisation ideological position that eschews the market and upholds Reithian public service values of universality of access and an appeal to audiences that should be free from market and political influence. In the second group, staff members believe that the market actually delivers a form of 'independence' from the state. For the purposes of this chapter, I call the first camp the 'traditionalists' and the second camp the 'pro-commercialisation' camp.²⁹⁶

The conceptions of 'independence' can, therefore, also be mapped with reference to a conflict between a commercial and a paternalistic/traditionalist understanding of PSB. The different understandings of 'independence' are informed by key questions about whom the SABC should serve and how it should serve the market, the public at large and politicians. To whom should the SABC be accountable? And how do accountability relationships shape conceptions of the 'independence' of the SABC? These ideological reactions to commercialisation produce three key conceptions of independence, which are not fixed, but are in flux: a legalistic, a political and an anti-establishment conception. As pointed out in the first chapter, PSB organisations are generally operated for purposes other than profit; however, they must still contend with economic and financial forces, which means that the significant costs of their operations need to be covered. Therefore, in this chapter, I examine how the SABC staff interpreted the divide between the traditionalist and pro-commercialisation camps' perspectives in relation to the SABC's independence. This leads to the SABC having a somewhat fragmented identity, in which staff members have conflicting ideas regarding what the

²⁹⁶ These two groups hold nationalist and neo-liberal perspectives, respectively.

organisation stands for, what its goals are, who it serves, and what the interests of its stakeholders (including the public at large) are. This organisational incongruence fosters mixed attitudes and ambivalent identifications.²⁹⁷ Commercialisation, therefore, fosters the emergence of a dual and contradictory SABC identity, generating tension between the market-driven viewpoint and the public service viewpoint within the organisation. This tension, in turn, influences how staff within the SABC think about independence.

This chapter develops this argument through five sections. The first section defines and contextualises commercialisation by placing the SABC within the context of South African politics. The second section examines the drivers of commercialisation, such as privatisation, alignment to national goals and the Triple Inquiry Report. The third section discusses how commercialisation manifests itself within the SABC. The fourth and core section of the chapter discusses how ‘independence’ conceptions are produced within the SABC in response to commercialisation. Here, I draw on interview data and public policy documents.

2 Defining commercialisation

The meaning of commercialisation varies according to the type of activity that is being commercialised. However, most definitions of commercialisation share a common core: profitability. At a general level, commercialisation refers to the streamlining of organisations, either wholly and/or partially owned by the government, such that the enterprises come to operate as profit-making

²⁹⁷ Organisational incongruence is loosely defined, here, as differing mind-sets among employees within the SABC, which create tangents and create a source of conflict, in the process promoting, a fragmented form of organisational identity. See Mark Esposito and Lloyd Williams, *Moving Beyond Human and Organizational Incongruence* (Working paper series RMT) (2010) 29 WPS 10, 13<<http://hal.grenoble-em.com/hal-00542258>>

commercial projects without financial backing from the government.²⁹⁸ In the specific context of media organisations, commercialisation is a process by which media structures and content come to reflect profit-seeking goals. For example, media industries become governed by market considerations such as the selling of advertising space in an effort to maximise profit.²⁹⁹ This process is usually a result of trying to secure financial sustainability and minimise dependence on the government. In this thesis, commercialisation refers to the formal endorsement of funding of the SABC through the sale of advertisements, as well as the further consequences of this endorsement. This definition focuses on the structures of the organisation pursuing profit-seeking goals and does not necessarily require that the actual programme content also reflect such profit-seeking goals. The interview data and the SABC documents, which I analyse in this chapter, do not provide a conclusive answer regarding the impact of commercialisation on SABC programming content. I, therefore, present a more detailed analysis of the content of SABC programming in Chapter 6. Nonetheless, the current chapter does recognise that the logic of a commercial system in broadcasting can lead to a situation in which the audience is viewed as a product to be delivered to advertisers (as has been argued by many anti-commerce theorists).³⁰⁰ Commercialisation, however, demands more from PSBs than the generation of profit. Attached to profit are three key principles of commercialisation that play

²⁹⁸ P Preston, *Competition in the Telecommunications Infrastructure; Implications for the Peripheral Regions and Small Countries in Europe*. (1995) 19 (4) *Telecommunications Policy* 253, 271; also see HR Zayyad, *Privatisation and Commercialisation in Nigeria* <<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/aapam/unpan028228.pdf>>

²⁹⁹ D McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* (4th edn, Sage Publication, London 1994)

³⁰⁰ P Scannell, *Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Life, Media Culture and Society* (SAGE, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi 1989) 11, 135

critical roles in the ways in which SABC staff understand their roles within the organisation and, consequently, their conceptions of independence.

First, commercialisation demands greater SABC accountability to parliament by demanding evidence and justification for its use of resources.³⁰¹ This accountability, in relation to financial performance, is especially important in terms of the fostering of a culture of financial discipline for the SABC, since the PSB is required to account for both income and expenditures, according to company law.³⁰² The prioritisation of such accountability is clear within the modern SABC. For example, 4 of the 12 SABC corporate goals reflect this financial accountability.³⁰³ One of these is the third objective, which states that the goal of the SABC is to 'create a financially sound company built on a sustainable business model within a specified time frame that fulfils its mandate'.³⁰⁴

Second, and linked to the first principle, is the objective of competitive neutrality. My research suggests that competitive neutrality has been critical because it underscores the fact that the SABC is not to expect any assistance from

³⁰¹ After commercialization, the SABC was obliged to comply with the stringent provisions of the Public Finance Management Act 1999 (PFMA). The aim of the PFMA 1999 was to lay a basis for the effective and efficient use of resources in the public sector and to provide for a more effective corporate governance framework. Its key objectives were to modernise the system of financial management in the public sector, enable public sector managers to be held more accountable and eliminate waste and corruption in the use of public assets.

³⁰² According to Section 5.2, the SABC, as a public entity (in terms of the PFMA 1999), has a responsibility to ensure that all revenues, expenditures, assets and liabilities are managed efficiently. The PFMA 1999 is not the only Act to depend on the transparency and financial efficiency of the SABC. Section 217 of the South African Constitution provides for the implementation of a procurement policy by all organs of the state. The SABC is an organ of the state, as defined in Section 239 (b) (ii) of the South African Constitution, as it performs a public function as a PSB under the Broadcasting Act 1999. Section 6.4.4 of the Procurement Act 2000 makes it clear that it is imperative for state organs to improve overall efficiency and procurement in order to enhance the value gained for money spent.

³⁰³ The first board of the corporatised SABC was appointed in 2004 and chaired by Sonwabo Eddie Funde. It made clear that the 12 objectives of the corporatised SABC were to underlie all of the SABC's activities and to ensure coherence throughout the company. The objectives were also outlined as being key to the performance management of the SABC's employees. See SABC Annual Report 2006 (08).

³⁰⁴ See SABC Annual Reports 2004-2006 (Johannesburg)

the government in its struggles with competitors, such as M-Net (a commercial broadcaster) and E-TV (an extra-terrestrial free-to-air broadcaster). The Broadcasting Act 1999 was the legislation that provided for the conversion of the SABC into a public company, and the conversion finally took place in 2004.³⁰⁵ In line with the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), the SABC was listed as a Schedule 2 public entity rather than a Chapter 9 institution. Chapter 9 institutions are established to support constitutional democracy; that is, they are independent and subject only to the constitution and the law, meaning that no person or organ of the state may interfere with their functioning and that they are accountable to the National Assembly. Examples of Chapter 9 institutions include the Auditor-General, the Human Rights Commission, the Electoral Commission and the Broadcasting Authority.³⁰⁶ According to the PFMA, like any commercial company, the SABC is subject to paying company taxes and cannot be financially cushioned against competition, since it is no longer public. Furthermore, according to treasury guidelines, the boards of public companies are appointed by the executive, rather than by the legislature.³⁰⁷ The Broadcasting Act 1999 emphasises that the Minister of Communication is the sole shareholder of the SABC; however, it does not stipulate whether he has to exercise his duties on behalf of the public or not. Hence, many questions concerning the accountability of the SABC arise, such as whether it is accountable to the public or to the minister.³⁰⁸ In line with this dilemma, the Minister of Communication also determines the Memorandum and the Articles of

³⁰⁵ Broadcasting Act 1999 (no 4)

³⁰⁶ See South African Constitution Act 1996 (no 108). There have been calls from civil society to establish the SABC as a Chapter 9 institution.

³⁰⁷ Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) 1999 (no 1, as amended by Act 29)

³⁰⁸ SABC Charter Section 5.2

Association of the SABC.³⁰⁹ There is no requirement for public involvement, but, interestingly, the government is divorced from any financial responsibility, despite the fact that, in the past, SABC profits have been paid into the treasury.³¹⁰ According to interview respondents, the commercialisation of the SABC led to the delimitation of a range of freedoms.³¹¹

Third, and finally, commercialisation provides more autonomy for managers. Managerial autonomy refers to the moving away of SABC management from the state bureaucracy. However, the reality is very different.³¹² Commercial practices, such as the hiring of management consultants, the poaching of expertise from rivals and the precision of budgets continue to define the SABC as an enterprise.³¹³ These moves are, however, met with resistance and inertia, since they redefine the identity of the enterprise, which is key to how people's roles within the organisation are defined. I argue that, as the SABC has adopted the organisational structures of a commercial broadcaster, an identity crisis has emerged. A situation has developed whereby the role of the SABC has become complex, such that the staff cannot tell whether they are PSBs or commercial broadcasters. Their understanding of the organisation has a significant role in the ways in which they view their own roles.

³⁰⁹ Broadcasting Act 1999 (no 4)

³¹⁰ In 2009, the government acted as a guarantor to a 1 billion rand loan to the SABC. This was a strong statement that the government was distancing itself from any financial responsibility for the SABC, since it acted only as a guarantor (rather than bailing out the SABC).

³¹¹ Most informants outside the seven pro-commercialisation advocates believed commercialisation was not good for the SABC because it created numerous opportunities for managerial interference.

³¹² State bureaucracy, here, refers to a system in which crucial decisions are made by state officials, the executive or the office of the presidency. It is differentiated from bureaucracy, which is the observance of a hierarchy and administrative procedures within an organisation.

³¹³ See Chapters 1 and 2 for discussions of organisational identity.

A further effect of the commercialisation of the SABC is that it can generate conflict. The pro-commercialisation interview respondents pointed to the three key principles mentioned in the previous section as being very important for any efficient enterprise. They emphasised that commercialisation gives audiences the ability to choose what they want, despite the glaring fact that those choices exist without the consent or support of citizens.³¹⁴ However, in the view of the traditionalist respondents, the argument is that, in as much as commercialisation fits well with efficiency goals, it runs counter to the universal principles inherent in PSB.³¹⁵ In addition, the pro-commercialisation interview respondents further argued that commercialisation removes the SABC from civil society by fragmenting and individualising audiences. This argument hinges on the idea that public goods cannot be delivered through commerce.³¹⁶ Furthermore, they add, the SABC must, as stated in the functions and duties of the SABC in the Broadcasting Act 1999, offer, in all of South Africa's official languages, a range of informative, educational and entertaining programs that showcase South African attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity. This programming must offer information from a South African perspective and advance the national and public interest.³¹⁷

The anti-commercialist interview respondents argued that the SABC cannot perform its duties in a state of commercialisation.³¹⁸ However, before further examining how these different perspectives on the commercialisation of

³¹⁴ Interview with former SABC Chief Operations Officer, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 17 August 2011)

³¹⁵ Interview with SABC Journalist/Producer, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 17 August 2011)

³¹⁶ Ibid (n 14)

³¹⁷ Corporation goals do not, at any point, refer to the South African national or public interest. Instead, the corporation goals refer to Africa in general. For example, one of the objectives states that the SABC should ensure that it plays a meaningful role in enabling the SABC to deliver on its mandate.

³¹⁸ Interview with Secretary General MWASA Union, Mandela Foundation (Johannesburg 20 September 2011)

the SABC influenced the construction of 'independence' conceptions, it is necessary to analyse what actually drove the commercialisation of the SABC.

Key drivers of SABC commercialisation

There were three key drivers behind the commercialisation of the SABC. In this section, I draw on an analysis of academic literature on SABC commercialisation and newspaper reports, as well as respondent accounts.³¹⁹ I suggest that the drivers are a combination of the larger South African economic context and of SABC-specific issues. First, in post-apartheid South Africa, the process of commercialisation has been tied to the larger idea of privatising state enterprises as part of the government's commitment to debt reduction.³²⁰ The harsh realities of the state of the South African economy meant that, despite the urge to pursue socially inclined projects, such as poverty reduction and the elimination of racism and inequality, fundamental policy changes had to be made to address the immediate problems of a large budget deficit, poor GDP growth and unstable government finances.³²¹

The economy that the ANC inherited was in dire straits, economic growth had been declining since the 1970s. An annual GDP growth of 5.5% in the 1960s declined to 3.3% in the 1970s and to 1.4% in the early 1980s.³²² In the 1990s, it

³¹⁹ See W Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001); MM Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2005)

³²⁰ D Pillay, 'The Challenge of Partnerships Between the State, Capital and Civil Society: The Case of the Media Development and Diversity Agency in South Africa' (2003) 14(4) *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-Profit Organisations* 401, 420

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² 'South Africa Statistics' <<http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/>> accessed 14 May 2011. Also see MM Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2005)

dropped even further, into negative growth (except for in 1994).³²³ This decline was compounded by a rising budget deficit, which skyrocketed from 0.9% in 1989 to 9.2% in 1993 and 10.8% in 1993-94.³²⁴ In addition, South Africa was mired in debt inherited from the previous government, which was pegged at R300 billion in 1997, a sharp rise from R90 billion in 1989. Fifty one per cent of the debt was owed by the government, 39% by companies, 7% by banks and 5% by the Central Bank.³²⁵ This economic picture coincided with GEAR, a fiscal-discipline-oriented macro-economic policy that promoted a commitment to the privatisation of non-strategic assets and the creation of public-private partnerships.³²⁶ The SABC was automatically considered to be one of the companies that would be privatised, especially after the Communication Minister declared that the PSB could be self-sufficient. This situation left the ANC in a double bind, wherein it had to try to reconcile socially inclined projects with fiscal-discipline-oriented approaches. The result is captured well by William Beinart, who stated that, for the left leaning observers, the ANC has become trapped in a web of overcautious economic influences and, as a result, has sacrificed its core aims of addressing widespread poverty and disadvantage.³²⁷ In trying to solve these economic problems, other groups beyond conservative whites have expressed concerns about the rapid centralisation of political control, asking 'whether South Africa was drifting in the direction of some other African states where trends towards authoritarianism and

³²³ MM Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2005)

³²⁴ *Ibid* (n276)

³²⁵ J Duncan and M Seleokane, 'The SABC Handbook' (2002) <<https://www.fix.org.za/PDFs/Publications/SABC%20Book.PDF>>accessed 17 March 2010

³²⁶ See Chapters 1 and 3 for a detailed discussion of GEAR.

³²⁷ W Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001) 350

corruption remain widespread'.³²⁸ This view also shapes SABC 'independence' conceptions, as the chapter will show in Sections 3 and 4.

Second, the SABC, like other public companies, had to be commercialised in order to increase resource efficiency as part of the larger process of attempting to increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and address the government budget deficit. The SABC had been performing poorly in financial terms. For example, in 1997, it posted a loss of R64 million, and the SABC CEO made it clear to parliament that the deficit could be expected to rise to R650 million if the government did not intervene.³²⁹ The financial losses of the SABC also began to be a source of civil society criticism of the government, at a time when the ANC-led government was already weakened by internal power struggles.³³⁰ The resulting assumption was that commercialisation would increase efficiency and accountability to the public and would result in a higher quality service and delivery. The then Minister of Post, Telecommunications and Broadcasting, Jay Naidoo, stated that the SABC had to be self-sufficient as a result of the budget constraints of the government. He stated, "This government is not going to give it[the SABC] more money".³³¹ He also introduced further austerity measures for the

³²⁸ W Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001) 290

³²⁹ SABC Annual Report 1997 (Johannesburg 1997)

³³⁰ Many senior SABC personnel either resigned or were fired under Zwelakhe Sisulu (the first post-apartheid CEO). For example, Joe Thlolobe, the chief editor of television, announced his resignation after citing irreconcilable differences with the CEO. His resignation came after the dismissal of Senior Executive Producer Jeremy Thorpe and the departure of television executive Jill Chisholm. In addition, Zwelakhe Sisulu argued with parliament that the increase in expenditure was due to the changes in the SABC mandate, which included a move from the narrow interests of the apartheid government to the catering of African and local content. It was argued that advertisers shied away from local content and religious programmes; however, this is disputed by some producers/journalists.

³³¹ Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI). 'Comments on Broadcasting Amendment Bill' (Freedom of Expression Institute, Public hearings: Portfolio Committee on Communications, September 2002). <http://66.249.93.104/search?q=cache:jZXWtZTAZYwJ:fxi.org.za/archives/amendment_bill_comments.html+site:fxi.org.za+sabc+editorial+policies&hl=en&gl=za&ct=cl nk&cd=8&client=firefox-a> accessed 6 June 2010

already financially depleted SABC, announcing that government funding for the SABC would be cut by 41 per cent, from R235 million in the 1997-98 financial year to R141 million in the 1998-99 budget.³³² Furthermore, he stated that proceeds from the commercialisation process would create revenue for the SABC (although the SABC did not receive any proceeds for its sale of assets from the treasury).³³³

The third key driver of commercialisation was the Triple Inquiry Report findings. In 1994, the move toward SABC self-sufficiency began when the IBA called for a 'Triple Inquiry' an investigation into the feasibility of public broadcasting, cross-media ownership rules and local content provisions. The inquiry was viewed as a continuation of an approach envisaged by the apartheid government: namely, that of privatising the SABC.³³⁴ In support of this point, Horwitz points out that the restructuring of the SABC was considered to be entirely in line with the state strategy of privatising parastatals in order to secure the political and economic interests of the private sector.³³⁵ In September 1995, the IBA released its findings, and in 1996, parliament ratified the report, which had found that the SABC was commercially viable.³³⁶ This paved the way for the formal commercialisation of the SABC, beginning with the Broadcasting Act 1999 and the SABC' final corporatisation in 2004, which formalised the division of the SABC into a public

³³² See AfriMap, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) <<http://www.communitymedia.org.za/alt-media-resources/128-sabc?start=1>>accessed 15 April 2011.

³³³ Ibid

³³⁴ C Tleane and J Duncan, *Public Broadcasting in the Era of Cost-Recovery: A Critique of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's Crisis of Accountability* (FXI, Johannesburg 2003)59

³³⁵ RB Horwitz, *Communication and Democratic Reform in South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001). Horwitz adds that the move to restructure the SABC was more than a simple efficiency strategy; instead, the changes were broadly consonant with the reform apartheid strategy of privatising the parastatals as a subtle, largely hidden market-driven means of entrenching white dominance.

³³⁶ In some of its provisions encouraged the sale of SABC assets. Despite its financial situation, the SABC made over half a billion in the sale of its assets; however, the National Treasury kept the funds, in the process, leaving the SABC without the revenue from the commercial services or the benefits of the sale. The SABC tried to claim the revenue from the National Treasury, but failed (despite many attempts)

and commercial wing. Specifically, the Broadcasting Act 1999, which was a key step towards commercialisation, separated the SABC into a public and a commercial wing. The two divisions were supposed to have different funding models; however, in the end, they both relied overwhelmingly on advertising for revenue.³³⁷ Five years later, in 2004, the SABC corporatisation process was finalised and formalised. One of the financial implications was that the SABC became liable to pay company taxes and was finally actually divided into the public and commercial wings that had been proposed in the Broadcasting Act 1999.³³⁸

These three key drivers promoted the commercialisation of the SABC, which manifested itself in specific ways within the organisation. I argue that these manifestations played a significant role in shaping how SABC staff think about independence, particularly with regard to the effects of restructuring the PSB.

3 How commercialization forced the SABC to restructure

In order to understand the manifestations of commercialisation, two important concepts, corporatisation and privatisation, have to be discussed. First, corporatisation is the process of commercialisation at the organisational level, where the SABC simulates, as closely as possible, private sector ownership in both structure and function. For example, following corporatisation, the majority of SABC shares were held by the Minister of Communication. The situation seemed to indicate a government/state ownership structure, but it also resembled an ideal structure for privatisation, which I discuss in the next section.

³³⁷ Section (10)(2) of BA Act 1999 states that the public wing is funded by advertising, sponsorship, grants and donations, as well as licence fees, and that it may receive grants from the State. However, the wing has relied on advertising revenue for more than 75% of its annual funding since 1998. On the other hand, the commercial wing was supposed to subsidise the public wing to the extent recommended by the board, in consultation with the minister. See BA Act 1999 s 11(d).

³³⁸ SABC Annual Report 2006 (Johannesburg 2006)

Corporatisation can be defined in different ways. For the purposes of this thesis, it refers to the process of changing the structure of a government body so that it operates along business lines, with a mandate to trade profitably and an obligation to report to the government regarding its financial performance. Thus, corporatisation refers to the formal process of turning the SABC into a corporation, but with the government retaining significant control. Second, and as an extension to corporatisation, there is privatisation, which is defined as the transfer of government services into private hands, usually on the grounds that private ownership facilitates efficiency.³³⁹ For example, the privatisation of services within the SABC is illustrated by the fact that most programme production (except for news and current affairs) is outsourced to commercial companies. Consequently, corporatisation is both a product of and a conduit through which the commercialisation of the SABC is attained, whereas the privatisation of some SABC services is evidence of both commercialisation and corporatisation.³⁴⁰ For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on three closely linked commercialisation-induced changes within the SABC that appear to shape staff conceptions of independence.

The nature and extent of commercialisation within the SABC can be seen through reference to three overarching manifestations: bureaucratisation, downsizing and SABC financial turnaround. More specifically, and as part of the three overarching manifestations, commercialisation manifested itself through

³³⁹D Whitfield, *The Welfare State, Privatisation, Deregulation, Commercialisation of Public Service: Alternative Strategies for the 1990s* (Pluto Press, London 1992)

³⁴⁰ In 1996, as another key step to commercialisation, the SABC commissioned outside the managerial consulting company McKinsey and Co. to recommend methods of turning the corporation's finances around. These recommendations were rejected by the SABC's unions—namely, the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA), the South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ) and the Black Engineering Media and Workers Union. The McKinsey recommendations were, however, implemented anyway. They included downsizing, placing workers on contracts and introducing bi-media (in which radio and TV newsrooms are integrated to cut costs)

targeted appointments, financial turnaround, an inclination towards commercial principles, competitiveness, changes in the ownership and funding model, the establishing of bi-media (a policy that involves the news and current affairs departments forming one department for multi-skilling purposes), the contested nature of the PSB mission, the rise of powerful unions, an increase in management-to-staff ratios, the marginalisation of workers, the out-sourcing of production and self-censorship. In the next three sub-sections I discuss this list of indicators of commercialisation.

SABC restructuring and an expanding bureaucracy

Contrary to the idea that commercialisation reduces bureaucratic bottlenecks, the interview data suggest that commercialisation actually increased bureaucracy within the SABC, such that bureaucracy now appears to be endemic at the administrative level. The pattern of bureaucratisation takes place in three interlocked ways: the establishment of bi-media, the head-hunting of managers with commercial reputations, and an increase in staff-management ratios. Bi-media refers to a process copied from the ABC and the BBC, where it was introduced as a measure to cut costs and to make productive use of resources through the merging of various departments into one.³⁴¹ The process emphasises multi-skilling, particularly of journalists, who are expected to possess a range of skills that include research, reporting and editing. The SABC effectively adopted the bi-media approach by merging its radio and TV newsrooms in an effort to cut costs.³⁴² Bi-media restructuring had a direct impact on appointments, since some

³⁴¹ J Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-Liberalism* (FXI and MISA, Johannesburg 2003)

³⁴² Available <http://www.fxj.org.za/archive/Linked/Public%20Broadcasting%20e-archive/PB_subm2.html>

positions were merged and others were erased. In addition, it resulted in an increase in head-hunting for external staff with experience in the private sector. A key example is Peter Matlare, who was appointed as SABC's CEO in 2001 and who had vast prior experience in business, having headed several companies before joining the SABC. The restructuring and appointments led to more managerial staff joining the corporation, which, in turn, bloated the ranks of management, leading to an increase in management–staff ratios. According to a report on these ratios, of the 670 workers in news, 114 were defined as managers in 1994, meaning that there was one manager for every five workers. However, by the year 2000, of a total staff complement of 799, there was a manager for every two people.³⁴³ This multiplication of administrative personnel increased management levels and contributed to a vertical structure that demanded more paperwork and red tape.³⁴⁴ Thus, the interview respondents seem to suggest that bureaucracy fuels a crisis of organisational identity, which occurs in two forms. First, it raises questions about what constitutes a PSB and, therefore, what constitutes 'independence'. Second, it raises questions about from what and whom 'independence' has to be achieved.

It is clear that the new bureaucratic commercial ways of working, particularly the bi-media approach, were received with mixed reactions by staff within the SABC. Bi-media was particularly bureaucratic because it called for staff specialisation which could lead to workers refusing to work outside of their job descriptions and, in the process, add numerous layers to decision-making processes. The phasing in of the bi-media approach created a major problem. The management structure created posts for bi-media executive editors that entailed

³⁴³ Ibid (n 298) 141

³⁴⁴ Interview with former producer/journalist (SABC, Auckland Park 20 August 2011)

existing editors being made subservient. As a result, existing editors reported to executive editors especially on matters pertaining to budgets all in the name of efficiency. This form of concealed centralisation became a source of conflict. One former head of news had a particularly revealing response to what he called 'authoritarian commercialism':

...for me, there was one thing I still cannot understand: a profit-making SABC? Then who are you, a public broadcaster? What then is the purpose of a public broadcaster, when you don't know your purpose and direction? You are bossed around by mafikizolos [newcomers] who know nothing about broadcasting, just because they can make money.³⁴⁵

It thus appears that a non-commercial PSB was central to the SABC's identity for some staff. As a result, for these staff members, commercialisation seemed to strip the SABC of its PSB identity, leaving some staff members without a sense of belonging or self-worth due to the autocratic management approach. A closer look, however, also reveals that the former head of news' response is a product of a power struggle between older members of the SABC and newer members, who have become senior in terms of position. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the new members now control the budget, meaning that the autonomy of existing editors is limited. The same respondent also attacked the commercialisation of the SABC, whose role is now driven by market values.³⁴⁶ These points were echoed by some journalists and producers, who insisted that there were people at the SABC who used their seniority to bully existing staff, even though they were the ones who taught the newcomers their jobs. Many of those who came with new management have better working conditions, and some of the

³⁴⁵ Interview with Former Head of News, Sunnyside Park (Pretoria 12 July 2011)

³⁴⁶ Ibid

existing staff were discriminated against.³⁴⁷ When asked how this situation played out and whether he could provide examples, one respondent stated that:

...there is autocracy. It is clear; it is there; everyone knows it is there; you can feel it; there is nothing we can do about it; it comes from the top. This corporatisation is nothing but a corrupt ANC project.³⁴⁸

These statements appear to link the commercial with the political, especially with respect to senior personnel. This link suggests that 'independence' conceptions are more complex than contemporary scholarship on the SABC would imply.³⁴⁹ This is because such conceptions are not only interlocked, but are also shaped by the fusion of external factors, such as politics, global matrices of power and advertisers, as well as internal factors, such as day-to-day organisational interactions.³⁵⁰ An illuminating example is this response from a former CEO:

...Matlare [the former CEO] never resigned; he was pushed. His mistake was to outsource current affairs programmes to an outside production. The politically elected board questioned him on that, ganging up against him with Snuki Zikalala [the former head of editorial].

This is an interesting case of political and commercial factors fusing to shape SABC staff conceptions of independence. Commercialisation allowed for the production of programmes to be outsourced; however, it was made clear that news and current affairs programmes should not be outsourced, since they represented key components of the PSB's mandate. Matlare, however, outsourced a current affairs programme during his role as CEO and chief editor, which resulted in him losing his job. However, some respondents noted that senior personnel had, in the

³⁴⁷ A number of respondents (six) at the journalistic/producer level did raise the point of bullying by managers.

³⁴⁸ Interview with SABC Newsreader, Auckland Park Mall (Johannesburg 1 September 2011)

³⁴⁹ See J Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-Liberalism* (FXI and MISA, Johannesburg 2003)

³⁵⁰ See Chapter 2

past, outsourced current affairs programmes without any reprisal. According to the respondents, it seems that Matlare lost his job due to political interference both from within and outside the SABC, unlike others who had out-sourced current affairs programmes.

Corporatisation directly allowed for all productions to be outsourced, with the exception of current affairs and news (though, as stated above, Matlare did out-source some current affairs programmes). Bi-media, however, by promoting the merging of newsrooms and multi-skilling to cut costs, indirectly led to the commercialisation of the newsroom and current affairs, as well.³⁵¹ Indeed, the bi-media process lent itself to contradictions. For example, the SABC outsourced all programme production except news and current affairs in order to maintain a non-commercial approach to the running of both. However, the bi-media process was a cost-cutting measure, and the idea behind it was to make news more attractive to audiences and advertisers; thus, in the end, the reality went directly against the 'obligation' that current affairs and news would not be commercialised.

Some other commercially induced patterns of authority and deference were pointed out by informants, particularly in reference to staff-management ratios. The increase in the number of managers created a problem, wherein there was ambiguity surrounding the chain of command. For example, SABC editorial policy states that, should any difficulty arise during programme production, those

³⁵¹ According to one respondent, bi-media was clouded in political mystery. The respondent pointed out that the whole project was an ANC directive that was implemented as a disguise for cutting costs. A labour reporter of no significance, Snuki Zikalala, was appointed to push the project through in order to achieve ANC victory in the 1999 elections. He was then promoted to editor in-chief, deputising Barney Mthombothi. The respondent pointed out that the project was a ploy to push out Mthombothi, who soon left the SABC. Snuki Zikalala then took over his post, only to also leave after the elections. Bi-media was to be scrapped in 2001, after incurring losses. Barney Mthombothi came back as chief executive of news, and Snuki Zikalala later returned in 2004 as Barney Mthombothi's deputy once again. These transitions are analysed in more detail in the next chapter.

concerned should consult their supervisor for guidance.³⁵² This process of upward referral extends to the CEO, who is also the editor-in-chief. Upward referral theoretically insulates staff against any form of censorship and, most importantly, gives staff room to contest any controversial decision. However, a disturbing finding is that, of the lower-level interviewees, only one appeared to have utilised it. This is worrying particularly in light of their references to a culture of conformity, in which, as the interviewees pointed out, the SABC environment forced them to have regard for authority at all times. In fact, the only informant who had utilised upward referral was a producer currently working at the SABC. When asked whether he had used upward referral before and what his experiences were, he pointed to a disconcerting experience:

‘after a disagreement with my manager, I took it up with a superior [name provided], who told me it was better to leave it be, stating that it does not reduce or increase your pay. This is work; it is different from student politics, so just let it go’.³⁵³

When asked whether he had told anyone besides the superior about this experience, the producer replied that he had, but ‘not until after a few months though, when I was shocked that a number of people had also had my experiences in the past’. He added: ‘If you want to keep your job, be silent; otherwise, *uzolamba* [you will go hungry]’.

These experiences offer a powerful account of self-censorship. The maintaining of silence becomes a form of protest, as much as a form of self-preservation, on the part of the SABC staff. This ‘watch your back’ culture is emblematic of an organisation that discourages debate or any form of

³⁵² See SABC Editorial Policies 2004 (a)

³⁵³ Interview with SABC Producer, Mandela Foundation, Houghton (Johannesburg 9 July 2011)

disagreement. It is, therefore, important to realise that an approach in which staff perceive themselves only as employees and nothing more makes them unlikely to actively participate in organisational activities. This leads to the idea of an anti-establishment form of independence. The interview respondents understood 'independence' as individual or personal courage and a determination to keep one's distance from authority. As a result, 'independence' is understood as the right to criticise any form of authority, which may range from immediate seniors to directives from the board.

Commercialisation has also been known to foster corruption, which, according to interview respondents, severely limits freedom. The argument is that commercialisation exposes the SABC and its newsroom to control by rich individuals.³⁵⁴ A number of cases of corruption were referenced by interview respondents. One case that stood out involves a wealthy businessman, Robert Gumede, who, through his financial muscle, influenced the SABC newsroom to publish false allegations of bribery against a *Mail & Guardian* newspaper. The SABC refused to apologise for this, even after being discovered.³⁵⁵

As mentioned earlier, the SABC tends to assume commercial broadcasting characteristics that, in turn, compromise its identity as a PSB, whose barometer for success is usually considered to be citizen-focused programming, rather than profit.³⁵⁶ Commercial broadcasting is fundamentally characterised by its pursuit of profit and audience share (which is necessary to sell the audience to advertisers). Nonetheless, it is clear that there is variation in the extent to which the SABC

³⁵⁴ Ibid

³⁵⁵ F Parker, *M&G Takes on SABC Over Gumede Report* (Johannesburg 11 February 2011)

³⁵⁶ John Keane, *Media and Democracy* (Polity Press, Cambridge 1991) 51-92

became commercialised under the three post-apartheid administrations. Under the Mandela administration, most interview respondents considered the SABC to be 'the people's SABC'.³⁵⁷ During this period, the wider public was consulted in relation to any decision pertaining to the SABC, and the SABC remained accountable to the same public. For example, the SABC board selection was a national issue, in which candidates were nominated by the public and the interviews were broadcast live on television.

In contrast, the commercialisation of the SABC during the Mbeki and Zuma eras was characterised by a top-down form of communication, in which the SABC was accountable to the communication minister, who was the sole shareholder. Commercialisation brings out dictatorial traits in the government as a result of the powers of the minister as a shareholder, a reality that contrasts sharply with the tenets of commercialisation that are supposed to promote the SABC's autonomy from the government. Some of these powers can be seen in the Broadcasting Act 1999, which makes it clear that SABC-related financial regulations are to be approved by the Minister.³⁵⁸ This top-down form of communication seems to also play out in day-to-day SABC staff interactions and affects how staff construct their meanings of independence. A manager captured the difference through this illustration:

...when I started at the SABC, I could spend time with fellow workers and get to know them, and we could have regulars [individuals that consistently attended informal gatherings] in our meetings about our work. A lot of

³⁵⁷ A total of 32 of the 36 respondents considered the Mandela era to be the honeymoon period for the SABC. They pointed out that the SABC was 'for the people, by the people', since, apparently, the citizenry participated in all decision-making with regard to the SABC, ranging from board appointments to designing the SABC logo.

³⁵⁸ For example, the respective ministers have been involved in the arbitrary hiring and firing of senior management personnel.

apprentices used to benefit a great deal from such meetings. I was an apprentice myself, but now you just have to get on with work. You have targets that are set by your bosses, and there is no autonomy or fulfilment in your work.

This new top-down approach, brought about by the commercialisation of the SABC, reinforces various respondents' anti-establishment conceptions of independence. For instance, among producers, editorial 'independence' is now understood as the right to criticise authority. For example, one respondent in the newsroom, who preferred to remain anonymous, stressed that middle management is not independent because they do not resist authority:

They [management] are used to the apartheid way of doing things. They bring that continuity with the apartheid state of affairs to the SABC. They never act as an obstacle at all. During apartheid, they used to respect authority without questioning, and that earned them promotions and staying power. Today, they still do the same. They do not resist authority.³⁵⁹

The interview respondent highlights two important points. First, the respondent draws similarities between apartheid management and post-apartheid management. The lesson learned is that the management does not resist authority. In the process, it is clear that 'independence' is viewed as the ability to resist authority. This characteristic is in line with the watchdog role of the media discussed in Chapter 2. Resistance of authority as 'independence' upholds the anti-establishment conception of independence. Second, the view is polemical, in that it creates a binary of junior staff versus senior staff. This limited view may contribute to people losing sight of other influences on their conceptions of 'independence', such as the different ideological persuasions that manifest in various ways (e.g.,

³⁵⁹ Interview with Journalist/Producer, University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg 4 August 2011)

resistance to transformation).³⁶⁰ Resistance to transformation has the potential to cement factionalism within the SABC, such that new staff and old staff can be cast into opposing camps (since, after all, organisational inertia can lead to resistance to anything new). For example, a middle manager at the SABC pointed out that, in 1996, when he started working at the SABC, he and his peers were viewed as deployed ANC cadres and, in return, they, themselves, assumed the tag 'trust-in-cadres'. This phrase generally referred to new staff members whose intention was to upset the privileges of older officials within the SABC.

Third, the informant assumed that the SABC's apartheid identity of deference to authority has a profound impact on managerial independence. He, therefore, suggested that the length of tenure has an adverse impact on 'independent' pursuits. This idea was also suggested by a former producer with the SABC, who stated that certain managers who had served in the SABC for a long time would not resist anything that came from the top. These opinions are cause for concern. If there were deference to authority, one would assume that the some of the managers would not have remained in a state of inertia when there was movement from apartheid to democracy. There is, however, sufficient evidence in their responses (or in other respondents' responses) that there was, indeed, resistance on the old management's part when the SABC's identity morphed from state broadcaster to public broadcaster. For example, Sarah Crowe a manager in the nineties illustrates this dismissive reaction to affirmative action at the SABC in the mid-1990s:

...they were never journalists; they were brought in because they were 'yes

³⁶⁰ As argued in the previous chapters, the key ideological persuasions are the nationalist (pro-state) and the neo-liberal (anti-state) persuasions.

men, and because they were incompetent...all the training in the world would never have got them to the point where we wanted them to be, as dynamic interpreters of events and things around them. So many of them were promoted during the early transition phases because there was a drive to get people into positions which they weren't going to be able to cope with.³⁶¹

Of course, this transformation was not consistent with staff's interpretation of the identity of the SABC; however, the shift from public broadcaster to corporatisation met with a lot of resistance. This shift from the top-down apartheid form of communication to the post-1994 consultative approach should not have garnered any resistance, but it seems to have met with some due to the idea held by senior staff that new staff members were political appointments. It is, therefore, understandable that middle managers would conform to the old order and resist the new order. Therefore, it is difficult to see middle managers as having been so conformist in light of the above response. Nevertheless, organisational transformations draw diverse responses in different organisations.

Two opposing views have been expressed in the literature with respect to transformations and changes at the level of organisational identity. Some authors, like Stimpert and Sarason, have argued that managers have difficulty acting appropriately in response to environmental changes that do not correspond with their firms' organisational identities.³⁶² Although it is not my intention to explore the sources of managerial inertia, Stimpert emphasises that it is difficult for managers to change in ways that they see as inconsistent with their identities, since the managers of such firms find the social and psychological task of giving up old

³⁶¹Demitri Martins, 'State Broadcasting to Public Service Broadcaster: A Case Study of SABC TV News 1993-1996' (Unpublished paper presented at the SABC stock taking conference of the FXI, 4-5 November 2002).

³⁶²JL Stimpert, LT Gusfaton and Y Sarason, 'Organisational Identity within Strategic Management Conversation: Contributions and Assumptions' in DA Whetten and PC Godfrey (eds) *Identity in Organisations; Building Theory through Conversations* (SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA 1998) 83

meanings and accepting new meanings costly.³⁶³ There seems to be some evidence in support of this argument from the perspective of the respondents. A former head of news who did not want to be named was particularly scathing, saying, 'these people [management] are so resistant to change that they are not even on Facebook or Twitter. And this in the 21st century'.³⁶⁴

Other arguments, however, suggest that it is not a foregone conclusion that management resists change. For example, Jacobs suggests that when novel concepts are aligned with existing identities, inconsistencies are easy to integrate, and new identities are shared by everyone.³⁶⁵ In regard to the SABC, a complex pattern emerges. An isolated comment from the former deputy chairperson of the board adds to the complexity:

In post-apartheid South Africa, the middle management viewed 'independence' as 'independence' from the *mafikizolos* [derogatory term for newcomers], mere political appointments with no knowledge of the SABC. To me, 'independence' has to be a departure from the way we construe independence. 'Independence' has always been viewed from an 'us versus them' perspective. Civil society and all other interest groups should be responsible enough to move away from always resurrecting apartheid when talking about independence.³⁶⁶

Interestingly, however, despite staff's preference for previous identity practices (at least according to the producers), another view emerges. It expresses a clear outlook that is consistent with a legal understanding of 'independence' and that perceives politics and commerce as the only factors that compromise the SABC's independence. This legalistic conception shows allegiance to nationalist

³⁶³ Stimpert and Sarason(n 314) 92

³⁶⁴ Interview with former SABC Newsreader, Mandela Foundation, Houghton (Johannesburg, (19 July 2011)

³⁶⁵ G Jacobs, J Christie-Zeyse, A Keegan and L Polos, 'Reactions to Organisational Identity and Threats in Times of Change: Illustrations from the German Police' (2008) 11 (3) Corp Reputation Rev 245, 261

³⁶⁶ Interview with Former SABC Board Deputy Chair, UNISA (24 September 2011)

perspectives of 'independence'. A former COO demonstrated this legal conception of independence with the following statement:

...commercial pressures are less likely to be recognised by a lot of people because they impact them [only] indirectly. We, at the governance level, know the pressures of having to shape our programming to fit the corporate clientele. That is why these corporate managers were employed.

This interview respondent highlights advertisers as the major threat to the SABC's 'independence' and suggests that they are a key limit to professionalism. To further develop this argument, in the next section, I focus on the second key manifestation of commercialisation restructuring and downsizing as well as on how this manifestation has shaped conceptions of independence. At the end of the next section, I further discuss the legalistic conception of 'independence' and how it links to these manifestations of commercialisation.

Effects of restructuring and downsizing the SABC

In this section, I examine how the legalistic conception of 'independence' emerges in relation to the downsizing of staff. In particular, I discuss the legalistic, professional and anti-establishment conceptions in general terms. All three conceptions, as mentioned earlier, are not to be understood in a rigid manner; rather, they should be seen as interrelated in terms of how they are actually generated. Because their meanings are dependent on context (e.g., the position in the hierarchy of the person holding the conception), their meanings cannot be fixed. Instead, they should be used as mapping devices to map understandings of 'independence' conceptions, which sometimes overlap with one another.

Downsizing marked a turning point in the SABC because it involved various forms of fragmentation of the identity of the SABC, as well as increased

uncertainties and fears, which marked the PSB's working environment. As discussed in earlier sections, one of the chief recommendations of the consulting firm McKinsey & Co. was to downsize the SABC staff in order to cut costs. In 1994, the SABC had 5,287 employees. A year later, that number hovered at just under 3,500 employees.³⁶⁷ The exodus of staff during this period was the result of a combination of factors. First, the SABC offered employees a one-off opportunity to apply for voluntary retrenchment, which led to resignations and early retirements. Moreover, some of those who remained were forcefully retrenched.³⁶⁸ Retrenchments and resignations have continued to plague the SABC, such that commercialism now works hand in hand with state corporatism.³⁶⁹ This phenomenon of state corporatism is discussed in more depth in the next chapter. State corporatism refers to the subordination of business interests to the state, with a diluted demarcation between private and public enterprise.³⁷⁰ Consequently, the retrenchments paved the way for and represented one of the first steps towards commercialisation. As a result, while commercialisation implied that the SABC would operate under commercial principles typified by stringent financial discipline, internally, the organisation remained intensely political. Besides causing tensions related to whom the SABC should serve or be accountable to, commercialisation also produced dynamic internal politics. These internal politics included, to a large extent, the differences in perception we have seen

³⁶⁷ Interview with Jane Duncan, Eastgate Mall (Johannesburg August 2011). Duncan noted: 'The numbers of retrenched staff continue to fluctuate between 1400 and 1600 employees'.

³⁶⁸ Interview with Jane Duncan, Eastgate Mall (Johannesburg August 2011)

³⁶⁹ In 2007, more than 76 staff members, particularly in the newsroom, left the organisation. Notably, these included Denzil Taylor, the political editor who cited a drop in standards at the PSB, John Perlman and the head of 'Special Assignment', a popular hard-hitting investigative SABC documentary. Interview with Kate Skinner, SOS (Rosebank Mall 12 August 2011)

³⁷⁰ Gerhad Lehmbruch, 'Liberal Corporatism and Party Government' in *Trends Intermediation, Contemporary Political Sociology* (vol 1, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills 1979) pg 147, 183 (F)

related to the tier an individual occupies (e.g., lower tiers of staff are more likely to hold anti-establishment conceptions, which represent a form of resistance to senior management bullying).³⁷¹ A pervasive theme among seven interviews with journalists/producers was that, as a result of commercialisation, a new and distinctive conception of 'independence' based on the level a person occupied in the hierarchy of the SABC was developed. Central to this conception was the strong perception that the top tier not only bullied the lower level tiers, but also did not understand anything about the SABC.³⁷² The lower tiers emphasised that the upper tiers specifically, the board and the senior management were divorced from and ignorant about the day-to-day activities of the SABC. This lower-tier evaluation of the top tiers was a central feature of the polarised relationship between the two groups (i.e., the pro-commercialists and the traditionalists). As a result, this relationship contributes to the anti-establishment conception that entails journalists and producers tending to understand 'independence' as resistance to any directives from authority. The lower tier, particularly the traditionalists, attempt to reject this new PSB commercialisation identity, which they view as a system of oppression that seeks to absorb them. For example, a union secretary general in one of the interviews pointed out that:

...there is so much pressure on the staff of the corporation, who have to listen to the clueless guys on the 26th floor and above [i.e., the office floors occupied by senior management]. It is very difficult and psychologically draining for the staff to have to continue to work for a bad news organisation, where dedication and professionalism is overshadowed by the incompetence and cat-fights amongst those that have very little, if at all, to do with the daily programming of the company.³⁷³

³⁷¹ This relationship is discussed extensively in Chapter 5.

³⁷² See quote below.

³⁷³ Interview with Union Secretary-General, Nelson Mandela Foundation (Johannesburg 7 July 2011)

Another element that came up repeatedly in the interviews was the selective and reduced social distance between the senior level personnel and staff members in the lower-level tiers. According to interview respondents, there were individuals within the lower tiers that had been strategically placed by management to spy on their colleagues. Consequently, there was increased rapport between senior management and their strategically located spies. These relationships also took place outside of work and created fertile ground for nepotism.³⁷⁴ This upper–lower tier tension could also be caused by the fact that, following commercialisation, while the staff base in senior management and on the board changed in its entirety, the lower tiers and middle management remained almost unchanged in terms of personnel (save for the merging of departments, such as the news departments). As a result, lower-tier staff feel that they are more experienced than the new, senior-level staff, whom they think should learn more about the SABC from the lower tiers.

This core concern is reinforced through responses such as this one:

It has come to our attention that there is a practice by senior management of what appears to be 'jobs for pals'. Despite a clear recruitment policy, several appointments were made without advertising the positions. We have received reports of positions simply been given to pals, or friends and loyalists, in what appears to be cases of pure favouritism. We have received reports of certain positions being advertised in such a manner that it suits a particular candidate and unfairly excludes others.³⁷⁵

The response above is impossible to ignore because there is evidence to support the suggestion that there are, indeed, individuals who are employed to spy on others. One interview respondent recalled an incident in which five members of staff were selected from their own pool and given over R500,000 by the bankrupt

³⁷⁴ Interview with suspended newsreader Auckland Park Mall (Johannesburg August 2011)

³⁷⁵ Interview with Union Officer, Nelson Mandela Foundation, Houghton (Johannesburg 07 July 2011)

SABC to spend on a workshop in London. These staff members were subsequently deported for allegedly not paying prostitutes in a London brothel.³⁷⁶ What is, therefore, clear is that, despite promises of efficiency and fiscal discipline, commercialisation has its own disadvantages, such as the ones illustrated above.

Decoloniality scholars, such as Maldonado Torres, have noted that what they call the 'myth of modernity', like the discourse of European enlightenment, has two faces: the emancipatory one and the darker one.³⁷⁷ The 'myth of modernity' can also be applied to commercialisation, which promises 'independence' and financial autonomy for the broadcaster but also hides its darker side of corruption, a redefined PSB role, downsizing and hidden power dynamics. The 'myth of modernity' proves that the ideas behind commercialisation practises are not neutrally conceived, since, though its proponents pretend to follow the public interest, they instead serve dominant political-economic interests. It should not be taken for granted that the dominated will speak from the position of the dominated. In understandings of 'independence', it is important to appreciate where the respondents are located epistemically. 'Independence' could imply the location of the speaker; thus, his/her experience needs to be revealed in order to become the starting point for thinking. Grosfoguel calls this the 'locus of enunciation' and points out that it is possible for a subject located on the side of the

³⁷⁶(Staff Reporter) 'SABC Staff Bust over Prostitutes' *City Press* (Johannesburg 30 September 2014). According to the interview respondent, the staff were not senior managers (as reported by the newspaper).

³⁷⁷Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'On Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept' (2007) 21 (2/3) *Cultural Studies* 240, 270

dominated to view the world from the position of a subject located on the dominant side.³⁷⁸

It follows, therefore, that there is a pro-commercialisation group within the lower tier of staff that rejects the notion of an overbearing management. Two interview respondents dismissed the traditionalists' articulations, which assumed that, within the lower tier, there is a shared community of values. The respondents did not view the management as overbearing; instead, they conveyed a legal conception of 'independence' that holds advertisers and politicians to be the key determinants. Consequently, a shared conception of 'independence' influenced by the lower tier being either completely pro or anti-senior management becomes impossible, thus destroying the 'neat scheme of things', such that lower tiers cannot be rigidly classified as holding a particular conception that is set against the upper tiers. Thus, the conceptions are not cast in stone, and nor can they be neatly arranged according to the various levels of staff within the organisation.

As a result of a number of these disparate standpoints expressed by interview respondents, it is clear why a neat consensus regarding the idea of the anti-establishment conception is impossible. Other salient reasons include the fact that some of the staff in the lower tiers are, as alleged, deployed by management or are simply hesitant to become involved in the tensions. Two interviewees expressed sharp disagreement with the anti-establishment conceptions held by journalists/producers. All of the interview respondents in the lower tier did, however, share the view that senior management and the board were not really

³⁷⁸R Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms' (2007) 21 (2/3) *Cultural Studies* 203, 246

aware of what went on in the day-to-day business of the SABC. One producer/journalist remarked:

We should not underestimate that some of the people have been here for too long and are used to many unproductive shortcuts. They are not interested in new ideas, and they are also intolerant of new staff...the managers are, at times, inconsiderate, but we need to work together to realise the SABC's goals of serving the public interest and leave our selfish ambitions aside for the sake of South Africa.³⁷⁹

This interview respondent's view that the traditionalist members of the SABC prefer to conform to their constraints and to segregate new members reflects a subject covered in the relevant literature. For example, Berger and Luckmann argue that members of a society who are involved in the construction of social norms form esoteric enclaves, hermetically sealed to all but those who have been properly initiated into their mysteries. Outsiders are kept out through various techniques, such as intimidation and rational and irrational propaganda.³⁸⁰ Radically understood, based on this perspective, one could argue that, in the case of the SABC, the anti-establishment group is formed, not only as a result of bullying and intimidation, but also as a way of resisting the new, commercially driven way of doing things at the SABC, since the relevance of the traditionalists is threatened. As a result, the strong and unwavering belief in the values of the Reithan PSB, at the expense of commercialisation, is not genuine. Rather, it is a mobilising factor behind which most traditionalists rally in pursuit of self-preservation in a working environment infused with anxiety due to the changes. However, Berger and Luckmann also suggest that this process of social construction and this shaping of social norms is pervasive to the creation of meaning in a society; that is, it is a

³⁷⁹ Interview with journalist/producer, SABC Studios, Auckland Park (Johannesburg September 2011)

³⁸⁰ PL Berger and T Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Penguin Books, Middlesex, England 1966)

fundamental process that involves all members of a society.³⁸¹ This means, therefore, that the outside group's inability to enter the hermetically sealed enclave does not prevent it from creating or contributing to the creation of 'independence' meanings. For example, the isolation of new staff members by older staff members may reinforce the anti-establishment conception of independence, such that the mere existence of the new staff members becomes a uniting factor for the well-established and older staff members.

Senior management and SABC board interview respondents refused to be drawn into this lower-level versus senior-level contest, reflecting instead on the various influences that shape, not only the animosity, but also the conceptions of 'independence'. For example, a former SABC board deputy chairperson outlined a two-fold set of overlapping influences. First, when asked to respond to the lower level tiers' assertion that lower-level staff do not enjoy 'independence' because they are threatened and fearful, the former deputy chair responded:

'Independence'? 'Independence' from who?'Independence' from what? To me, 'independence' means being free from the influence of others, and that is impossible because we have a hierarchy here[in the SABC]. At the same time, we are dependent on advertisers and the government to function. So, we also exist under the authority of others. The so-called journalists should also live with it because everyone is under authority either they sink or swim.³⁸²

A deconstruction of this statement reveals a concealed deference to external factors, such as the government and advertisers, which can be linked to a legalistic conception of independence. The same deference to authority appears to be expected of lower-level staff by the upper tiers. This state of affairs could be explained through the fact that the upper tiers are actually appointed to ensure the

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Interview with former SABC Board Deputy Chair, UNISA (September 2011, Pretoria)

follow-through of the commercialisation principles, thus making the upper tiers cogs in wheels that do not have any control over the direction of the SABC. Again, what this suggests is that the understanding of 'independence' is formulated around the binary opposition between boss and subordinate. The top level appears to be driving commercialisation within the SABC, while the lower levels appear to stick to the traditional form of PSB. The narrative of 'independence' comes, therefore from one of the two competing groups: that is, the traditionalists' rejection of both commercialisation and its pro-commercialisation adherents. Set against this perspective is the pro-commercialisation camp, which rallies behind the SABC's goal of profitability.

One particular respondent was more forthcoming in outlining that the divisive political aspects within the SABC were a price of commercialisation, stating that 'if six senior positions are reduced to three, people are always going to fight, and we on the ground will feel the pinch; it is like throwing three bones to six dogs'.³⁸³ They will bite each other to death'. The respondent's position is emblematic of the fragmentations that have plagued the SABC after commercialisation. Commercialisation, according to 21 of a total of 36 interview respondents, leads fundamentally to downsizing which remains a real threat for many SABC employees.

Another observation is that, when it came to discussing downsizing, most of the respondents (including those 21) were reluctant to speak until they had received assurances that their names would remain anonymous. All of their responses articulated a common recognition of the fact that various silences play roles in

³⁸³ Ibid 382

constructing different conceptions of independence, which are directly linked to the anti-establishment conception of independence. These silences, in as much as they are a form of self-preservation, are also a form of resistance. It is also difficult to imagine that employees would ask questions of their superiors, since the organisational climate seems to one in which 'no one is indispensable'. When a senior manager was asked why SABC staff were reluctant to be more forthright during interviews, and whether this was not, in itself, a form of censorship, the response was yet another version of silence: 'they do not talk because "independence" is not a big issue here'.³⁸⁴

This response was typical of senior management informants, who appeared to be dedicated to a legalistic conception of 'independence' that attempted to ignore internal politics by pointing generally to Reithan threats to 'independence', represented by external politics and commerce. Despite overwhelming evidence from lower-level respondents, members of senior management were unable to recognise the delimiting factors brought about by downsizing, such as censorship, factions and self-censorship. Moreover, they questioned the causal links between any negative experiences and downsizing or retrenchments. One senior manager dismissed the perception entirely, saying:

...what you see in newspapers is different from what happens here. The SABC is a huge organisation, and when it bleeds, it leads; these people want to sell newspapers by creating dissension in the SABC.³⁸⁵

The difficulties that the senior manager interview respondents had in acknowledging that downsizing produced a culture of trepidation within the SABC appear to have been compounded by their tension-filled relationships with the

³⁸⁴ Interview with former COO, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 12 September 2011)

³⁸⁵ Interview with senior manager, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 12 September 2011)

unions within the organisation. This reality contrasted with the commercialisation literature, which tends to suggest that commercialisation brings fragmentation to organisations, in the process rendering unions obsolete.³⁸⁶ However, the SABC presents a different case, as its unions often serve as rallying points through which employees find common ground.

Unions appear to be a vital aspect of the SABC; they stand on the side of the lower tier and seem to both hold and fuel the anti-establishment conception of independence, particularly in the lower tier. Since the employees have been silenced, unions have become the voice of the SABC. A secretary general in one of the unions illustrated this, saying:

These people care nothing about the workers. Anything you say counts against you. We are encouraging people to talk. As we speak, I have over a hundred disputes on my desk, but most of them are not followed up because people are scared. In whatever they do, they ask themselves, Will this offend my editors? Will my proposal be dismissed? These managers are just bullies.³⁸⁷

This anti-establishment discourse is echoed by many respondents who appear to have internalised the union language, evidenced by the use of union vocabulary, such as 'chief' or 'comrade'. In addition, the secretary general painted a picture of a very strong union that stands up for workers and is listened to by management. The secretary could even be described as boastful, saying that the unions were so powerful that they played a pivotal role, not only in having CEOs fired, but in having the former head of state, Thabo Mbeki, recalled from the presidency. However, one middle manager on suspension during the interview period dismissed the unions as useless, saying, 'It is true they [unions] unite

³⁸⁶ Miguel M Lucio and others, 'Constructing the Market: Commercialization and Privatization in the Royal Mail' (1997) 75 PA 267,282

³⁸⁷ Interview with Union Secretary-General, Nelson Mandela Foundation (Johannesburg 2011)

workers, but they are useless, and many people are suspended today because of them. They start things they do not finish'.³⁸⁸

Predictably, a former COO was contemptuous of the unions. He stated: 'the unions are not significant; they do not merit any discussion because they are the ones who sell negative stories about the SABC to newspapers'.³⁸⁹ When asked whether, if the SABC did not listen to unions, it would facilitate the bullying of workers by management (since workers had no protection), the answer was in the negative: 'a broadcaster that bullies employees does not deserve to be called a PSB; an environment that is built on fear is not what a public broadcaster is about', the COO responded.³⁹⁰ It appears that the COO indirectly buttressed the legalistic conception of independence, which is political in that he views the newspapers as enemies, not only of the SABC, but also of the state. This view shows another angle to the nationalistic ideology. This type of opinion is echoed by Jacob Zuma, the president of South Africa, who launched a scathing attack on newspapers and civil society, saying: 'public opinion is a dissident voice because it is the surviving voice of the minority informed by the historical, social and political position of this minority'.³⁹¹

Another extension of downsizing occurs through the contracting of workers. In an effort to cut costs, the SABC placed many permanent workers on fixed-term contracts and began relying on short-term apprentices, who were less expensive to the organisation. Contractual workers saved the SABC from expenses like

³⁸⁸ Interview with Acting General Manager: Policy and Regulatory Affairs, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 25 September 2011)

³⁸⁹ Second interview with former COO, Auckland Park (Johannesburg August 2011)

³⁹⁰ Ibid

³⁹¹ (Staff reporter) 'Where to civil society?' *The Sowetan* (Johannesburg 13 October 2003) 4

recruiting, payroll, training, benefits, pensions and others. While these cuts saved the SABC R450 million, they created further tensions and led to nepotism, corruption and further worker alienation.³⁹² In addition, the move buttressed the professional and anti-establishment conceptions of independence.

Professional conceptions of 'independence' are inspired by how SABC staff perceive how colleagues have a degree of control over their own work and, therefore, how the environment allows them to practise their profession without interference. According to an experienced editor who had been at the SABC for 19 years, professional standards have deteriorated, such that the newsroom is filled with 'public relations students' instead of journalists. In his view, this has led to the relaxation of professional standards and, in the process, left the newsroom vulnerable to outside interference. It appears that the situation is the same across departments. The editor suggested that evidence of what he called the 'dumbing down' of the SABC can be seen in the newsroom's inclination to prioritise stories about people's lives over investigative reporting.

In addition, there have been many cases of corruption, and the SABC has spent more than R30 million investigating this issue. In just five years, 1,500 employees, almost half the organisation were brought under investigation. One of those facing disciplinary action was the head of procurement. When asked whether there were any qualified personnel left (since downsizing appeared to leave students at the helm), the editor answered:

Yes, we have many skilled individuals across all departments within the SABC. The problem is they don't last. The organisation does not allow them to last. Many people in senior positions are not qualified. So, to consolidate

³⁹² Interview with senior manager, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 12 September 2011)

their positions, they discriminate against these educated guys for their qualifications.³⁹³

These sentiments were supported by the secretary general of one of the unions, who pointed out that a great deal of dehumanisation of highly skilled people occurred. He added:

Most of 'them' are actually hounded out of the SABC by senior personnel through the most convenient means possible, including the rampant abuse of disciplinary processes, however costly it may be to the SABC and its victims. The saying is: 'This is leadership at its best...it is in the best interests of the SABC...money is not an issue...'³⁹⁴

This reckless spending on suspensions by the SABC was made clear in a newspaper article showing that some staff were paid millions of rand while sitting at home in 2010 and 2011. The list includes: Gab Mampone, a former acting CEO, who was paid R1,172,823; Rapitsi Montsho, a news resources manager, R1,016,410; Solly Moketle, a former CEO, R815,189; Tseliso Leballo, logistic services manager, R730,673; and many others.³⁹⁵

A former SABC board deputy chair was more blunt and unapologetic about the situation:

We feel comfortable working with people we know; this is not a crime. Permanent staff are expensive compared to contract workers, and they need to be constantly trained, and that is an unnecessary cost...it is good business sense to out-source.

In this rejection of permanent workers, the board member is indirectly addressing commercialisation contradictions, while, at the same time, strongly recognising the importance of commercialisation for the SABC. First, the opening

³⁹³ Interview with former news editor (Polokwane 10 August 2011)

³⁹⁴ Interview with Union Secretary General, Mandela Foundation (Johannesburg August 2011)

³⁹⁵ Sidimba Loyiso, 'SABC Coughs Up R7 Million for Staff Sitting at Home' *City Press* (Johannesburg 10 July 2011)

part of the response appears to defend two intriguing contentions. Traditionalists have raised concerns suggesting that commercialisation necessitates corruption. In the response included above, the board member implied that nepotism is acceptable, since people should work with people they know. 'Knowing', in this case, seems to mean 'holding the same values'. The pro-commercialisation camp upholds the tenets of fiscal discipline and, consequently, they understand each other, which is beneficial to the SABC. However, the process of appointing these skilled people contains loopholes that can facilitate nepotism. Therefore, the board member is defending nepotism in the process of defending commercialisation.

The second part of the response is an outright rejection of traditional broadcasting principles, and it asserts that profit can be a barometer for the success of a PSB. There is an emphasis on efficiency, and the response frees the respondent from the sanctions of custom, tradition and the inherited status of the Reithan model of the SABC. It appears to the pro-commercialisation camp that the rejection of the traditionalists, who eschew profit, including those conventional PSB tenets of universality and government intervention, reinforces the autonomy of the SABC. The financial turn-around, particularly between 1998 and 2006, is used as evidence of the financial success of commercialisation.

It appears that subordinate groups within the SABC, although they may be silent, are not necessarily oppressed. However, the domination is not successful, since the groups' silences are also a method of resistance. These silences appear to be intentional and, as a result, to point to anti-establishment conceptions of the 'independence' of the SABC. On the other hand, the evasive responses of senior management point to a legalistic conception of independence. All of the managers

(except for two) wanted to emphasise that only external politics and advertisers shape conceptions of independence. The senior management, in as much as they tried to ignore these narratives of subjugation through obfuscation tendencies, including emphasising legalistic conceptions of independence, could not avoid the fact that there are internally produced conceptions. These conceptions of 'independence' are largely a product of how employees perceive their roles within the SABC. Their narrated personal encounters reveal how their conceptions are located within a variety of interactive arenas, mainly related to interactions with managers and the vestiges of commercialisation. However, not all conceptions of 'independence' are produced by pessimistic views of commercialisation. A successful SABC financial turnaround, particularly in the early stages of commercialisation, appears to have promoted a pro-commercialisation SABC. The conception of 'independence' that has arisen in response to this pro-commercialisation attitude is a legalistic one.

How SABC restructuring and improvements to the financial health of the PSB shape a legalistic conception of independence

The three key goals of commercialisation appear to have been attained, despite the fact that the SABC itself did not benefit from the money (since the treasury refused to release the proceeds to the PSB). It is clear that, during the initial stages of commercialisation, the SABC made a profit, and its news department did break-even for the first time in over a decade. However, some critics have argued that this profit was mainly the result of downsizing, rather than the result of organisational

efficiency. Furthermore, the key appointments (namely, the Peter Matlare team) left the SABC with R400 million in its reserves after four years.³⁹⁶

Eight out of 36 respondents were pro-commercialisation. Of these, five were from senior management and the board, and the other three were producers/journalists. This significant number (almost one third of the informants) proves that commercialisation is a complex and nuanced phenomenon that cannot be criticised in a categorical manner. According to the respondents, the relationship between the state and the SABC appears to be at its best when clear and distinctive lines particularly funding lines are drawn between the two. This separation merits attention for two reasons. First, it appears that the pro-commercialisation group held the perspective that commercialisation has resulted in financial 'independence' from government bureaucracy, which is key for the SABC. Consequently, according to their view, the market delivers autonomy for the SABC. In asserting this view, a current senior manager pointed out:

...We do not see an apartheid SABC. No one can deny that the set-up at the SABC today is unlike in the past the top editors are not from the ruling party, but are seasoned professionals from the corporate world. There are no National Party agents masquerading as editors.³⁹⁷

When asked whether some ANC members were deliberately deployed in the SABC (as had been alleged by other respondents), the former CEO gave a strong rebuttal to the allegations: "We went to school with some of the ANC guys; some of them are our friends. I went to school with Cyril Ramaphosa [the current ANC

³⁹⁶ SABC Annual Report 2006 (Johannesburg 2006)
<<http://www.supportpublicbroadcasting.co.za/images/uploads/SABC-AR-06-compressed.pdf>>accessed 21 March 2012

³⁹⁷ Interview with for SABC CEO, Sandton (Johannesburg 13 August 2011)

deputy president], so can you call me a deployed cadre because I know him?’³⁹⁸ What I observed during the interview was that this response appeared to be a deliberate attempt to fail to recognise the penetration of politics by using commercialisation as a mask. The manner in which the drive toward commercialisation and ‘independence’ was reproduced by senior management points to evasion and a repressive tendency that works against the articulation of other ‘independence’ conceptions by staff. This also reveals a tendency that directly erases the significance of the internal and emphasises the legalistic understandings of independence.³⁹⁹

The second reason the distinctive funding lines between the state and the SABC merit focus is the prejudiced way in which conceptions of ‘independence’ are articulated, as they appear to be rooted in the respondents’ ideological inclinations. For example, pro-commercialisation respondents believed that the market serves the public interest better than traditional broadcasting because it gives the public what it wants, whereas traditional broadcasting gives the public what it thinks the public wants.⁴⁰⁰ In other words, commercialisation rejects the paternalistic ideological values that embody PSB. Consequently, to pro-commercialisation interview respondents, the old adage ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’ only applies when it is the government that funds the SABC not when the revenue comes from advertising. This paradoxical situation, whereby commercialisation and funds from advertisers are accepted, but traditional PSB and government funding are rejected, is illustrative of how the two ideological positions inform

³⁹⁸ Interview with SABC COO, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 17 August 2011)

³⁹⁹ As discussed in the previous section, senior personnel appear to be always to be in support of what has been decided by the government.

⁴⁰⁰ RW McChesney, ‘The Problem of the Media: US Communication Politics in the 21st Century’ *Monthly Review Press* (New York 2004)

conceptions of independence. Pro-commercialisation respondents appeared to favour market-based funding, while traditionalists preferred government funding. Therefore, pro-commercialisation respondents believed that centralisation is a strength of partisanship when it is state-driven, but dispute the idea that relying on the market can shape organisational goals to suit corporate clientele.

When I addressed a point raised by the traditionalist interview respondents that commercialisation leads to budget cuts, which, in turn, limit the 'independence' of the SABC by eroding the journalistic professional values of objectivity and impartiality (since the staff are now subjected to values of commerce, which serve the market instead of the public) I received an illuminating but disturbing response from one manager: "Tell me of any one journalist in the world who has the power to determine what is news, whether in private or party media. No journalist has such power".⁴⁰¹ The informant appeared not to recognise the relevance of the questions regarding 'independence' and suggested that 'independence' is not an issue at all. The interview respondent added, repeating the former board deputy chair's remarks almost verbatim: "Independence from what? 'Independence' from whom? What independence?"⁴⁰² This response confirms the situation that those who hold anti-commercialisation and anti-establishment views of 'independence' claim to be the case: that, for example, there are senior managers for whom 'independence' is not an issue because they simply want to do their jobs. By contrast, this senior manager perceived that what was needed was for the SABC to breakeven or make a profit, without any strings attached to governmental funding. The situation is a complex one, however, because the government does not

⁴⁰¹Interview with SABC General Manager, Special Projects, University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg 10 July 2011)

⁴⁰²Ibid

appear to have contributed much to the SABC's annual revenue since the early 1990s (since SABC annual reports reflect that, since the 1990s, advertising has always contributed more than 70% of SABC revenue). The situation appears to support the pro-commercialisation of respondents' perceptions.

One journalist/producer, who (along with many others) was suspended at the time of the interview, illustrated the extent to which the complexity shapes the pro-commercialisation camp's financial 'independence' conception: "There is nothing wrong with relying on advertisers. Doesn't the BBC rely on its commercial wing, too?"⁴⁰³ The respondent continued:

It is only misinformed people who think that the SABC's problems, including 'independence', are caused by financial problems. The main problem with the SABC is poor governance and mismanagement and poor decision-making. How do you explain having R400million to spend, and three years down the line, you owe R1billion?⁴⁰⁴

Statements such as these provide certain insights. First, the argument of the traditionalist interviewees is that local content is expensive and, though the SABC mandate requires the SABC to screen more local content, such content is not attractive to advertisers. Second, as a result of this expensive and financially unattractive local content, the SABC is forced to screen cheap foreign content, which is attractive to advertisers. Thus, commercialisation impedes the SABC's editorial independence. This perspective appeared to make sense, until it was rejected by another journalist/producer:

No one forces the SABC to broadcast current affairs 24/7. In the past ten years, I don't remember the SABC being summoned by ICASA [the Regulator] for exceeding or under-broadcasting local content. That mandate and advertisers thing is just a figment of their imagination. If they were sincere, they would tell you that locally produced programmes have always

⁴⁰³ Interview with SABC producer/journalist, University of Pretoria, Hatfield (Pretoria 23 August 2011)

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with journalist/producer, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 14 July 2011)

topped the viewer listenership ratings, both at primetime and after the watershed.⁴⁰⁵

A look at the statistics appears to support the above perspective. A study by Zohra Dawood of the Open Society Foundation for South Africa reveals that locally produced programmes like 7 De Laan, YizoYizo, Generations and Khululeka have consistently dominated the top-ten most-watched programmes in South Africa. Indeed, independent producers have, in the past, produced significant evidence illustrating how commercialisation does not limit the 'independence' of the SABC with respect to programming content. For example, they point out that the SABC earns 75% of its revenue from just four primetime slots.⁴⁰⁶ Another compelling study by Kate Skinner revealed that the SABC had adequate cover of key events and issues, with the public giving the SABC a three out of five rating. These assertions undermine the argument that advertisers influence SABC content and, therefore, delimit its range of freedom. After all, according to these pro-commercialisation interview respondents, government funding increases bureaucracy more than commercialisation does.

The contention of pro-commercialisation interview respondents is that 'independence' has a dual character. First, there is financial 'independence' from the government, which can be attained only through the market and which, according to the interview respondents, is good for the SABC. Second, the only factors impinging on SABC 'independence' are financial mismanagement and poor governance. The conclusion, therefore, is that for information to flow and staff to work without any restrictions, the SABC should be free from any form of political interference. However, it is also important to consider that some of the

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with journalist/producer, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 06 July 2011)

⁴⁰⁶ See Chapter 6 for a detailed analysis of programming content.

producers/journalists are now members of the group of independent producers who benefit from the SABC's recent outsourcing of programming. It is, therefore, inevitable that they will benefit from the maintenance of a system that encourages production outsourcing. Consequently, these contradictions between the pro-commercialisation supporters and the PSB traditionalists are characterised by underlying tensions in relation to who the public is, who serves the public well, who finances the PSB and at what cost it is financed.

On one hand the pro-commercialisation camp believes that stripping the state of SABC financial responsibility will bring autonomy, while, on the other hand, the traditionalist camp maintains the idea that commercially funded media is not dedicated to the public interest. Pro-commercialisation supporters assume that SABC 'independence' lies in its ability to be profitable and that profitability hinges on a competent management system. Moreover, since the resignation of Peter Matlare, the management has been characterised by poor decision making, including the loss of lucrative sporting rights to other competitors.⁴⁰⁷ In this respect, a loss-making SABC poses a fundamental barrier to an autonomous SABC, since the creativity of producers/journalists is defined by financial resources. It should also be noted that the adoption of commercial principles to deliver public sector goods was not rejected by all interviewees. It can be argued that such an adoption also increases efficiency through accountable systems and autonomy by delivering both profit and local content without compromising editorial standards, provided there is a competent management system.

⁴⁰⁷Interview with Chief Operations Officer, University of Pretoria (Pretoria 21 August 2011). The officer showed his inclination towards Peter Matlare and commercialisation when he said that the 'political correctness thing' of the SABC (which I call the traditionalist PSB) had left the SABC in a R1 billion deficit and that, in two years, Matlare's commercialising intervention had turned the broadcaster around.

In concluding this section, I wish to underline that the intersection between the pro-commercialisation and the traditionalist perceptions is characterised by a common thread, such that all interview respondents were focused on making money for the SABC and retaining audiences at the same time. In addition, this tension between the two camps underpins the staff's constructions of conceptions of independence. On one hand, there is the belief that the most important issue is for the SABC to be market driven and free from government funding in order to be accountable to audiences a situation that brings with it more bureaucracy. On the other hand is the perspective that commercialisation cannot deliver public goods.

4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the driving forces of macro-economic policy ushered in commercialisation for the SABC. By developing a perspective derived from inhabiting the organisation of the SABC, the chapter outlined various drivers and manifestations of commercialisation and explored how commercialisation affects the organisational identity of the SABC and, in turn, how the SABC's staff think about conceptions of independence. Commercialisation, in its different manifestations, the chapter has argued, is important for SABC self-sufficiency; however, it is equally apparent that commercialisation brings about shifts in the organisational identity of the SABC as it encroaches on the values of PSB, as articulated by John Reith. Moreover, commercialisation brings about a conflict between different organisational norms and practices, such that one group of staff (which I call the traditionalists) wants to limit the SABC to a traditional PSB remit, accountable to the public, and the other group, which I call the pro-commercialisation camp, supports the adoption of a commercial approach to PSB. The existence of both of these camps within the SABC leads to a complex series of

adjustments to organisational norms and practises. Most importantly, for the purposes of answering the key research question of this thesis, it contributes to the shaping of fragmented conceptions of independence: namely, the anti-establishment, legalistic and professional conceptions. The chapter has further illustrated that these conceptions are not rigid, but are, instead, used as mapping devices that help us to understand how the meanings of 'independence' as reconstructed by different staff within the SABC, especially with regard to how they interpret the impact of intrusive external power dynamics in relation to the role of the PSB. The next chapter will provide a further nuanced account of different conceptions of 'independence' by defining the ways in which the four different tiers of staff within the SABC (i.e., the board, senior management, middle management and producers/journalists) think about the 'independence' of the SABC, as impacted by ANC power struggles.

Chapter 5: How internal power struggles within the ANC have shaped understandings of the 'independence' of the SABC

1 Introduction: The ANC and politically shaped conceptions of SABC independence

This chapter illustrates how the connection between global economic power and local political power weakened the South African state and fragmented the ANC, dividing it on both personal and ideological levels. In the end, these fragmentations, political interference and the weakening of professional values led to a reconfiguration of the SABC's role and identity, which, in turn, has influenced the ways in which 'independence' is understood. The rise of anti-state and anti-Keynesian ideologies saw a rise in the belief in free enterprise, and these two positions continue to inform respondents' perspectives on the role of the SABC in post-apartheid South Africa. A situation arose in which politicians supported the profit-making enterprise for personal aggrandisement and consolidation of power, since power gave access to material resources.

This chapter illustrates how the 1999 to 2008 ANC power struggles between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma shaped two key conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC: namely, the political and professional conceptions.⁴⁰⁸ The political conception refers to the ways in which staff perceive

⁴⁰⁸ Thabo Mbeki appointed Jacob Zuma as his deputy in 1999. Jacob Zuma, with a primary school education, was generally viewed as a place-holder, with no ambitions to succeed Thabo Mbeki. The trend is common in Africa that leaders often appoint people who appear to be weak leaders, so that the appointees do not later challenge their positions. Other examples would be Michael Sata in Zambia and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. According to Adrian Hadland and Jovial Rantao in their book, *The Life and Times of Thabo Mbeki*, the seeds of tension between Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma began in 1999, when, due to differences in policy, Mbeki declined to meet leaders of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) for almost two years, leading Jacob Zuma, in his position as deputy president, to become the mediator and, consequently, COSATU's point man. Most importantly, this led Zuma to find favour with the union leaders. William Gumede buttresses Rantao and Hadland's view by adding that, from 2001, relations between Mbeki and Zuma were strained. In particular, union leaders Cyril Ramaphosa, Tokyo Sexwale and Matthews Phosa were accused of trying to replace Mbeki with Zuma, and the crisis was averted by Nelson Mandela. Jacob Zuma was forced to publicly declare that he had no

themselves and, particularly, how they think they can conduct their work without interference (whether in the form of threats or inducements) from either politicians or internal authorities, such as line managers. According to interview respondents, it seems that the political conception refers to the belief that the SABC has a specific mandate at a particular time in history to advance the goals and objectives of the ANC. The political conception is similar to the professional conception in that it also refers to the extent to which the SABC staff's understanding of 'independence' is linked to how they think they are performing their duties without interference from politicians through either formal or informal directives. This conception of 'independence' allows me to focus, not only on the ANC, but also on other political parties that also, in one form or another, use the ANC's internal struggles to position themselves in relation to other factions within the SABC. I further examine the content of the newly politicised narratives that the staff develop regarding independence. With the ANC power struggles playing themselves out within the SABC, conflicts begin to emerge regarding how to reconcile the political demands of factionalism with the desire to be faithful to professional demands. Staff appear to be able to anticipate the whims and expectations of those leading these factions and to feign subordination without appearing to resist their condition.

This political conception is closely tied to the professional conception, which is inspired by how SABC staff perceive how colleagues and they, themselves, have a degree of control over their work, as well as how the staff stick to values of

interest in becoming president in 2002. From 2001, the National Prosecuting Authority (allegedly with the full support of Mbeki) began to investigate Jacob Zuma for various crimes that ranged from money laundering to rape. This investigation eventually saw Zuma being relieved of his deputy presidency duties in 2005.

objectivity and fairness without undue internal or external influence. Any form of political interference could, therefore, result in less-than-professional journalism, in which values like objectivity, fairness and impartiality are challenged. In journalism, these values grant autonomy to editors to make editorial decisions based on their professional judgment, rather than on the politics of the owners, the state, advertisers or commercial interests. In keeping with this approach, editors must learn to sublimate their own values, as well.⁴⁰⁹

In this chapter, I argue that these two key conceptions are influenced by the long-standing ANC power struggles that finally manifested themselves through the Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma succession struggles. I argue that two key factors profoundly affect the various internal SABC constituencies in different ways and, in the process, reshape the conceptions of 'independence' inside the SABC. These two factors are a result of ANC efforts to exert influence over the SABC. I demonstrate this claim by examining how these two conceptions of 'independence' depend on two broad and interlocked factors: the ANC's power of appointments for key SABC positions and the ANC's ability to control the SABC operating environment through these appointments.

First, the ANC's power of appointment to positions at the SABC saw a deviation from the appointment process that characterised the Mandela era, during which appointments were participatory and transparent. During the RDP, SABC appointments were done through a public nomination process, and the interviews were broadcasted live on television for short-listed candidates. This allowed the public at large to participate in a meaningful sharing of political power in the

⁴⁰⁹ RW McChesney, 'The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication in the 21st Century' *Monthly Review Press* (New York 2004) 64

running of the SABC, allowing them to contribute ideas on issues that affected them and the SABC by playing a role in these appointments. Thus, under the RDP, instead of passively in-gesting and perceiving problems in terms of the elite-dominated rationality of the ANC, civil society and other political parties, the public actively participated in SABC decision-making processes.⁴¹⁰ As pointed out in Chapter 3, the Broadcasting Act 1999 created gaps in terms of appointments to the board.⁴¹¹ For example, the Act allowed the board to appoint an executive committee that administered the affairs of the SABC and was accountable to the board.⁴¹² However, the minister, through shareholding powers, was given the power to accept or reject the appointment of any of the executive members of the SABC.⁴¹³ These gaps saw the commencement of a trend in which Thabo Mbeki would appoint clients (i.e., people personally beholden to him), who would, in turn, appoint their own clients. Through this, political patronage became more deeply entrenched in the SABC's operational activities. For example, in 2007, an altered list of SABC board nominees was presented, in which Randall Howard, an experienced secretary-general of the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU), an affiliate of COSATU allied with Jacob Zuma, had been removed from the list in favour of Christine Qunta and Andile Mbeki, who were seen as Mbeki supporters.⁴¹⁴ The Democratic Alliance exposed its concealed participation in these ANC political struggles and factions when one of its parliamentarians, Dene Smuts, supported the removal of the Zuma-aligned Howard by stating that the Zuma group should ask itself how it justified party approval of candidates when the law gave Parliament

⁴¹⁰ Refer to Chapters 1 and 3 for a discussion of participatory processes during the RDP era.

⁴¹¹ Broadcasting Act 1999 s 15A (4)

⁴¹² Broadcasting Act 1999 s 14 (1)

⁴¹³ SABC Memorandum of the Articles of Association cl 11.1

⁴¹⁴ (Staff Reporter) SABC Board: Mbeki Decision Satisfies DA' *Business Day* (Johannesburg 23 December 2007)

the power to select candidates. The Democratic Alliance (DA) explained that it would have supported Randall Howard if the ANC members of parliament (MPs) had ever been allowed to give the DA their true final choices.⁴¹⁵ Interestingly, according to a former SABC board deputy chair, through what could be horse trading, the DA supported the nomination of pro-Mbeki candidates in order to build support for its own candidates by openly supporting candidates like Khanyisile Mkhonza, who was a confessed Mbeki supporter, for SABC board chair.⁴¹⁶ Consequently, the DA's vote was a calculated one; it realised that the Zuma faction had insignificant power compared to the Mbeki faction, which had Khanyi Mkhonza as the chair of board. The DA, therefore, had no choice but to support the seemingly powerful faction in order to see its own candidates through. Despite these struggles, the Zuma faction appeared to be winning the succession battle at the national level and would later win appointment power within the SABC.

While the Zuma groups were steadily ascending into power, the marginalisation and isolation of the pro-Thabo Mbeki group within the SABC began. Within a year of its tenure, the Mbeki-aligned, Khanyisile-Mkhonza-led board was suspended, and one affiliated to Jacob Zuma was appointed.⁴¹⁷ These changes in top personnel, such as the SABC board, the CEO and senior management, led to increasing factionalism within the SABC. The chapter explores the character of these counter-mobilisations (i.e., disgruntled anti-Mbeki groups

⁴¹⁵ Ibid

⁴¹⁶ Interview with former SABC Board Chair, UNISA (Pretoria August 2011)

⁴¹⁷ In 2009, Khanyi Mkhonza went on to secretly investigate seven SABC managers who had taken Dali Mpofu's side. Dali Mpofu was the former CEO whom Mkhonza's board had suspended. These executives included middle management's Phumelele Nzimande, Mvuzo Mbebe, Siphso Sithole, Thabang Mathibe and Thami Ntenti, as well as the SABC spokesperson Kaizer Kganyago and former COO Charlotte Mampane. Their crime, according to Mampane, was to defy the board's directives during Mpofu's suspension, which was tantamount to misconduct, since it encouraged ordinary employees to mobilise and revolt against the SABC's highest competent authority.

mobilising against Zuma groups within the SABC, with the pro-Mbeki supporters, in turn, orchestrating counter-mobilisation against the rising opposing groups, and vice-versa) and their relationships to the construction of conceptions of 'independence' within the SABC. These partisan appointments to key positions within the SABC resulted in the ANC controlling the PSB's internal operating environment. The ANC's control of the SABC's operating environment, loosely refers to how the ANC began to influence the PSB's internal activities, including its working environment and organisational culture.⁴¹⁸ When Thabo Mbeki lost control over the ANC and two centres of power his and Zuma's began to emerge, the fragmenting broadcaster found it difficult to tell whom its patron was.⁴¹⁹ It did not know which programmes to air in daily news and current affairs, since the ANC was divided into factions.⁴²⁰ In a nutshell, this chapter examines, first, how the struggle between Mbeki and Zuma led to power struggles and the politicization of appointments at the upper level, and second, what the impact of this politicisation was on the SABC operating environment.

As outlined in the preceding sections, each faction wanted something different, and it was not clear who would be in power next. As a result, the ANC problems replicated themselves within the SABC in the process, impeding the

⁴¹⁸ For example, in developments relating to these factions and in the effort to consolidate power, Thabo Mbeki began to reach into the SABC's editorial. In one of many instances, he directed the removal of a documentary that would have diminished his status only hours before airing. In an act of retaliation, imitation, or both, Jacob Zuma also banned any Thabo Mbeki interviews from the SABC. The *Sunday Times* reported that Phil Molefe, the SABC's head of news, said, in a meeting with senior news executives, that Mbeki's appearance on SABC television undermined ANC leader President Jacob Zuma and that the ANC headquarters had instructed him not to broadcast any interviews with or items about Mbeki. Interview with SABC Strategic Manager for News and Current Affairs, Auckland Park (Johannesburg August 2011)

⁴¹⁹ According to a former producer/journalist, it became difficult to tell who belonged to what faction (i.e., Zuma or Mbeki), since people were positioning themselves for the post-Polokwane-conference situation, when a new leader would be elected. Most people played their cards close to their chests.

⁴²⁰ Interview with SABC Strategic Manager for News and Current Affairs, Auckland Park (Johannesburg August 2011)

professionalism of everyone within the organisation. In 2007, John Perlman, one of the most respected SABC anchors (amongst others), resigned from the PSB after blowing the whistle on political censorship.⁴²¹ This was followed by a high level of politically induced staff turnover and deep-rooted clientelism. Consequently, the SABC operating environment was no longer a professional one, but, rather, one of devoted subservience, with little distinction between a CEO, a patron, a manager, a relative and a friend.⁴²² To consolidate its waning power and hold on to the SABC, the ANC began to practice 'state corporatism' within the PSB.⁴²³ In so doing, the ANC attempted to assume total control of the SABC as a way of consolidating power, since many distinct centres of power began to emerge. Though these centres belonged to various ANC factions, the simple existence of such factions undermined ANC control in totality.⁴²⁴ In the end, this chapter argues, the SABC was not only politicised, but was party politicised. In the next section, I begin with a background that explores the origins of these Mbeki-Zuma succession political tensions. I then, in Section 3, revert the narrative back to how these succession tensions shaped conceptions of SABC 'independence'. The underlying argument

⁴²¹ Staff reporter, 'Veteran Journalist Perlman Quits SABC' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 30 January 2007)

⁴²² Those who resisted, like Nikiwe Bikitsha, a former SABC News and Current Affairs anchor, found themselves out of a job.

⁴²³ In the literature, state corporatism is generally defined as, 'a system of non-competitive, compulsory, hierarchical and limited interest-representation which helps the elites to repress and exclude the autonomous articulation of subordinate class demands'. In South Africa and within the SABC, state corporatism is characterised by two layers of control. On one level, loyal members of the ANC are appointed to key positions. This is done through top-down decision making processes that find legitimacy in policy documents. On another level, the appointed members appoint their own loyalists, who continue monitoring the activities of others within the work-place. See Phillippe C Schmitter, 'Still the Century of Corporatism?' in Phillippe C Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch (eds) *Trends Toward Corporatist Intermediation* (Sage, London 1979) 25

⁴²⁴ Different factions began to develop, and it became easy to move from one faction to another—which resulted in problems for the ANC. For example, during the Zuma administration, four different CEOs moved through the SABC in a period of four years. The high turnover rate of CEOs was said, by a former head of news to be the result of ambiguous loyalties on the part of the respective CEOs. One example was Solly Mokoetle, a Zuma appointee who, in 2011, was hounded out of the SABC because he was suspected to be a Mbeki and ANC Youth League sympathiser.

here is that the SABC adopted the model of faction behaviour found within the ANC, since the SABC was also a part of and an extension of the state bureaucracy.

2 A background to tensions: The ANC's struggles within a struggle

In this section, I begin by analysing the roots of the Mbeki-Zuma 'tug of war' and, in the process, link it to understandings of the South African state and, later, to SABC 'independence' conceptions. I contend that the political tensions between Zuma and Mbeki are not only personal, but can be analysed in terms of a triangular alignment of forces that are not necessarily rigid, but have undergone shifts and continue to do so as tensions grow deeper and transition phases grow longer. These triangular forces are ANC ideological tensions, succession struggles that manifest through other factors, such as factionalism (which, at some level, is intertwined with ethnicity).⁴²⁵ As argued in Chapter 3, the SABC and the larger macro-social structures of government symbiotically feed on one another; thus, the relationship creates and shapes the contours of understandings of SABC independence.⁴²⁶ The SABC is, therefore, very much part of this political culture of South Africa and is both a part of and a conduit for those tensions. In particular, I argue that Thabo Mbeki is at the centre of these tensions between different political factions.

The ANC found itself governing a South Africa born into an unusual ideological environment. In 1994, the newly democratic South Africa stood astride a fading socialist-driven era characterised by equality and social welfare, while, at

⁴²⁵ According to two senior managers and three former board members, Thabo Mbeki appointments always favored his ethnic Xhosa. This led to the birth of the term 'Xhosanostra', which referred to the elite Xhosa people who were deployed in key positions of public companies and in the civil service. Jacob Zuma has also been accused of appointing people from his ethnic group, the Zulu, to key positions within the SABC.

⁴²⁶ Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *National Broadcasting Under Siege: A Comparative Study of Australia, Britain, Israel and West Germany* (MacMillan, London 1987) 8, 9

the same time, facing an emerging neo-liberal world determined by inequality and commerce.⁴²⁷ The ANC's struggle to find its place in this ideological terrain saw Thabo Mbeki taking centre stage and, in the process, due to his shifting ideological stances, creating many enemies. In the long run, Jacob Zuma was to become a 'best friend turned arch-rival'.

While the roles of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma have been widely explored in studies on the succession struggles of the ANC, relatively little reference has been made to how the fragmentations within the ANC date back to the very core of the fundamentals of the struggle against apartheid.⁴²⁸ The tension between Zuma and Mbeki began, not in 2005, when Mbeki fired his deputy from the government; instead, in effect, the tension was deeply rooted in the difference in ideological preferences between and within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), which make up the ruling government alliance with the ANC.⁴²⁹ These differences go back to the 1980s but actually manifested in the early 1990s before the first democratic elections.⁴³⁰ The differences hinge mainly on competing ideologies, pitting, on the one hand,

⁴²⁷ Devin Pillay, 'Media Diversity and the Contested Character of the Post Apartheid State' (2004) 31 (2) PN 167

⁴²⁸ See Adrian Hadland and Jovial Rantao, *The Life and Times of Thabo Mbeki* (Zebra Press, London 1999); William M Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (ZED Books, New York 2007) and Tom Lodge, *The Politics in South Africa from Mandela to Mbeki: Bus Stop for Everyone* (New Africa Books, Cape Town 2002)

⁴²⁹ Tom Lodge, *The Politics in South Africa from Mandela to Mbeki: Bus Stop for Everyone* (New Africa Books, Cape Town 2002)

⁴³⁰ In the preceding sections, I have made reference to how the left (i.e., COSATU/SACP) began to engage in squabbles with the Thabo Mbeki faction, which was leaning towards business. The tension can also be understood through the three people who would be successors of Nelson Mandela: Chris Hani (SACP), Cyril Ramaphosa (COSATU) and Thabo Mbeki (who had drifted all the way from the left to the centre, due to the ideological challenges faced by the ANC with regard to sitting astride both a fading socialist world and one of commerce). Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution* (Mandarin, Berkshire 1996)

Thabo Mbeki, who had drifted from the communist group and turned centrist, and, on the other hand, the SACP and COSATU militant leftist groups.⁴³¹

The squabbles over ideological preferences and strategy were fuelled by the fact that Thabo Mbeki, in his pursuit of the highest throne, had played many political roles. At first, Thabo Mbeki was a leftist within the ANC, and he even campaigned for the British Labour Party in Brighton in the United Kingdom.⁴³² To affirm his leftist ideological inclinations, Mbeki, in a conference in Canada, made it clear that 'black capitalism was as parasitic and senile, historically obsolete without any extenuating circumstances to excuse its existence'.⁴³³ Somehow, he later joined the SACP and became the youngest member of its five-member central committee.⁴³⁴ Thabo Mbeki went on to resign from the SACP and, in the process, won himself many enemies, who later supported his friend, turned competitor, Jacob Zuma. Thabo Mbeki's resignation from the SACP coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. Many members of the SACP never forgave Mbeki for resigning and went on to vehemently oppose his candidacy for crucial leadership positions in the 1990s.⁴³⁵

Prior to his resignation in the 1980s, Thabo Mbeki was reported to have privately told close friends that the ANC's alliance with the communist party would have to be broken in post-apartheid South Africa a sign of increasingly centrist

⁴³¹ Ibid

⁴³² William M Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (ZED Books, New York 2007) 68.

⁴³³ Mondli Makhanya, 'Time to Recolonise Bits of Africa' *The Star* (Johannesburg 28 August 1998)

⁴³⁴ See Tom Lodge, *The Politics in South Africa from Mandela to Mbeki: Bus Stop for Everyone* (New Africa Books, Cape Town 2002) 243

⁴³⁵ Ibid

tendencies that outraged militants within the party.⁴³⁶ What began to emerge was a clear difference in leadership style between Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. In fact, they were complete opposites in terms of their understandings of leadership. According to Nelson Mandela, 'the leader must keep the forces together, but you cannot do that unless you allow dissent'. By contrast, in the early 1990s, Thabo Mbeki suggested that it would be natural for the ANC to split into different factions soon after attaining power.⁴³⁷ He pointed out that change demanded that the ANC and the democratic movement as a whole should be able to shed some of its members, regardless of how this action might be exploited by the ANC's opponents to discredit the movement.⁴³⁸ Mbeki went on to see that his vision of factions was achieved and suppressed dissent within the organisation by appointing sycophants and allies to key posts in government. The factions were then created by people who had been expelled.

To understand the supposed divisive nature of Thabo Mbeki's ideological preferences, one has to begin by examining a number of key personnel in Jacob Zuma's cabinet and then tracing their historical interactions with Thabo Mbeki. These personnel include, namely, Cyril Ramaphosa, the ANC deputy president; Kgalema Montlanthe, Zuma's deputy; Blade Nzimande, a cabinet minister; Tokyo Sexwale, a cabinet minister; Matthews Phosa, the ANC treasurer; and Marc

⁴³⁶ See Hadland Adrian and Jovial Rantao, *The Life and Times of Thabo Mbeki* (Zebra Press, London 1999) and William M Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (ZED Books, New York 2007) 68

⁴³⁶ Ibid 45

⁴³⁷ See RW Johnson, *South Africa's Brave New World, the Beloved Country Since the End of Apartheid* (Penguin Books, London 2009)

⁴³⁸ William M Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (ZED Books, New York 2007)

Maharaj, the presidential spokesperson.⁴³⁹ It is these individuals who enabled Zuma, who had been South Africa's deputy president from 1998 to 2005, to form what scholar and author RW Johnson calls a 'coalition of the wounded' meaning all of those who had been hurt or marginalised by Thabo Mbeki in the past.⁴⁴⁰ The Thabo Mbeki 'purge' can be understood in three stages: The first stage occurred within the ANC, before the first democratic elections. The second occurred when Thabo Mbeki ascended to the presidency. The third stage occurred during the Jacob Zuma arms deal trial, when Mbeki used the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) to settle his own scores against survivors of the previous two purges.⁴⁴¹ The trial drew in his right hand man, the then-head of the NPA, Bulelani Ngcuka, who was reported to have been an apartheid spy.⁴⁴² Mbeki took this chance to eliminate Marc Maharaj, including orchestrating the sacking of the *City Press* editor who had printed the spy allegations.⁴⁴³ The editor was replaced by Mathatha Tsedu, an

⁴³⁹ These individuals became prominent in Zuma's cabinet, and their ideological inclinations can be traced in the organisations to which they were affiliated and the positions they held in those organisations. Cyril Ramaphosa came from labour. He had been the first secretary general of COSATU before his election to secretary general of the ANC in 1991. Kgalema Montlanthe also came from labour, where he was the secretary general of the National Unions of Mineworkers (NUM). Motlanthe went on to replace Cyril Ramaphosa as the secretary general of the ANC in 1997. In 2008, Motlanthe was elected by parliament to become the third official president of South Africa, though he was largely viewed as a place-holder for Zuma, who was still facing charges in court. This proved to be true when Zuma was acquitted of all charges. Blade Nzimande has been the secretary general of the South African Communist Party (SACP) for over a decade. Marc Maharaj is also a member of the SACP and was accused of money laundering along with Jacob Zuma. Tokyo Sexwale was also a member of the SACP. Finally, Matthews Phosa does not have any clear links to the SACP; thus, he appeared to have personal differences with Thabo Mbeki.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid (n381)

⁴⁴¹ Thabo Mbeki, on his way to the throne, contested mostly against Chris Hani, who was later assassinated before the elections, and Cyril Ramaphosa, who was pushed out of contention by the ANC leadership. These individuals from the left also had supporters in Mandela's cabinet, whom Mbeki began to eliminate in his cabinet reshuffle when he came to power. A notable example (and one of the first casualties) was Jay Nadoo, who had been tasked with the implementation of the RDP. His office was closed by Mbeki, and his position was rendered redundant.

⁴⁴² Matthew Burbidge, 'Reporter Set to Fight Subpoena' *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg 3 October 2003)

⁴⁴³ Vusi Mona, 'Was Ngcuka a Spy?' *City Press* (Johannesburg 7 September 2003). Vusi Mona was appointed head of communications in the presidency in 2009 and later became Jacob Zuma's 'spin doctor'. Steffan Brummer and Monako Dibetle, 'Zuma's Spin Doctor in Bribery Scandal' *Mail & Guardian*

alleged Mbeki man.⁴⁴⁴ These enemies that Mbeki created set him up for a serious downfall.

Ramaphosa, Sexwale and Phosa were not only far left, but were also direct contenders for the ANC presidency with Mbeki after the murder of Chris Hani, the head of the SACP. Mbeki not only marginalised them, but also attempted to 'purge' them from political relevance by accusing them of planning to assassinate him in 2001.⁴⁴⁵ Ramaphosa, the front runner for the presidency, suffered the brunt of Mbeki's energy, since the left-wing elements in the ANC (led by Joe Slovo and Marc Maharaj) had chosen Ramaphosa over Mbeki to lead the discussions for the new democratic South Africa in the early 1990s.⁴⁴⁶ Tokyo Sexwale and Matthews Phosa were even accused of dealing in drugs and corruption, respectively.⁴⁴⁷ Marc Maharaj, now a presidential spokesperson, was one of the victims of the 'purge' when Mbeki ascended to the throne. Marc Maharaj was accused of corruption and bribery, together with Jacob Zuma, a former Mbeki ally and deputy. Thabo Mbeki had supported Jacob Zuma's ascent to the presidency because he had remained

(Johannesburg 06 August 2013) <<http://mg.co.za/article/2009-07-10-zumas-spin-doctor-in-bribery-scandal>>accessed 06 August 2013

⁴⁴⁴ This allegation found support when Ranjeni Munsammy, a reporter, raised the concern that when she wanted to publish a story supporting the allegation that NPA head and Thabo Mbeki ally Bulelani Ngcuka was, indeed, an apartheid spy, the editor, Tsedu, refused to publish the story.

⁴⁴⁵ RW Johnson, *South Africa's Brave New World, the Beloved Country Since the End of Apartheid* (Penguin Books, London 2009) 252. An ANCYL James Nkambule went on to accuse Phosa and Sexwale of trying to link Mbeki to the Hani assassination. In retaliation, Mbeki also tasked the head of police, Jackie Selebi to investigate Phosa of being an apartheid spy.

⁴⁴⁶ Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution* (Mandarin, Berkshire 1996)

⁴⁴⁷ In the midst of accusations and counter accusations, a damning allegation arose that De Klerk had information relating to Tokyo's drug trafficking involvement. De Klerk confirmed that Mbeki had clandestinely asked for full reports. Parliamentarian Bantu Holomisa later formed the United Democratic Movement (UDM), a breakaway party from the ANC, which addressed those rumours in parliament. Sexwale dismissed the allegations by saying that the tiff had its origins in the intense jockeying for position within the ANC after the elections. Also see: Staff reporter, 'The ANC and the Bantu Who Caused All the Trouble' *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg 24 December 1996)

loyal to him during his succession struggles with Mandela.⁴⁴⁸ Another factor was the assumption that Zuma, as uneducated as he was, had no ambitions for the presidency as a result of which, he was made deputy president. Zuma was also used by Mbeki to counter Matthews Phosa, who was a sworn enemy of Mbeki but was also attempting to secure the deputy president position.⁴⁴⁹ It is, therefore, clear that even before the Mbeki-Zuma power struggles, the ANC already had factions. For example, during 1991, the ANC's 48th elective conference, Mbeki had been courting influential leaders and marginalising the unwilling. During that period, Mbeki, knowing the hatred held by Winnie Mandela, the head of the ANC Women's League, for Ramaphosa, persuaded Winnie to be on his side, with great success.⁴⁵⁰ However, Mbeki discarded her after serving his own purposes. The other person who was courted by Mbeki was Peter Mokaba, the former ANC Youth League leader.⁴⁵¹ Cyril Ramaphosa had chided Mokaba publicly at a rally for the 'kill the Boer, kill the farmer' slogan. Mbeki reportedly went behind the scenes and told Mokaba he thought it was wrong for Ramaphosa to correct him in public.⁴⁵² Peter Mokaba was actually the one to move the motion for Mbeki's candidature as deputy president, which was supported by the Women's League and other groups that Mbeki had impressed behind the scenes.⁴⁵³ Thus, an ideological difference became personal and even ethnic when it came to Zuma.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid 417

⁴⁴⁹ Tom Lodge, *The Politics in South Africa from Mandela to Mbeki: Bus Stop for Everyone* (New Africa Books, Cape Town 2002)

⁴⁵⁰ See Tom Lodge, *The Politics in South Africa from Mandela to Mbeki: Bus Stop for Everyone* (New Africa Books, Cape Town 2002)

⁴⁵¹ See Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution* (Mandarin, Berkshire 1996)

⁴⁵² Ibid (n382)

⁴⁵³ Ibid

Mbeki's process of marginalising rivals was coupled with and reinforced by the adoption of GEAR and the DSM, respectively. On one hand, GEAR's prioritisation of fiscal prudence and its tendency to be driven from the top facilitated a massive centralisation of power, while, on the other hand, the DSM led to extensive government intervention in all sectors of society. It was even used to marginalise anti-Mbeki individuals who were sidelined across sectors. Many people had been marginalised and wounded by Mbeki. The sacking of Zuma, therefore, provided a platform for all those who had left politics, like Ramaphosa and Sexwale, to make a comeback. The Zuma sacking also resurrected the likes of Winnie Mandela, Dr. Blade Nzimande and Marc Maharaj, as well as the entire left wing movement that had been pushed to the periphery by Mbeki. When Zuma, who had been charged with fraud, corruption and rape, was acquitted, moves were made, and Thabo Mbeki was recalled from the presidency of South Africa and replaced by the SACP's Kgalema Montlanthe, who held the position for Zuma.⁴⁵⁴

Interestingly, one of the first things this cabinet and the parliamentarians of the wounded did was to call a hearing of the entire board, including the SABC CEO and other executives, over the corporation's history of bias.⁴⁵⁵ Furthermore, in 2011, Judge Neels Claassens found the SABC guilty of distortion, lying, manipulation and dereliction of duty by the board in the year 2005-06.⁴⁵⁶ Judge Claassens also criticised ICASA, the regulator, for misinterpreting Broadcasting Act 1999 s 10(1)(d), such that ICASA only monitored programmes after they were

⁴⁵⁴ Staff reporter, 'NPA drops charges against Zuma' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 6 April 2009)

⁴⁵⁵ See minutes in the Parliamentary Monitoring Group Report on the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications Hearings on the SABC (Cape Town 18 June 2009)

<<http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71656%3Foid>>

⁴⁵⁶ FXI Report 2012

aired, instead of also looking at the pre-production process.⁴⁵⁷ ICASA's neglect of such duties would mean the distortion of programming content with impunity by the SABC. This revealed how the SABC had been used as a political weapon by the warring factions within the ANC. However, many more fissures were to be created within the ANC, and Zuma became a symbol of hope of reversal to the left. The difference in ideological preferences had become messy, and it has become even messier during Zuma's tenure. All of these changes had implications for the SABC because, during this time, important legislation was formulated (mainly the Broadcasting Act 1999, which brought fundamental changes to the organisation's relationship with the state and, specifically, the minister of communication). For example, the Broadcasting Act 1999 gave the ANC more power to appoint ANC affiliated members to key SABC positions through the minister's shareholding and appointment powers.⁴⁵⁸ According to interview respondents, this allowed the ANC to use the SABC to promote the party's own interests, such as appointing party affiliated boards or particular individuals, which only led to decreased 'independence' and increased susceptibility to the whims of the ANC from the perspectives of the staff.⁴⁵⁹

3 The ANC's power of appointment and the political conceptions of SABC independence

Political pressures, mainly from the ANC, have affected the construction of SABC 'independence', largely through the ability of such political powers to appoint key personnel via the executive through the minister's shareholding powers. Through the minister's shareholding powers, the ANC has played a key role in appointing

⁴⁵⁷ Broadcasting Act 1999

⁴⁵⁸ BA 1999 s 19

⁴⁵⁹ All of the 36 respondents agreed that the ANC influences the appointment of particular individuals that are influential in the running of the SABC.

the SABC's CEO and board of governors with little consent from the opposition, which has had no choice, since it constitutes a minority in the ANC dominated parliament. Against this backdrop, it is worth paying attention to the relationship between the minister and key governance structures at the SABC: namely, the board and the three executive managers.⁴⁶⁰ It is important to examine this relationship because the intersection of forces stemming from political influences can be traced at this level. In addition, this section serves as a background to understanding how staff at the SABC construct their own conceptions of 'independence' in the face of the ANC's factional struggles, which also play out within the SABC. The important aspect is to explore how SABC legislation creates a gap that the ANC can exploit.

According to the Broadcasting Act 1999, the board consists of 12 members and 3 executive managers. The 12 members of the board are appointed by the president on the advice of the National Assembly, and only once parliament has made recommendations (after calling for public nominations and holding public interviews with short-listed candidates).⁴⁶¹ The Act makes two clear statements regarding the roles of both the board and the executive management. According to the Broadcasting Act 1999, the board controls the affairs of the corporation.⁴⁶² However, the same legislation provides for an executive committee appointed by the Board and accountable to it to run the affairs of the corporation.⁴⁶³ The Act also states that the CEO is the accounting officer of the corporation.⁴⁶⁴ The duties of the

⁴⁶⁰ The three key senior managers are the group chief executive officer (CEO), the group operations officer (COO) and the group financial officer (CFO).

⁴⁶¹ The Broadcasting Act 1999 (s12)

⁴⁶² The Broadcasting Act 1999 (s13)(11)

⁴⁶³ The Broadcasting Act 1999 (s14)(1)

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid

senior personnel are, therefore, clearly defined, and they appear to guarantee an autonomous PSB. However, one key factor dissipates this theoretical reality. The SABC was established pursuant to the Broadcasting Act 1999 (no. 4), but in 2002, when it was fully corporatized, it was established as a public corporation. Since it was deemed to be a public company incorporated in terms of the South African Companies Act 1973, an Articles and Memorandum of Association of the SABC, which spelled out the relationship between the shareholders and the SABC, had to be registered.⁴⁶⁵ The Articles of Association established a new relationship fraught with contradictions, complications and tensions between the board and the minister of communications. For example, a number of challenges were introduced by the minister becoming a shareholder. By virtue of becoming the sole shareholder of the SABC, the minister gained new extended degrees of control over both the board and the executive management.

First, through the memorandum and Articles of Association, the minister had the power of appointment and removal of executive members, despite the fact that the Broadcasting Act 1999 made it clear that this power was vested only to the president through the advice of the National Assembly.⁴⁶⁶ According to the Articles of Association, the non-executive directors shall, after they have conducted interviews and compiled a shortlist of preferred candidates, recommend to the minister, for his approval/rejection, the appointment of a preferred candidate to

⁴⁶⁵ The Articles spelt out various duties to the SABC, including Section 12, which spells out that directors should conclude contracts of employment for five years and that the board controls the affairs of the corporation in accordance with statutes. Article 12.2.9 ensures that matters of a confidential nature should be treated as such and not divulged to anyone without the authority of the SABC. These designations also supported Section 19 of the Broadcasting Act, which gives the minister borrowing powers (which, at times, are used as sanctions to control the SABC, as argued in the preceding chapter).

⁴⁶⁶ See Broadcasting Act 1999 s 13

fill any position as an executive director of the corporation.⁴⁶⁷ It is clear in this clause that the minister is effectively given a veto over the appointment of any of the executive managers. One of the former senior managers pointed out that the ANC's hand was highly visible in the running of the SABC. He noted:

...One of the most serious controversies that the ANC has subjected us to is to ride roughshod the appointment of the board of governors. They have time and again used their majority in parliament to create a majority of ANC-sympathetic board of governors. I think it is only fair for board members to renounce their political membership to political parties. Of course, it will not change much, but at least the suspicions of political interference could be lessened.⁴⁶⁸

What is being questioned here is the allegiances of board members to political parties. One can acknowledge the importance of renouncing allegiances, especially when political parties like the ANC have party declarations that require unwavering loyalty from their members. The core requirement of ANC membership, which is signed by any member, declares:

...I will abide by the aims and objectives of the African National Congress....work as a loyal member of the organisation, that I will place my energies and skills at the disposal of the organisation and carry out tasks given to me...take all necessary steps to understand and carry out the aims, policy and programme of the ANC; observe discipline, behave honestly and carry out loyally decisions of the majority and the decision of higher bodies.⁴⁶⁹

This statement could be further analysed and underscored. First, there is clear potential for a conflict of interest. The continual deployment of ANC cadres to key positions on boards could lead to a situation in which individuals are torn between the need to serve two masters: the ANC and the SABC. If a declaration requires members to carry party policies, it is, therefore, apparent that ANC

⁴⁶⁷ SABC Broadcasting Charter

⁴⁶⁸ Interview with SABC COO, Braamfontein (Johannesburg July 2011)

⁴⁶⁹ ANC membership declaration and interview with Raymond Leouw, Pretoria (05 July 2011)

policies may override SABC policies within the PSB. Moreover, the fragmentations within the ANC may also necessitate the pursuit of factional policies within the SABC. These ANC inspired factional contestations within the SABC were also noted by Judge Claassens, who suggested that political interference and the hand of Jacob Zuma was clear in the appointment of Phil Molefe as Snuki Zikalala's replacement.⁴⁷⁰ In 2012, Phil Molefe was suspended because he allegedly gave too much airtime to the ANC Youth League, which, by then, was breaking away from the ANC.⁴⁷¹ In an interesting turn that reflected even more fragmentations within the SABC, the Communications Workers' Union (CWU) supported the decision to suspend Molefe, as he was viewed as being unsympathetic to unions.⁴⁷² The above circumstances, among others, pivoted the construction of the political conception of 'independence', such that staff across all four tiers of the SABC held the perspective that their work was limited by interference from factions.⁴⁷³ The significance of the ANC's role in appointments, therefore, led to the understanding of 'independence' as the need to be free from the ANC. A former journalist was even more scathing, insisting that the SABC was now the Zuma African National Congress Broadcasting Corporation (ZANCBC) a statement that was echoed by other respondents.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁰ High Court ruling against ICASA. Phil Molefe, who was largely viewed as a Zuma man, replaced Snuki Zikalala, Thabo Mbeki's ally as the director of news and current affairs at the SABC, in 2009. Snuki Zikalala was accused of managing the news along partisan and factional lines by the pro-Zuma ANC Youth League, led by Julius Malema.

⁴⁷¹ Staff reporter, 'Mixed Reaction over SABC's Molefe' *Sowetan* (Johannesburg 11 April 2012)

⁴⁷² Interview with Union Secretary General, Houghton (Johannesburg August 2011)

⁴⁷³ The upper-tier respondents largely upheld the legalistic conception of independence. Only two interview respondents from the upper tier held the political conception of independence. These two were actually pushed out of the SABC.

⁴⁷⁴ Interview with former journalist/producer (now opposition party politician), Sandton (Johannesburg 26 September 2011)

Considering that the ascendance into power by the different post apartheid administrations has always been accompanied by changes to the board of governors and the CEO and, at times, the head of news and current affairs gives credence to the above comments. Consequently, there has been a causal link between activities within the ANC and those at the SABC. For example, in 2000, six months after Thabo Mbeki had ascended to the presidency, a new SABC board chaired by Vincent Maphai was also put in place. This board took over from one headed by Eddie Funde, who had only chaired the board for a year. Accusations and conflicts began to emerge, since Vincent Maphai had been known to be a Thabo Mbeki man and had worked as an advisor to the president. Further divisions emerged, such that people at senior levels were appointed due to their loyalty to Thabo Mbeki and, in turn, employed loyalists within the SABC. A senior manager within the SABC pointed to this period as the worst for the SABC:

...the rot began in 2000, after Sisulu. People were engaged into dirty factionalisms and individual power struggles. At the centre of all this was the question of power, which was fuelled by Thabo Mbeki, who wanted to use the SABC as an ANC mouthpiece to defend his economic policies. Since then and till today, the SABC has never been the same.⁴⁷⁵

This senior manager's view is widely supported in the literature. Etzioni-Halevy points out that 'countries that have party politicised bureaucracies are also more likely to have party politicised public broadcasting corporations as compared with other countries where the bureaucracies have become largely non partisan'.⁴⁷⁶ With regard to the ANC's relationship with the SABC, Etzioni-Halevy's postulation proves pertinent. Of course, these ministerial powers represent, for all

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with former acting CFO, Wits University (Johannesburg 5 August 2011)

⁴⁷⁶ Eva Etzioni-Halevy, *National Broadcasting Under Siege: A Comparative Study of Australia, Britain, Israel, and West Germany* (Macmillan, London 1987) 8-9

intents and purposes, the need for the ANC led government to control the SABC. However, it remains with the staff to state how these tensions shape their interpretations and meanings of independence, which is something I elaborate on in the next section. However, two points emerged from the above contradictions that were shared by all staff. First, it is clear that the state of affairs, whether by intent or by default, increased governmental control over the SABC. Consequently, the SABC is not only on the side of the government, but is also a potential tool that whomever is in power can use to keep that power. Moreover, it is an arena for ideological struggles for those in a power tug of war as shall be illustrated in the following sections, when I discuss how Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma struggled for control of the ANC. These tensions are made possible by the laws which gave the minister of communications broad powers over the SABC's governance structures. Consequently, a gap for interference by both the state and politically powerful individuals was set. These ministerial intrusions created even more gaps for intolerable presidential and executive meddling.

Second, the SABC board is accountable to the minister, who is the sole shareholder. In terms of the Memorandum and the Articles of Association, cl 5.2:

...the Board is ultimately accountable and responsible to the shareholder for the performance and affairs of the SABC. The Board must therefore retain full and effective control over the SABC and must give strategic direction to the SABC's Management. The Board is responsible for ensuring that the SABC complies with all relevant laws, regulations and codes of business practice.⁴⁷⁷

This clause creates ambiguities because, on the one hand, the board is given full control, and, on the other hand, in the Articles of Association, cl 11, the minister

⁴⁷⁷ SABC Memorandum and the Articles of Association, cl 5.2

appropriates the board's right to appoint or fire the SABC's three top management positions. Seen from this perspective, the right to appoint executive managers conferred to the minister has a direct impact on the whole organization. Jane Duncan observes that these powers had serious implications for the SABC's editorial independence, since the CEO is also the editor in chief and has taken charge of news and current affairs.⁴⁷⁸ Here, the analysis appears to be more pessimistic; however, there are other PSB corporations that fall under government ministers but that still enjoy substantial degrees of autonomy.

One example of a PSB that enjoys a substantial degree of autonomy is the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The BBC was first constituted by royal charter in 1926 and is, at present, chartered until 1996. It operates under a statutory licence granted by the home secretary under the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949. The royal charter states that the governors should set and monitor a set of 'clear objectives and promises for the Corporation's services, programmes and other activities that monitor how far the Corporation has attained such objectives and met its pledges to audiences'.⁴⁷⁹ The home secretary can, however, in some instances, ride rough-shod over BBC editorial direction. There are many cases in which the BBC has directly faced governmental and ministerial pressure to enforce rules through both formal and informal pressure. For example, one stand out occasion occurred in 1988, when Douglas Hurd, the then-home secretary, in an attempt to fight against militant Irish Republican Army (IRA) officials, invoked executive powers under the Broadcasting Act 1981, which allowed the Secretary of

⁴⁷⁸ Jane Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast media in the era of neo-liberalism* (FXI, Johannesburg 2003)

⁴⁷⁹ BBC Charter s 7 (1) (a)

State to compel the BBC to either broadcast or refrain from broadcasting material.⁴⁸⁰

Comparatively, the SABC has remained vulnerable at the political level. The ANC has applied pressure, with considerable success, such that it has, through its power to appoint key personnel, managed to control the PSB. The key provisions in the Articles of Association have vested the power of appointment and the removal of the corporation to the minister. In the process, the minister has been indirectly empowered to give ministerial direction to the corporation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, such powers are sufficient to place the minister in an unassailable position, which is compounded by the financial powers bestowed upon him. These provisions undermine the separation of powers in the South African constitution, as well as functions between the SABC and the executive. Moreover, they are almost certainly unlawful, since they violate the requirement in the Broadcasting Act 1999 for the board to control its own affairs.⁴⁸¹ As a result, these changes and contradictions have allowed for inappropriate political interference through other political appointees, factionalism and censorship factors, which have contributed to the ways in which staff at the SABC understand 'independence' and, particularly, the development of adversary attitudes towards board members and senior management (who, from the perspective of staff in lower tiers, are not only viewed as ANC deployed cadres, but are also perceived as impeding the SABC's activities).

⁴⁸⁰ See <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/foi/docs/governance>>. The BBC resisted such a move until the ban was lifted in 1994 and, with regard to informal pressure, always insists on formal directives.

⁴⁸⁰ In fact, in the history of the BBC, the UK government has used its legal right to attempt to introduce censorship measures only six times.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid (n 420)

The ANC has, over the years, also received a barrage of unceasing criticism from civil society, opposition parties and the public at large over its role in appointing key SABC personnel affiliated with the ANC. However the party has not relented to the pressure. In fact, when the Zuma-Mbeki succession struggle for power gathered momentum, the Mbeki administration consolidated its power of appointment to counter the Jacob Zuma faction. In 2008, amid further fragmentation and conflict within the SABC, the ANC led parliament introduced the Draft Broadcasting Amendment Bill, whose aim was to give leeway to parliament to remove the entire board (since the Broadcasting Act 1999 only allowed for the removal of individual members, and not of the entire board).⁴⁸² This move gave greater power of appointment and control to the ANC, and the process fermented the political conception of 'independence', particularly amongst lower-level staff and unions. A secretary general in one of the unions at the SABC provided an interesting illustration of this commitment to partisanship on the part of the SABC and also added a quote by former ANC spokesperson Joel Netshitenze:

...the ANC has always wanted that power of appointment; it has always been part of their agenda; it is how they understand transformation. Joel Netshitenze made it clear that the ANC had to extend over all levels of power: the army, the police, the judiciary, the public broadcaster and the central bank, and so on.⁴⁸³

These appointments cement the ANC's relationship with the SABC, which, consequently, becomes a propaganda arm of the ANC. As a result, loyalty to the ANC and its feuding factions become the norm. Through its power of appointment, the ANC creates a master and servant relationship between itself and the SABC, which is manifested in various forms including the partisan appointment of staff by

⁴⁸² Interview with Kate Skinner, head of SOS, Rosebank Mall (Johannesburg September 2011)

⁴⁸³ Ibid (n415)

deployed cadres across all tiers, special coverage of the ruling party, interference in programming content, the manipulation of news and current affairs and the intimidation of staff.⁴⁸⁴ The power of appointment became complicated when Jacob Zuma was acquitted of his rape case and became a serious presidential contender, at which point the tensions played themselves out at the SABC once again. A former SABC head of news agreed:

...2007 was the year when the ANC's strategy to co-opt the SABC became clear to everyone concerned. For some of us, it was clear as early as 2009, when the ANC went on an accusation spree. They attacked newspapers, journalists, editors...and showed a reckless and dismissive attitude to press freedoms. They were seeing ghosts everywhere.⁴⁸⁵

2007 was the year in which Thabo Mbeki was defeated at the ANC's Polokwane December conference. The former head of news affirmed:

Thabo Mbeki did the unthinkable: After his defeat at Polokwane, he went to appoint a new SABC board. The calculating management shifted loyalties and aligned themselves to Jacob Zuma, who was certainly the next president. The board remained loyal to Mbeki, who had appointed it.⁴⁸⁶

The former head of news' narrative gives an indicative account of how fissures began to appear within the SABC. The head of news' account is echoed by a former CEO. From the CEO's account:

...the SABC found itself starring in a movie it knew nothing about. All of a sudden, in 2008, the Mbeki appointed board decided to fire the CEO, Dali Mpofu, who had shifted allegiance to Jacob Zuma. Divisions emerged because the MPs were now aligned to Jacob Zuma. They did not endorse the firing of the CEO; instead, they introduced a Broadcasting Amendment Bill, which allowed them to get rid of the board.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ See Chapter 6 for the examination of programming content

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with former SABC Head of Current Affairs (now academic), University of Pretoria (Pretoria, 22 July 2011)

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid

⁴⁸⁷ Interview with former acting CEO, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 18 July 2011)

Interestingly, even before the Polokwane conference, divisions within the ANC had become clearer, as Thabo Mbeki continued to override certain decisions, particularly in relation to the SABC. For example, in 2007, MPs had developed a shortlist for the SABC board, but the ANC head office had removed certain names and added its own, which were mainly Mbeki supporters, including the chair, Khanyisile Mkhonza, a Mbeki loyalist.⁴⁸⁸ It is, therefore, clear that the political control focused on the board, with the hope that its directives would trickle down to lower tiers. In the end, the state of affairs led to the development of a political conception of 'independence', in which all tiers held a political and adversarial attitude towards state authorities, which, by and large, were ANC officials. The boards and CEOs appointed by particular factions within the ANC also held this political conception of 'independence', since they pursued autonomy from rival factions.

However, trajectories vary, as do the degrees of political loyalties, since interpretations of connections between media and politics are not always the same. A former head of corporate affairs, together with three others, held the political conception of 'independence' (albeit from a different perspective). He said:

...the real threat to 'independence' does not come from too much intervention in appointments by the ANC. As you can see, print media is boldly anti-government and anti-poor.⁴⁸⁹ It is commercial. The real danger is actually less intervention from the government. Within the SABC itself, staff are divided, so the government should provide leadership by intervening and putting its house in order...the ANC has to have one centre of power.⁴⁹⁰

Such an interpretation should not be ignored. What we have here is a critical reading of the entire South African political and media environment, linked with

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid

⁴⁸⁹ Interview with former SABC Head of Corporate Affairs, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 18 July 2011)

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid

the processes within the SABC. There is reference to the partisan nature of the South African independent print media. This respondent's commentary was an attempt to articulate the realms and subjectivities of political economy and how they intersect with the ways in which 'independence' is understood in relation to the ANC. He tried to theorise about how the ANC has a certain approach to its relationship with the SABC. Since the ANC cannot control independent print media, which it largely views as anti-ANC, it can only seek to consolidate its media power in the only medium it can control: the SABC. This view that print media is hostile to the ANC is largely supported within the ANC itself, which went to the extent of enacting the Protection of State Information Bill in 2011.⁴⁹¹ This was not a new trend; in 2007, the ANC set out to stretch its control over the media in its 52nd National Conference (under the title 'Communications and the battle of ideas') by establishing a Media Appeals Tribunal (MAT).⁴⁹² The argument within the ANC was that journalists were reporting badly on the government and the party. One of the key statements in the communications and battle of ideas paper was that 'the ANC was faced with a major ideological offensive largely driven by opposition and fractions in the mainstream media where some fractions of the media allegedly adopted an anti transformation and anti-ANC stance'.⁴⁹³

The above section largely focused on the governance level of the SABC. It discussed the ways in which the political conception of 'independence' is

⁴⁹¹ The Protection of State Information Bill was enacted in 2011 to provide for the protection of sensitive state information; to provide for a system of classification, reclassification and declassification of state information; and to regulate the manner in which state information may be protected. The act repealed the Protection of Information Act 1982 (no 84).

Communications and Battle of Ideas (ANC position paper)

⁴⁹² <www.anc.org.za> 52nd National Conference: Resolutions. The ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe argued that a media tribunal was required to deal with what he called a 'dearth of media ethics'.

⁴⁹³ Ibid

conditioned by the exogenous factor of the interfering ANC in appointing party cadres to senior positions. The following section discusses how a professional conception of 'independence' is conditioned by the ANC's interference in the SABC's internal operating environment. It examines how the ANC's interference shapes the SABC's internal perspective of independence and, specifically, the professional conception of SABC independence.

4 The ANC's control of the SABC's operating environment and the push back by SABC staff

A professional conception of 'independence' concerns the autonomy granted to the SABC, free from the influences of politicians, fellow staff members, advertisers or other commercial interests, based on a professional judgement whose barometer is primarily journalistic values of objectivity, impartiality and fairness.⁴⁹⁴ By embracing these values, the professional conception exists, as mentioned in the preceding chapters, in light of Eurocentric fundamentalism, which holds the premise that there is only one epistemic tradition from which to achieve truth and universality.⁴⁹⁵ These values of objectivity, impartiality and fairness form the core of the journalism profession. Moreover, they demand that PSB purveys a reliable account of their meaning without favouring one side over the other and without conveying its own feelings and prejudices. However, these values assume a neutral and objective point of view, masking, in the process, that individuals always speak from a particular location in power structures.

⁴⁹⁴ Thami Mazwai, a former news programming chairperson and, later, a board member at the SABC has been widely quoted as saying 'I feel objectivity is a delusion...it is a notion that does not exist, and the SABC should not be driven by Western, liberal views on media freedom'.

⁴⁹⁵ Ramon Grosfoguel, *Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms* (2007) (Cultural Studies) 211-223

The argument in this section is that the ANC's power of appointment has provided leeway to the party with regard to interfering with the operational day to day SABC activities that challenge and conflict with the professional values held by the SABC staff through its system of deploying cadres which, in turn, affected the production of content. However, the ANC's actions should be understood in the context of the larger global matrices of power, particularly with regard to where the nation states stand in the colonial matrix of power and from what position they articulate their ideologies. In this chapter, I also show that, despite the ANC holding a nationalist ideology, it faces divisions within itself. In particular, one group pursued Keynesian democracy, and another pursued neo-liberalism. In addition, the fragmented ANC, devoid of any single centre of power, left the SABC vulnerable to any force, internal or external, since the PSB was no longer certain of whom its patron was. The appointment of ANC personnel to SABC key positions, I argue, permeated through all levels of the SABC, creating, in the process, an environment characterised by suspicion, staff turnover and self-censorship, amongst other factors. Using data from interview respondents, I argue that a professional conception of 'independence' is held by SABC staff across all tiers, particularly during the Mbeki and Zuma eras.

Since the highest posts within the SABC were essentially political appointees appointed specifically by the ANC government, the PSB, which was the party that nominated the board members, began to exhibit particular ANC traits. The SABC's operational environment and, particularly, its structure at the middle management level and in key positions, such as news and current affairs, began to be headed by ANC members. According to a senior journalist:

...at the turn of the century, what we suffered was an apartheid hangover. The government's influence on the SABC was still present a hangover from apartheid...The ANC was seeing ghosts everywhere. Everyone was an enemy. They used their friends to change the SABC. Themba Mthembu was one of them; he was the new head of news, who had powers of editorial intervention when necessary.⁴⁹⁶

As the new millennium unfolded, SABC management began to determine the types of journalists and of content it wanted conveyed by the SABC. Journalists and other staff who did not show commitment to the ANC's developmental state model or who were suspected to belong to opposition parties were dismissed. The state of affairs increased corruption and nepotism within the PSB. This point was echoed by a former producer/journalist, who said, 'managers who, in turn, appoint their own friends are today appointed more for their perceived loyalty to the ANC and not their professional experience. As a result, staff think their mandate is to protect the government'.⁴⁹⁷

What is clear here is a trend in which the ANC faction in power was effectively using the BA Act 1999, which reduced the influence of civil society on appointments to determine managerial control. The recruitment of party loyalists into the management and lower tiers of the SABC appears to have influenced a pro-ANC working environment. The appointments were accompanied by demotions and dismissals of those who held views contrary to the ANC, like Max Du Preeze.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁶ According to a former SABC employee, who had served across all tiers and had been at the SABC since 1990, the first point of tension after the appointment of Mthembu was his relation to the executive producer of one of the current affairs programmes: Special Assignment. During Zwelakhe Sisulu's tenure, in line with international standards, executive producers enjoyed ultimate editorial authority over the content of their programmes. Mthembu, however, in his new capacity as head of news, decided to pull certain Special Assignments programmes off air. Shortly after the incident, Max Du Preeze's contract was not renewed. Du Preeze made it clear that he was fired because he had refused the erosion of the editorial 'independence' of his programmes.

⁴⁹⁷ Interview with SABC journalist/producer, Balfour Mall (Johannesburg August 2011)

⁴⁹⁸ Max Du Preeze was dismissed for insubordination from his position as chief executive producer of a popular investigative documentary, Special Assignment, after he refused to bar a particular documentary from the air.

In the end, an environment that was not conducive to the ideals of professionalism and, instead, that involved fear and self censorship began to characterise the SABC. The SABC also presented opportunities for those who shouted the loudest to join the political elites. For example, quite a number of people who left the SABC were later rewarded with senior posts within the government. One example was the former chair of the board, Dr Ivy-Matsepe Cassaburi, who went on to become the minister of communication.

These opportunities for joining the political elite appeared to curtail professionalism, particularly in the lower three tiers, since board members would make unethical comments that made it clear what was expected of staff within the SABC. For example, Thami Mazwai, an ANC member who was, by then, a board member, was quoted in one of the daily newspapers saying, 'objectivity in the news is a delusion that simply does not exist. The SABC's role is to promote the work of President Thabo Mbeki and the ANC government'.⁴⁹⁹ Statements of this nature give credence to the argument that the ANC, just like the apartheid government, had co-opted the SABC and diminished professionalism within the organisation by making its staff subservient to the party in power. In the end, the staff found themselves in a dilemma, which they had to choose between loyalty to a politicized organisation and remaining true to their professional ideals (and, thus, risking dismissal). However, selective personnel changes of this kind have been shown to be ineffective since, within the SABC, some staff have remained non partisan. Those who have been passed over in promotions have remained resentful and have become sources of information for what is happening at the SABC.⁵⁰⁰ Nevertheless,

⁴⁹⁹ Kevin Bloom, 'A Mysterious Presence' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 8 August 2003)

⁵⁰⁰ Interview with producer/journalist, Sandton Mall (Johannesburg 13 July 2011)

the ANC's power of appointment remains a key factor in the party's control of the PSB's administrative procedures. Where SABC control has failed to be achieved through appointments, the ANC has not hesitated to use sanctions via its deployed cadres. One such example occurred when Molefe, the head of news disobeyed an order to stop broadcasting news about Julius Malema, the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) leader, from Dr Blade Nzimande, a high-ranking ANC. Molefe was duly suspended by the CEO, Lulama Mokhobo.⁵⁰¹ Sanctions can take other forms, too, including death threats or arson, orchestrated by powerful, untouchable members with strong links to the ANC. One example is that of Elsje Oosthuizen, a head of the SABC's internal audits, who, in 2007, released findings that the SABC's chief legal advisor, Mafika Sihlali, had fraudulently billed the SABC over two million rands for a non-existent company.⁵⁰² After these events, Oosthuizen's received threatening phone calls, to the point that the SABC gave her a bodyguard and her house mysteriously caught fire.⁵⁰³ Sihlali was untouchable for a time because he was the friend and business partner of the CEO, Dali Mpofo.

The ANC's stronghold and the party's control over the SABC's operating environment intensified in 2005, when two centres of power begin to emerge. On one hand, there was Jacob Zuma, who intended to succeed Mbeki, and on the other have, there was Thabo Mbeki, who positioned himself for a third term. The ANC became openly interventionist in an aggressive manner and now resembled the apartheid SABC. This situation was captured in this comment by a former middle manager currently serving on the SABC board:

⁵⁰¹ Glynnis Underhill, 'Former SAB Legal Chief on Fraud Rap' *Mail And Guardian* (Johannesburg 7 Feb 2012)

⁵⁰² Ibid

⁵⁰³ Ibid (n 441)

There is perhaps no organisation in South Africa that has, over the years done as much damage to the country as the SABC. In warping the minds of ordinary people, the corporation ensured that apartheid not only triumphed but endured as well.⁵⁰⁴

A variety of interventionist methods have been used. For example, several producer/journalists have received telephone calls from board members questioning their choice of words or the programmes aired on TV.⁵⁰⁵ SABC staff have been known to avoid such criticisms and have, thus, developed a ‘watch your back’ culture. As a result, staff have tried to impress upon the ANC that they are loyal to the party and presidency. Those staff members that are believed to be partisan are rewarded with promotions or production contracts.⁵⁰⁶ Production contracts are another area of the SABC that is riddled with politicised corruption.⁵⁰⁷

The outsourcing of production by the commercialisation process has a political dimension to it. So called independent producers are not independent after all. Instead, they are run by former SABC staffers who are affiliated with the ANC and who have bought majority shares in production houses through the ANC’s Black Economic Empowerment policy.⁵⁰⁸ Party loyalists, once they leave the ANC, often join the government or one of the many high paying production companies.⁵⁰⁹ One respondent spotlighted a number of former SABC staff, including Zwelakhe Sisulu, a former CEO whose company was a key shareholder at New Africa Investments Limited

⁵⁰⁴ Interview with producer/journalist, Sandton Mall (Johannesburg 13 July 2011)

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid

⁵⁰⁶ Interview with suspended SABC newsreader, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 14 September 2011)

⁵⁰⁷ This politicisation of content is also discussed in the next chapter

⁵⁰⁸ The BEE program was a program launched by the South African government to redress the inequalities of apartheid by giving previously disadvantaged groups who were South African citizens economic opportunities that were previously not available to them. It includes measurements like employment equity, skills development, ownership, management and preferential procurement.

⁵⁰⁹ Interview with suspended SABC newsreader, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 14 September 2011)

(NAIL) investments, a company that did most of the SABC's production.⁵¹⁰

Other series of incidents within the SABC also reflect the general mentality and priorities of the ANC's relationship with the SABC during the Zuma/Mbeki debacle. These incidents created instabilities within the SABC, and the instabilities, in turn, did not allow all members of the SABC across tiers to acquire or realise professionalism. A non-professional organisational culture characterised by the absence of a shared purpose or role and marred by political intervention, therefore, influenced a professional conception of 'independence'. A professional conception of 'independence' refers to autonomy granted to the SABC, free from many influence of politicians, fellow staff, advertisers or other commercial interests, based on a professional judgement whose barometer is primarily the journalistic values of objectivity, impartiality and fairness. The ANC political struggles that play out within the SABC have made these professional values unattainable. The SABC has shown partisan commitment, since there is an obvious bridged relationship between the PSB and the ANC. The degree of partisanship also varies according to the levels occupied by various individuals. According to interview respondents, this partisanship compromises the role and the identity of the SABC. In addition, staff across tiers often display disregard and contempt when their autonomy is threatened, and this diminishes professionalism on their part. Though not all staff voice their concerns, other staff do conform to the requirements of the authorities, since they feel the urgency to acculturate into the difficult anti professional process of getting along with utmost deference and not questioning the delimitations of their professionalism.

⁵¹⁰ See J Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National question: South African broadcast media in the age of neo-liberalism* (FXI, Johannesburg 2003)

5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that intolerable interference by the ANC in two key areas of the SABC particularly, the appointment of key personnel and interference with the operational environment have contributed to the construction of a political and professional conception of independence. This interference, which represents quite a deviation from the early and mid 1990s (i.e., the Mandela era) began to manifest itself in the form of factions and an unprofessional working environment characterised by suspicion, backbiting, nepotism and self censorship, among others. Despite all these pressures, SABC staff appears to view themselves as professionals; however, they find it difficult to view their work in such terms. This uncertainty is a consequence of the constraints in their operating environment in this case, caused by the ANC. When their work is subordinated to the whims of the ANC through appointments, constant personnel changes and interference in the operating environment through censorship, self censorship, factionalism, sanctions and the blacklisting of anti ANC commentators, it becomes difficult for the staff to view themselves as professionals. In the end, the staff find themselves continually responding to the evolving perceptions of what the SABC is while, at the same time, finding themselves caught up between, on one hand, loyalty to the values of objectivity, impartiality and neutrality and, on the other hand, the need to be loyal to the politicised PSB and allegiances to powerful factions. Interview respondents showed that they were aware of and resented the fact that their professionalism was undermined. Since they believed that their professional growth was undermined, they held the professional conception of independence. Moreover, since the ANC, a political party, is responsible for the SABC's pressures, the

professional conception of 'independence' overlaps fluidly into the political conception of SABC independence. The political conception of 'independence' is defined as the way in which SABC staff perceive themselves to conduct their work without any sort of interference, in the form of either threats or inducements, by either external politicians or internal authorities.

Chapter 6: Executive lawlessness, accommodation and submission in the SABC editorial

1 Background to the impacts of commercialisation and ANC power struggles on the SABC editorial

This chapter focuses on programming content as a key empirical reference point, around which different understandings of the ‘independence’ of the SABC manifested themselves. The chapter explores how commercialisation and power struggles affected the production of editorial content and how this, in turn, gave rise to specific narratives of ‘independence’ among SABC staff. The chapter does not present any new conceptions of independence; instead, it illuminates how conceptions of ‘independence’ were shaped by practices in relation to the determination of editorial content and the ways in which editorial content reflected particular conceptions of independence. Harking back to Chapter 2’s discussions of the critical economy of the media, which explains ‘independence’ as a domain of power, the chapter also argues that the interview respondents’ perspectives of ‘independence’ are not epistemologically free from the influence of power.

The resulting examination of the ways in which power struggles between commercialization and the ANC manifested themselves in organizational practices in the SABC advances the argument that there is very little empirical evidence backing the theory that commercialisation, as articulated (predominantly) by the anti commercialisation camp, determined editorial content.⁵¹¹ On the contrary,

⁵¹¹ The anti commercialisation camp asserts that the commercialisation of the SABC prompted the PSB and its staff to air cheap, imported programmes at the expense of local content. As a result, the respondents argue, the SABC’s identity became compromised.

overwhelming evidence suggests that ANC power struggles, through what I call 'executive lawlessness', appear to influence both editorial routines and content within the SABC. Therefore, in a comparative light, commercialisation has been less significant in shaping the newsroom than ANC power struggles. Using largely documentary evidence, such as ICASA quotas, South African media monitoring agency reports, programming schedules and newspaper reports, complemented by data from interview respondents, this chapter presents an examination of SABC programme production in post-apartheid South Africa. Any changes to editorial brought about by either commercialisation or ANC power struggles have contributed to the ways in which staff within the SABC understand SABC 'independence'. It must be understood that these influential ANC power struggles, which play out within the SABC, are, to a certain extent, local manifestations of concealed dominant global relations of power, as argued in the previous chapter. These global relations of power refer precisely to the Washington Consensus' dictates regarding what it views as universal solutions to the developing Global South and its institutions. For example, the rationale for partisan appointments, as described by interview respondents, is the result of the ANC trying to consolidate power in the face of an onslaught of neo-liberal influences. The resulting idea would be to exert control over the PSB. Of course, at the local level, these appointments could result from personal relationships, the buying of loyalties and the repayment of favours, which strengthen affiliations of patronage both up and down the political chain. Moreover, as argued in Chapters 3 and 5, these Washington dictates fuel divisions within the ANC and weaken the state. Therefore, despite the chapter's focus on programming, the ANC overstretches in this chapter should be seen in the light of external forces, as well.

In the previous two chapters' interviews, I discussed the various conceptions of 'independence' to which my interview respondents referred. Respondents expressed varying conceptions of SABC independence: namely, anti-establishment, professional, legalistic and political conceptions of independence.⁵¹² I have argued that these conceptions are associated with two key developments: the commercialization of the SABC and ANC power struggles. These two key developments appear to have altered the classical role of the PSB, which is to serve the public interest; as a result, an alternate situation, whereby the SABC serves the interests of these two groups (i.e., commerce and the ANC) has emerged. According to all 36 interview respondents, these developments have contributed to significant shifts in the SABC's operating environment and, consequently, I argue, to staff members' understandings of 'independence' across all SABC tiers. In addition to those mentioned in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the key sources of data on which this chapter relies are interviews, archived editorial documents, newspaper reports on SABC content, SABC annual reports and SABC position papers on programming.

In what follows, I will trace the ways in which the two mentioned key developments, commercialisation of the SABC and ANC power struggles, have impacted editorial, a key function of the SABC that is responsible for programme production and output. SABC editorial is important as a reference point because it is the lens through which the SABC can be viewed, as well as the barometer through which professionalism and the ability to make decisions without

⁵¹² The anti-establishment conception of SABC 'independence' refers to staff throwing off an identity that they view as residue of a system of oppression through a subtle form of radicalism, in which they disengage from authority through acts of insubordination or disengagement from SABC activities, such as training workshops. See the following sections for the definitions of the professional and political conceptions of 'independence' and the difference between the two.

interference from other forces (in this case, commerce and ANC power struggles) can be gauged. The primary good produced by the SABC is its programming content. The SABC's values (e.g., equality, editorial independence, nation building, diversity and human dignity) are also reflected in editorial.⁵¹³ To buttress the importance of editorial, the SABC charter explicitly recognizes the important role of programming content in nation building and requires the SABC to encourage the development of South African expression by providing a wide range of programming in all official languages to cater to all audiences.⁵¹⁴ ICASA, the regulatory authority, defines quotas for editorial content and monitors compliance to those quotas. Therefore, editorial was a key reference point for all interview respondents, as well as an area in which the changes brought by these two factors could play out and be traced. I begin by recapping the key views that emerged from the interview respondents' interpretations of the impact of commercialisation and ANC power struggles on their understandings of 'independence' and roles within the SABC.⁵¹⁵

First, commercialisation, the thesis has argued (Chapter 4), divided SABC staff into two camps. One camp's understanding of SABC 'independence' was shaped by an ideological position of anti-commercialisation, which largely determined the anti-establishment conception of independence.⁵¹⁶ The anti-commercialisation camp pointed out that commercialisation obliged the PSB to

⁵¹³The SABC Policies: Core Editorial Values of the SABC'
<www.sabc.co.za/wps/wcm/connect/3bb9fc8044341da1a5637c4173d8502/Editorialpolie_rev.pff?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_>

⁵¹⁴ See BA Act 1999 c 4

⁵¹⁵ See Chapters 4 and 5.

⁵¹⁶ The anti-establishment conception of 'independence' involves the throwing off of an identity that the staff view as residue of a system of oppression through a subtle form of radicalism via acts like insubordination and disengagement from SABC activities.

concentrate on the duty of delivering audiences to advertisers, rather than on catering to the general South African public in its diversity (e.g., by delivering educational, cultural, religious, multi-lingual and other locally produced programming content that reflected this diversity).⁵¹⁷ Consequently, according to the anti-commercialisation camp, the pursuit of profit undermined the PSB's responsibility to cater to diverse audiences because it necessitated the airing of programme content determined by advertisers, which encouraged the commoditization of programmes. Consequently, the anti-commercialization camp's argument was two-pronged. First, it suggested that the manner in which commercialisation was established was authoritarian, encouraging the factionalism, downsizing and bureaucratisation of the SABC a process that not only divided the staff, but also led to an adversarial attitude towards commercialisation itself. The resulting state of affairs created resentment towards authority, which appeared to push the commercialisation agenda. Eventually, SABC 'independence' was articulated through anti-establishment tendencies. Second, and most importantly, the anti-commercialisation camp argued that commercialisation compromised the role of the PSB, since the information needs of those on the periphery and those without buying power did not register significantly in the commercial considerations of advertisers. Moreover, they argued, the RDP, as discussed in Chapter 3, had not fulfilled its role of curbing inequality. As a result, inherited inequalities were apparent in the programming content of the SABC. Hence, it was impossible to construct a single and equally represented national audience because of the divisions brought about by advertisers' needs, which targeted affluent, English-speaking audiences. In addition, the anti-establishment

⁵¹⁷ Seven of the 36 interview respondents raised this concern

conception of 'independence' was fuelled by these adversarial observations, since the anti-commercialisation camp held the perspective that commercialisation was compromising its role.

Respondents in this study pointed to two ways in which their roles were compromised. First, the respondents held the view that the traditional public service role (i.e., the one that eschews profit) was being re-aligned to fit the goals of commerce and advertisers. Second, the respondents in the anti-commercialisation camp argued that commercialisation was a top-down ploy by the ANC to infiltrate the SABC with cadres under the pretext of fiscal prudence. The first point that commercialisation would shift the SABC towards commercial interests at the expense of audiences is widely supported in the literature.⁵¹⁸ As was pointed out in Chapter 2, the PSB should serve as a watchdog, or a fourth estate.⁵¹⁹ This fourth estate role cannot be realised if commercial interests prevail.⁵²⁰ These assertions were, however, dismissed by the pro-commercialisation camp.

⁵¹⁸ For example, amongst other voices, Olexiy Khabyuk, in the study of Germany and Ukrainian PSBs, argues that 'the economic targets of commerce would negatively affect journalistic quality and the diversity of programmes with negative consequences for public broadcasting as a central institution for public opinion making and public communication'; M Kops, 'Adjusting the Remits and Resources of Public Service Broadcasting Within the German Dual Media Order' in Olexiy Khabyuk and Manfred Kops (eds) *Public Service Broadcasting: A German-Ukrainian Exchange of Opinions* (LIT Verlag Munster, Berlin 2011)94

⁵¹⁹ Clive Barnett, 'The Limits of Media Democratisation in South Africa: Politics, Privatisation and Regulation' (1999) 21 MCS 274; JW Wigston, 'A South African Media Map' in Pieter Fourie (ed) *Media Studies, Volume 1: Institutions, Theories and Issues* (Juta, Lansdowne 2001); RW McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times* (University of Illinois Press, Chicago 1998)

⁵²⁰ Some countries have gone to the extent of banning advertising for their PSBs. For example, Radio Television Espanola (RTVE), the Spanish PSB, banned all advertising in 2009. See Jikova Semova Dimitrina, 'Financing Public Media in Spain: New Strategies' (2010) *The International Journal on Media Management* 141-157

The pro-commercialisation camp largely held a political conception of SABC 'independence' that eschewed state involvement in the running of the SABC.⁵²¹ Evidence from the pro-commercialisation camp suggests that commercialisation is synonymous with 'independence' from politics.⁵²² This group's response to the anti-commercialisation camp's argument is that there is no evidence that programming content changes in favour of advertisers' needs as a result of commercialisation. Therefore, the pro-commercialisation camp believes that it is only the market that can deliver a form of 'independence' from the state. It is, therefore, important to examine further programming content and the editorial environment, since an analysis of programming content could either support or refute the pro- and/or anti-commercialisation camps.

According to lower-tier respondents, as argued in Chapter 5, the ANC power struggles were followed by political meddling in two key areas of the SABC: the appointment of key personnel and interference within the editorial department. This meddling contributed to the construction of a political and professional conception of independence.⁵²³ Moreover, this interference, in quite a deviation from the early and mid-1990s Mandela era, began to manifest itself in the form of factions within the SABC and an unprofessional working environment, characterised by suspicion, back-biting, nepotism, censorship, corruption, fraud, factionalism, patronage, clientelism and self-censorship.⁵²⁴ According to interview respondents, the politicised nature of the SABC imposed limits on professionalism,

⁵²¹ The political conception of 'independence' is related to how SABC staff perceive themselves to conduct their work without any sort of interference in form of either threats or inducements from either external politicians or powerful internal authorities.

⁵²² According to six respondents, pro-commercialisation ensures 'independence' from politics.

⁵²³ The professional conception of SABC 'independence' is inspired by how SABC staff perceive how colleagues have a degree of control over their own work.

⁵²⁴ See Chapters 4 and 5.

as editorial direction from the ANC became the order of the day. For example, one interview respondent claimed that, though the apartheid was over, the ANC ensured that the same ethos of executive interference, authoritarianism and editorial control by the state was replicated.⁵²⁵ This executive lawlessness also manifested itself through Snuki Zikalala, the former SABC managing director of news and current affairs, who appeared to be the executive instrument within the SABC. In situations of negative news regarding the ANC, Zikalala acted through censoring and through fostering a culture of self-censorship.⁵²⁶ Lower tier respondents argued that the effects could be felt in editorial, where the censorship and self-censorship of journalists became prevalent. The editorial staff, particularly the journalists/producers, found themselves caught in a dilemma of being loyal to either their professional values or the SABC versus ANC conflict.⁵²⁷ According to the respondents, the re-alignment between the SABC and the ANC was a reversal from the apartheid era, during which the National Party controlled editorial. As was pointed out in the opening section, the argument in this chapter is that ANC power struggles influenced SABC programming content; however, commercialisation, in contradiction to anti-commercialisation, actually saw an increase in local programming content catering to diverse South African audiences. This largely supported the rise of the anti-establishment, political and professional conceptions of SABC 'independence'.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the next section, I discuss how ANC power struggles impacted editorial and, in the process, shaped the

⁵²⁵ Interview with SABC producer/journalist, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 20 August 2011)

⁵²⁶ See Chapter 5 for a discussion on Snuki Zikalala and how the SABC was found guilty of censorship by the High Court.

⁵²⁷ Interview with SABC journalist/producer, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 20 August 2011). The organogram in the appendix reveals the relationships between the tiers within the SABC.

professional, anti-establishment and political conceptions of SABC 'independence'. The second section discusses how commercialisation impacted editorial and examines the relationships among ICASA, the regulatory authority and the SABC in relation to editorial content, as well as how these relationships related to the three SABC conceptions of independence.

2 The impact of ANC power struggles on editorial

ANC power struggles manifested themselves on two main levels in relation to editorial. First, the struggles affected editorial at the staff level, where the operating environment like that of the whole SABC became one of nervousness and factionalism.⁵²⁸ Secondly, the struggles affected the production and output of programming content, particularly news, current affairs and documentaries. The ANC and its factions' desires to exert and secure editorial direction over the SABC shaped the professional conception of SABC independence, since these factions impeded and delimited the editorial staff's autonomy a key component of professionalism. In this section, I discuss how the culture of accommodation and submission within the SABC staff acted as fuel for the ANC's seizure of editorial control.

According to respondents, editorial appears to have been the most affected by the ANC power struggles. One interview respondent, a producer/journalist, offered a response that captured the experiences in the newsroom:

...Here I was, a 22-year-old university graduate, in this intimidating newsroom, with no work experience. All I had was my journalism degree, in a newsroom that resembled nothing that I learnt in lecture rooms. In fact, it was the opposite of what I learnt at university. If Thami Mazwai, a senior in editorial, with more degrees than I have and more experience in journalism than I have, and has been longer at the SABC than I have been, tells me that

⁵²⁸ This view was raised by a trade union secretary general within the SABC in Chapter 4.

objectivity is a delusion, what I need to do is to serve Mbeki, what do you think I would do? Jobs are scarce these days.⁵²⁹

Although this interview respondent appears to have questioned the rationale, views and practices of seniors in editorial, rebelling appears to have been a perilous venture. Editors in the newsroom seemed to side predominantly with the faction in power at any particular moment; for example, the news reader mentioned in Chapter 5 articulated the revolving door at the SABC, through which teams left with their leaders, only to return to the SABC with their teams when the power shifted.⁵³⁰ It is, therefore, not surprising that Thami Mazwai, a former SABC news programming chair and board member, would openly support Mbeki and emphasise objectivity as a non-existent notion. For editorial staff in general and for lower-tier staff in particular, survival in the newsroom was about accommodation and submission. According to the interviews, respondents' survival in the newsroom was more difficult than survival in other areas within the SABC (except for board and CEO positions).⁵³¹ As a result, in order to survive in the newsroom, one had to accommodate others, put up a facade and 'watch their back'.⁵³² Professionalism, along with its pursuit of balance, accuracy, fairness, objectivity and impartiality, was thrown out the window. One journalist/producer made an interesting point in support of this view:

...The intimidating thing about the SABC newsroom is that control over journalists/producers is not only exercised by seniors in editorial, but by other journalists, too. These guys are all aligned to factions. Despite the fact that they do not have the power to determine what goes out on air, they still stifle any form of discussion and sharing of ideas within the newsroom. They

⁵²⁹ Interview with journalist/producer, Wits University (Johannesburg 20 August 2011)

⁵³⁰ See Chapter 5.

⁵³¹ Interview with SABC union official, Mandela Foundation (Johannesburg 26 July 2011)

⁵³² Ibid

serve their masters' interest, which are far from the public interest that we should serve.⁵³³

The idea of serving the masters' interests is well articulated in Chapter 2 by Hallin and Mancini, who use the term *political instrumentalisation* to describe the situation.⁵³⁴ Hallin and Mancini argue that, in politically instrumentalised organisations, professionalization is low because journalists lack autonomy and political principles. There is also an absence of journalistic principles to guide journalists' practices.⁵³⁵ This argument supports the current situation happening in the SABC. Experience within the SABC editorial has taught staff that misplaying or misinterpreting a role could cost them their jobs. It appears that most staff members have, therefore, learnt to subordinate their professional values in an accommodative manner in order to preserve their jobs. This fear within the newsroom, which manifests itself through accommodation and submission, has created fertile grounds for editorial manipulation and given the ANC significant leeway over SABC editorial direction. For example, all interview respondents in the lower tier expressed an understanding, whether tacitly or explicitly, of both the formal and the informal ways in which the ANC has interfered with editorial to consolidate factional gains.⁵³⁶ In particular, interview respondents noticed two types of interferences.

First, the interview respondents spoke of interference at a pre-production level. This type of interference is largely covert; that is, it is clandestinely inculcated through ANC deployments in the newsroom. A central feature of the newsroom

⁵³³ Interview with journalist/producer Auckland Park (Johannesburg 13 August 2011)

⁵³⁴ Daniel C Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: The Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge University Place, Cambridge 2004) 37

⁵³⁵ Ibid

⁵³⁶ Generally, this has been shared by twenty-one of the thirty-six respondents across tiers

becomes subservience and what one might call 'factional collectivism', in which staff members converge together according to interest and trust, due to a suspicion entrenched in them by a culture of fear within editorial. Once journalists/producers are assimilated into this culture, they become easy to manipulate; after all, they either consciously or subconsciously know what will please or infuriate their immediate bosses. In this way, the ANC plays a key role in shaping information sharing and even its creation.⁵³⁷ These ANC efforts to control information by controlling the SABC editorial has made it possible for the ANC to withhold material that it clandestinely deems to be harmful or offensive to the larger South African public. For example, in 2006, a documentary on Thabo Mbeki was pulled off schedule shortly before it was to air because it was deemed to be defamatory to the president. In another example, ANC critic Liz Shange, the leader of the Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), was banned from current affairs shows by Hlaudi Motsoening, the COO of SABC, who was accused of pulling anti-Zuma programmes off-air.⁵³⁸

This leads to the second level of interference, which occurs at the production and post-production levels. The second level is more overt. For example, telephone calls from powerful individuals and, particularly, politicians have occurred. Even the presidency has been known to call editorial for certain content.⁵³⁹ In addition, politicians, who are powerful sources of information, may choose to withhold certain information from producers/journalists whom they think are not inclined

⁵³⁷ The ANC has even formulated the Information Bill, which prohibits access to certain information. The Bill, also known as the Secrecy Bill, was largely viewed in civil society as a threat to press freedom and freedom of expression, since it called for the regulation of the classification, protection and dissemination of state information. See Protection of State Information Bill 2010.

⁵³⁸ Interview with union official, Mandela Foundation (Johannesburg 26 July 2011)

⁵³⁹ Ibid

towards the party or towards their particular faction.⁵⁴⁰ As a result, journalists find themselves engaging in forms of self-censorship, simply in order to gain more information from key sources the same politicians who control the newsroom. This seems to have resulted in, at times, very effective methods of the editorial staff reinforcing accommodation and submission. In this state of affairs, through which the newsroom is tied to certain political groups, the idea of professionalism, which is characterised by objectivity and autonomy, is severely undercut.⁵⁴¹ This situation has shaped the professional conception of SABC independence, which is closely linked to the political conception of independence. These two conceptions are on a continuum: That is, they are interlinked, but cannot be used interchangeably. The professional conception of 'independence' refers to how SABC staff perceive themselves as having a degree of control over their work and how they are able to stick to values of objectivity and fairness and make editorial decisions based on professional judgment rather than on the politics of senior managers, the state, advertisers, commercial interests or political interests. The political conception of 'independence' refers to how well staff members believe they are performing their duties without formal or informal interference. Interview respondents within editorial were quite aware of their professional roles and how these roles were limited by external ANC constraints.⁵⁴²

This ANC executive lawlessness in the newsroom appears to have grown during GEAR and the Developmental State Model era and to have fermented during the reign of Zuma.⁵⁴³ It was under these two eras that a differentiation between

⁵⁴⁰ Interview with former SABC journalist/producer, Sunnypark (Pretoria 6 August 2011)

⁵⁴¹ Ibid

⁵⁴² Refer to Chapter 5.

⁵⁴³ See Chapter 2.

public and national interests began to emerge (while, in contrast, during the RDP, the two concepts were used interchangeably). As pointed out in the preceding chapters, public and national interests are offset against one another. On one hand, according to the ANC, the national interest is a sixth sense a domain of the ultimate formal authority (i.e., ANC) and it cannot be decreed in statutes; on the other hand, the public interest concerns the collective interest of the wider public and is, presumably, represented by the civil society, which, after all, is not homogenous.⁵⁴⁴ Consequently, in editorial, there have been many instances in which material that has been considered as jeopardizing the national interest has been banned.⁵⁴⁵ Moreover, definitions of what fell into public or national interest began to be determined by the whims of the contesting factions, at the head of which were Thabo Mbeki and Zuma, who were both vying for presidency of both the ANC and South Africa. In the end, this factionalism translated into patronage, through which, in order to cement loyalty or win over other people, huge material rewards, ranging from financial incentives to job positions and promotions, were offered to staff members. This practice promoted what one interview respondent called a culture of 'eating', in which staff conducted their work with a view towards gaining financial rewards.

Editorial: Factionalism and the consequences of 'eating' for a professional conception of independence

This sub-section discusses how Thabo Mbeki's attempt to consolidate power following his defeat in Polokwane left the SABC in a double bind: It could

⁵⁴⁴ See Duncan (n 38).

⁵⁴⁵ Chapter 5 offers an extensive discussion of these programmes.

serve either Mbeki or the president in waiting, Jacob Zuma.⁵⁴⁶ This sub-section raises the argument that this bind resulted in a plethora of internal factions within the SABC, which also played themselves out within editorial, thus determining both programming content and the newsroom's operating environment. These factions were a result of the SABC's relationship with its socio-political context, which consisted mainly of the macro-economic strategies adopted by the ANC, GEAR and the DSM. These factions, I argue, were fuelled mainly by fraud and nepotism, which are the main characteristics of the practice of 'eating'. These factions appeared to be factors, not only in shaping the professional conception of 'independence' in editorial, but also in reinforcing the low-level tiers' levels of accommodation and submission. However, it must be pointed out that the interview respondents' responses revealed that the lower-level tiers have two distinct social selves: one that they reveal to people they trust within the SABC and to some of their peers, and the other that they assume among superiors and people they do not trust (in order to persuade superiors that they are in line with their goals).⁵⁴⁷ As argued in the previous chapter, partisan management became prevalent in editorial during Thabo Mbeki's administration.

Thabo Mbeki's practice of closely controlling the public broadcaster through deployed cadres presented a fertile ground for the rise of factions and occult managers within editorial.⁵⁴⁸ This tendency to deploy cadres was acknowledged by

⁵⁴⁶ In 2008, the ANC had its elective conference, in which Jacob Zuma defeated Thabo Mbeki for the presidency of the ANC. The ANC presidency was an automatic ticket to the presidency of South Africa, where the ANC had a two-thirds majority in parliament.

⁵⁴⁷ See Chapter 5.

⁵⁴⁸ The term 'occult manager' has been widely used in reference to governments controlling public broadcasters. It was used by media expert Alin Mungiu-Pippidi in *State into Public: The Failed Reform of State TV in East Central Europe* (The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy 1999)

the secretary general of MWASA (a trade union within the SABC). The secretary general added that it was true that numerous people had been either employed or promoted and that 600 new managers were employed as a result of this practice a suggestion supported by sixteen other respondents. The primary reason for this state of affairs, according to the secretary-general, was to ensure that Mbeki had a sufficient pool of supporters to neutralise the rising support for Jacob Zuma, especially in the newsroom. Some of the people, he added, had no experience at all in journalism. Sharing the same concern was a middle manager, who preferred to remain anonymous. He said:

Most of the guys were not qualified at all, and some did not even have matric certificates. Motseunyane was one of them who has, at some point, headed the SABC without a matric certificate.⁵⁴⁹ Most of the guys were immediately promoted to senior positions, as there was this drive to secure all strategic positions for the Mbeki faction.

Further evidence for the above observation was given by another secretary general of COSATU (another union at the SABC), who said that, at a minimum, the era was full of blunders, and that it could be considered the comical episode in the history of the SABC. The secretary general pointed to an interesting scenario:

I wrote in the newspaper in 2004, when Zikalala was appointed head of news, that the threat to the SABC's stability is not the individuals leading it, but how the ruling party views and interferes with the public broadcaster. What followed was a comedy of errors. In 2007, we had the CEO, Dali Mpofu, jumping ship from the Mbeki faction to the seemingly rising stock of Jacob Zuma's faction. Later, he fired Snuki Zikalala, a Mbekite [Mbeki supporter]. The Christine Qunta board was Mbekite, so, in turn, it fired Dali Mpofu, but its [board] decision was overturned in court. But that was only the beginning of problems at the SABC.⁵⁵⁰

According to these two union secretary generals, ANC groupings are to blame for the factions at the SABC. These two attributed the growth of factions at

⁵⁴⁹ Matriculation (or matric) is the final year at high school and also refers to the minimum university entrance requirement

⁵⁵⁰ Interview with union official, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 12 August 2011)

the SABC to power struggles within the ruling party. Their observations deviated from the literature on public broadcasting in Africa. Extensive literature indicates that the primary focus of identity and loyalty in Africa, which is also true in broadcasting institutions, is ethnic, religious or tribal.⁵⁵¹ This assumption eludes us when we attempt to apply it to South Africa and the SABC. We find that, on the surface, ethnicities do not drive loyalties; instead, individuals in positions of political power attract people from all walks of life. This can be traced to political alliances, through which financially and politically powerful people attract loyalties across tribes. For example, in the Mbeki versus Zuma rivalry, both groups' top six executives included people from different ethnic groups. However, undercurrents of ethnicity cannot be totally ignored. At the height of the tensions, the Thabo Mbeki group began to be called 'Xhosanostra' a term created around the perception that Mbeki was surrounding himself with his own ethnic group, the Xhosa. At the same time, Zuma supporters were clad in t-shirts labelled '100% Zuluboy', insinuating an ethnic rivalry. However, within the SABC, the ethnic dimension was not as clear-cut.⁵⁵² On one hand, Dali Mpfu, the former SABC CEO and a Xhosa, shifted loyalties from Mbeki to Zuma. On the other hand, Dr. Ben Ngubane, of Zulu ethnicity, was appointed chair of the SABC board, leading to murmurings of the 'Zulufication' of the SABC.⁵⁵³ Above all, what bound different factions was the potential of gaining financially; in other words, ethnicity and other differences could be ignored for the sake of financial benefits.

⁵⁵¹Jean Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa*, (Polity Press, Cambridge 2009)

⁵⁵² Zulu and Xhosa are the biggest ethnic groups in South Africa, constituting 22% and 18% of the population, respectively. Due to the closeness of the languages, people can easily assume the identity of the group in power.

⁵⁵³Interview with SABC COO, Auckland Park (19 August 2011)

A former newsreader who was suspended with full pay offered an explanation for this phenomenon: Everyone wants to 'eat', and they are always ready to join the winning team or jump a sinking ship.⁵⁵⁴ This observation cannot be taken lightly. For example, Dali Mpofo's jumping ship to Zuma's group is difficult to explain. The newsreader's sentiments find support in the form of a former intern, who said:

...the problems at the SABC go back to the social struggles for primitive accumulation: Everyone wants to dominate everyone. These guys at the SABC organise themselves in factions in order to win or conserve power at the various echelons of the organisation of the SABC pyramid, and, of course, the recurrence of factionalism can only be explained by its depravedness in South African history.⁵⁵⁵

Other producers/journalists echoed this intern's sentiments. For example, a former producer said: 'The ANC just a huge, clumsy elephant that can be blamed for anything that is amiss, and I think it is a simple view. I can join the ANC today and use its name for my own selfish intentions'.⁵⁵⁶

Another newsreader's point seemed to support this statement. This newsreader said:

...in all departments, you will be shocked by budget discrepancies, the level of nepotism and the outrageous rewarding of loyalists, which comes in many forms that include money, promotions or giving loyalists the right to award tenders to their kith and kin without any form of accountability. We have seen people getting pulled off air with minutes to go or programmes being pulled off.⁵⁵⁷

These observations have proved relevant, since there is evidence (through reports) of people at the SABC who are under investigation for fraud or other

⁵⁵⁴ Interview with former SABC news reader, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 6 July 2011)

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with SABC former intern, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 11 August 2011)

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with SABC journalist/producer, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 8 July 2011)

⁵⁵⁷ Interview with SABC news reader, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 21 July 2011)

activities concerning the embezzlement of funds. One example is the South African Special Investigating Unit's (SIU's) finding of a misuse of funds amounting to 1.4 billion rands.⁵⁵⁸ Middle management and unions at the SABC apportion the blame to SABC senior management, while the lower-level personnel blame greed. According to most interview respondents, factionalism at the SABC is a scheming process involving adjustment between individuals' interactions with the formal rules (which, by and large, remain formal and are not adhered to) and their desire to 'eat' and engage in self-preservation. In the end, professionals find themselves in a situation in which they must practise deceit in order to keep their jobs or benefit financially. However, this is an uneasy arrangement, since it negatively affects professionalism. Since the SABC is viewed as being unprofessional by other organisations, working there limits job opportunities with other companies, particularly commercial broadcasters.⁵⁵⁹ As the tensions persisted and festered, the SABC's operating environment became challenging for new employees. In particular, new employees found themselves in a conundrum: They needed to follow formal rules, but the SABC's organisational culture necessitated factionalism. To survive, new employees were forced to choose and join factions, a practice that came with the risk of assuming the chosen faction's characteristics and may have included fraudulently gaining from the SABC.⁵⁶⁰ Therefore, it appears, the formal rules at the SABC serve as guides; however, meanings are created in the everyday experiences of SABC staff, which are defined by factions. Surviving independently becomes difficult for the average employee, whether they

⁵⁵⁸ Chantelle Benjamin, 'SABC Probe Finds 1.4 Billion Misuse of Funds, Fraud' *Business Day* (Johannesburg October 2010). According to various reports, the fraud went undetected for over five years. Evidence of the fraud was pointed out by the suspended newsreader.

⁵⁵⁹ Interview with former SABC COO, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 18 September 2011)

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid

exist in the upper tiers of the board and executive management or in the lower tiers of middle management and producers/journalists. ICASA, the regulatory authority, was established as an external lever of accountability; however, even in clear cases of fraud or interference, regulators have ruled in favour of the SABC. For example, regulators overlooked censorship at the SABC, only for the High Court to later rule against the PSB.⁵⁶¹ ICASA has largely been viewed as toothless; moreover, it has been expressed that one of ICASA's impediments is underfunding, which affects its ability to litigate and even to retain its experienced staff.⁵⁶²

At times, the respondents appeared to understate or even eliminate the role played by the ANC in shaping the newsroom or organisational culture and the professional conception of independence. They, at times, rejected political influence and reduced these factions to means for surviving the complex SABC organisational culture, affirming the view that 'everyone wants to eat'. Pockets of academic literature appear to support their perspective.⁵⁶³ For example, Bayart argued that the recurrence of factionalism can be explained only by the objects of internal struggles, which include, not just the distribution of status and power, but also the distribution of wealth and the distribution of possibilities of realising primitive accumulation.⁵⁶⁴ While, on the surface, Bayart appears to support the respondents' viewpoint concerning accumulation, on the other hand, he creates links between the two secretary generals' positions. By saying 'resemble the distribution of wealth and possibilities', he incorporates the political factor, since the appointments and tenders at the SABC are linked to political parties. It is clear

⁵⁶¹ Refer to the extensive discussion in Chapter 5.

⁵⁶² N Dawes, 'ICASA Staff Dash for the Door' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 2-8 December 2005); L Geyde, 'ICASA's Mass Exodus' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 2-8 June 2006).

⁵⁶³ Jean Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa, the Politics of the Belly* (Polity Press, Cambridge 2009) 233

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid

that factions exist and influence the SABC newsroom, despite debate regarding their causes. The other respondents' views could be influenced by their resentment over a lack of access to resources, given that one respondent had been demoted and the other was on suspension at various points during the era. Given that factionalism is linked to sanction and reward, it is clear why the practice is central to the staff's imagining of independence since, through it, professionalism, survival and length of tenure at the SABC can all be determined.

There are two principal challenges to factionalism, which can be induced by either politics or greed. In the first challenge, which was raised in the preceding paragraph, journalistic freedom is curtailed, and conformity abounds. This unfolds in two ways. When it is politically induced, programming or news content can be framed to favour a dominating group. This practice is not only limited to news and programming; it can also extend to appointments and promotions. This may happen when dominating groups seek to consolidate their power by strategically positioning fellow faction members. The second way in which journalistic freedom can be curtailed is through unnecessary competition. Competition in an organisation or in the newsroom limits vigorous discussions amongst journalists, producers, editors and editors due to the participants' fear of giving away vital, confidential or faction-oriented information.⁵⁶⁵ This results in unnecessary conformity to informal rules established by the powerful faction and, in the long run, blunts journalistic skills, since journalists end up believing that maintaining the status quo is their mandated role. For example, in 2009, an independent commission headed by Zwelakhe Sisulu, a former SABC CEO, and Gilbert Marcus

⁵⁶⁵ KG Corley and D Gioia, *Identity Ambiguity and Change in the Wake of a Corporate Spin-Off* (2004) 49 *Administrative Science Quarterly* 173, 208

confirmed the existence of an arbitrary blacklist of outside commentators who should not be consulted.⁵⁶⁶ The report also backed up the interview respondents' assertions that there was a climate of fear within the broadcaster's newsrooms that necessitated arbitrary decision-making.⁵⁶⁷

The second principal challenge is that the forces of factionalism, fraud and nepotism may subject the SABC, including editorial, to powerful external forces. For example, there is the case of Robert Gumede, who allegedly paid a senior person in editorial to cover his divorce story in a favourable light.⁵⁶⁸ This is a concrete example of the SABC being susceptible to powerful individuals, who end up controlling editorial direction. The main idea of 'eating' means that anyone can pay to control the SABC. The phenomenon of 'eating', translated from *ukudla* (a Zulu word for eating) has been widely accepted in the broader South African society since the ascent of GEAR, whose austerity measures led people to seek alternative ways of making money either within the organisations in which they worked in or outside, through informal work. Finally, when ideas of 'eating' manifest themselves through nepotism, fraud, intimidation and favours, the result is an incapacitated lower tier, which, in retaliation, formulates strategies that include disengagement as methods of self-preservation. One serving news compiler was concise in his explanation, admitting that he had been dishonest to himself and his superiors by saying:

I know when to play stupid and keep my mouth shut. That way, I have survived and stayed longer than many. I have been here for thirteen years, and I am still going strong. Where are the clever ones? Gone.

⁵⁶⁶ Staff reporter, 'SABC "Bias" Report Handed to Mpofu' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 2 October 2006) <<http://mg.co.za/article/2006-10-05-call-for-sabc-bias-report-to-be-made-public>>

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid

⁵⁶⁸ Interview with SABC journalist/producer (Polokwane 12 August 2011)

This news compiler, who fell into the lower tier of journalists/producers, revealed the critical distance between accommodation and submission. He was not necessarily submitting; instead, he was deliberately passive, so as to remain accommodative for the sake of self-preservation. This approach intertwines the professional conception of SABC 'independence' with the conception of the anti-establishment. On the one hand, the respondent felt that his autonomy was limited by the political system within the newsroom, which he had to accommodate, while, on the other hand, the respondent was deceitful. Through this disingenuity, the respondent is active in disengaging himself from these political activities. This approach works around the system by creating a distance and, in the process, maintaining some degree of professionalism. This subversion of the system has not been particularly successful, since other factors, such as factionalism, have made it impossible for staff to resist both external and internal interference with one voice. In addition, through its reward and sanction approach, factionalism ensures that people belonging to certain factions cannot attend workshops or trips, thus causing further divisions and suspicions within editorial. It is, therefore, apparent that the ANC's interference in the form of appointments and control over SABC operating procedures played a big role in shaping political and professional conceptions of independence. GEAR and the DSM became the channels through which these ANC power struggles manifested themselves.

How do GEAR and the DSM contribute to the professional conception of SABC 'independence' through the submission and accommodation of SABC editorial staff?

Interview respondents across the four tiers of staff within the SABC observed that the determination of the ANC government to exercise greater

direction over broadcasting reform for both political and economic reasons became clearer with GEAR and the DSM.⁵⁶⁹ In particular, GEAR and the DSM sought the consolidation of bureaucracy and top-down practices.⁵⁷⁰ The SABC reform was therefore characterised by such tensions. These Zuma and Mbeki power struggles and their relationships with the SABC become even more visible during these two eras, and these issues succinctly manifested themselves in editorial. The principles behind GEAR and DSM, as discussed in Chapter 3, targeted the SABC as one of the most important state enterprises. As a result, the ANC deployed cadres in strategic places; take, for example, Snuki Zikalala, who was promoted from junior office to the position of editor in chief, overseeing the 1999 elections (in which the ANC received its first two-thirds majority). As outlined in the previous chapter, the employment of cadres completely changed the SABC's operating environment by creating a trend of censorship unheard of during the Mandela era.⁵⁷¹ Kate Skinner, the head of a non-governmental organisation(NGO), Save Our SABC (SOS), observed that the SABC does not have a culture that encourages openness, deliberation, difference or creativeness; instead, everyone lives in fear of upsetting the boss or the unknown of what would happen if they were to freely air their views.⁵⁷² I suggest that this form of self-censorship can be traced back to overt censorship, through which certain political analysts with anti-Mbeki views, such as Eleanor Sisulu, were barred from the SABC. A former head of news painted a clearer picture of how internal ANC power struggles began to influence and play out in editorial:

⁵⁶⁹ A total of 32 of the 36 interview respondents appeared to agree with this statement.

⁵⁷⁰ See Chapter 3.

⁵⁷¹ A total of 23 of the interview respondents held this perspective.

⁵⁷² Kate Skinner is the head of the SOS NGO. SOS is a coalition representing trade unions, media NGOs, independent producers, academics and freedom of expression activists that was formed in 2008 in response to the crisis facing the SABC. Her observations are supported 8 other respondents.

I am not sure of the answers to these questions, but I think you have to look at the politics of what has happened inside the ruling party at any given moment to understand the ups and downs of the SABC. In 2004, an almost entirely new board was appointed, with Eddie Funde as chair and Christine Qunta as deputy. This board was clearly tasked with sweeping out most of the existing management and making the SABC much more pliable to short-term political exigencies. Matlare was pushed out, as were several excellent TV, radio and ad sales managers. Snuki Zikalala was appointed head of news.⁵⁷³

The head of news links this phenomenon, not to the Zuma and Mbeki debacle or to GEAR, but to the DSM. The connection becomes evident when the appointees begin to assert their authority and express anti-Zuma statements. Three significant occurrences take place during this period. First, there is a blacklisting of commentators in 2006. According to one respondent, a policy and regulatory affairs manager, independent political analysts, such as William Gumede and Eleanor Sisulu, were banned from the SABC by Snuki Zikalala, who was largely viewed as a Mbeki man.⁵⁷⁴ Zikalala denied these allegations; however, the public prosecutor's report found them to be true.⁵⁷⁵ The censorship allegations were also confirmed by a former journalist, who said:

...corruption starts from the top. As you can see, Snuki Zikalala was wielding power, and everyone else was supposed to make him happy. Snuki Zikalala is imposing even physically, he is a huge guy, and that sums the whole thing up.⁵⁷⁶

Second, the practice of removing programmes before they are aired became prevalent. This was confirmed by the removal of number of programmes. For

⁵⁷³ This Head of News has worked at the SABC in various capacities, ranging from the head of news to a member of the board. Eddie Funde (a qualified electrical engineer with an Msc from the University of Petersburg, Russia) is a former SABC board chairman who was appointed in 2004. He went on to become South Africa's Ambassador to Germany. Dr Snuki Zikalala was appointed managing director of current affairs and news and had control over all programming at the SABC. Zikalala earned an MA and a Phd in Journalism in Sofia, Bulgaria. Christine Qunta, an attorney who specialised in corporate law, was Eddie Funde's deputy.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid (n55)

⁵⁷⁵ SABC Public Prosecutor's Blacklisting Report (2007) Available: <http://mg.co.za/article/2006-10-13-inside-the-sabc-blacklist-report>

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with SABC producer/journalist, SABC Auckland Park (Johannesburg 12 July 2011)

example, the Sowetan newspaper published a story in which the country's deputy president, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, was booed at a National Women Day's rally. The SABC decided not to air the clip and claimed that its cameraperson was not there. However, this claim was soon disproven when it was revealed that the SABC cameraman had been captured live at the rally by an e-TV camera operator.⁵⁷⁷ There were many incidents of pulling programmes off air during this era; another example was a controversial documentary on Thabo Mbeki that was removed with minutes to go, and yet another was the SABC's refusal to air a provincial premier, Sbu Ndebele, being booed and pelted at a rally.⁵⁷⁸ An interview on Jacob Zuma's rape trial was also cancelled, since Zuma, at that point, was still an ally of Thabo Mbeki. The meddling of senior staff, such as Zikalala, created tensions between management and journalists. Journalists, in the end, constructed a view in which 'independence' was seen as the need to ward off management intervention in their work. When warding off management failed, the practice of disengagement appeared to take place: The lower tiers decided not to take part in any organisational training as a form of protest against management.⁵⁷⁹ Here, the professional conception of 'independence' appeared to be an extension of the anti-establishment conception. The anti-establishment conception involves staff throwing off an identity that they view as a residue of a system of oppression through a subtle form of radicalism, in which they disengage from authority through acts of insubordination or through disengagement from SABC activities. All too often, when the staff's professionalism is challenged, a professional conception

⁵⁷⁷ See F Haffajee, 'Inside the SABC Blacklist' *Mail and Guardian* (Johannesburg 13 October 2006)

⁵⁷⁸ See South Africa Press Agency, 'Why Was Mbeki Documentary Withdrawn?' *Mail and Guardian* <http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=272867&area=/breaking_news/breaking_news_national> accessed September 2010.

⁵⁷⁹ Interview with SABC journalist/producer, Wits University (Johannesburg 27 July 2011)

of 'independence' develops; further, when additional conflicts emerge and there is a failure to reconcile the politicised demands of authority with the desire to be professional, the anti-establishment conception of SABC 'independence' begins to exist side-by-side with the professional conception. Furthermore, increases to the power of the board directly the SABC staff's professionalism. According to a former intern:

...in Mbeki's time, we see the board getting involved more and more in the daily running of the SABC. Such a climate is not good because, due to their manipulative presence, the SABC is beset with a culture of apprehension. Despite the good documents and policies, the culture is one of stooges waiting to be told what to do.⁵⁸⁰

Twenty-four of the thirty-six respondents mainly, middle management and producer/journalists referred to the phenomenon of self-censorship in their interviews. For example, staff would make decisions to keep away from any form of censorship, whether real or perceived, on the part of senior management and, particularly, on the part of Snuki Zikalala. It is interesting to note, but also a matter of serious concern, that most of the respondents only gave responses to my interview questions under conditions of anonymity.⁵⁸¹

Fear, therefore, became the defining issue of the SABC's organisational culture during the Mbeki and Zuma periods. Fear and self-censorship were interlinked, and there was almost a uniform agreement across all the levels regarding censorship and self-censorship, especially between 2004 and 2011. This era coincided with Thabo Mbeki's troubled era, during which he was finally recalled by the ANC. The rise of censorship and self-censorship began to create an

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with journalist/producer, Auckland Park (Johannesburg 8 July 2011)

⁵⁸¹ In total, 29 of the 36 respondents would only participate in the interviews on the condition of anonymity.

unfriendly environment, which was characterised by suspicion and a 'watch-your-back' culture that severely limited professionalism. As a result, the whims of politicians gave direction to the working of the SABC. Autonomy is a prerequisite of professionalism, but this did not sit well with senior management, which sought to control the SABC in general and editorial in particular in order to align them with the ANC's dictatorial developmental state model principles. To accomplish this, the autonomy of producers and journalists had to be limited. The resulting differences in perspective created serious tensions, not only between senior managers and journalists/producers, but also among producers, who sought to align themselves with factions for the purposes of self-preservation. These alignments ferment factionalism and facilitate corruption, as the staff begins to shed professionalism in pursuit of the financial rewards that come with loyalty to particular groups and tendencies of entrenched accommodation and submission. As a result, editorial staff feign submission and accept the roles created for them (since, after all, they are left with no other choices, since the risks of ostracization are high if they do not toe the senior managerial line).

However, not all senior editors were accommodative and submissive. Others were confrontational, and the result was suspension and retrenchment. One example was the rise of the revolving door situation described by the former newsreader in the previous chapter. A head of a news team would be fired and would leave the SABC with his or her whole team. When power shifted to another group, the individual would be rehired again and would bring the entire team back to the newsroom, thus creating addition tension, fragmentation and conflict. It, therefore, remains that the editorial staff has accommodated and submitted to the

whims of ANC politics, but has not totally accepted submission as a permanent condition. The ANC's political instrumentalisation of the SABC has resulted in a fine line between accommodation and submission. The anti-commercialisation camp has also argued that the SABC has been instrumentalised for commercial purposes and that the result has been programming content favouring affluent audiences. In the next section, I argue that there has been no significant change to programming content as a result of commercialisation; instead, there has been a rise in local productions and viewership.

The prevailing climate of fear, censorship and self-censorship has shaped three key conceptions of independence: the professional, political and anti-establishment conceptions. First, the role of staff members as the trustees of the public interest has been diminished. The intimidating working environment has robbed them of a sense of broader responsibility for their own work. Consequently, the climate does not allow staff to perform their specific duties according to professional conduct, which values autonomy, impartiality, objectivity, truth and balance, amongst others. As a result, staff members have developed professional conceptions of independence. These conceptions flow into the political conception of independence. According to the interview respondents, the intimidating environment was induced by the power struggles of the ANC; therefore, it is political and influences a political conception of the SABC. As argued before, these conceptions of 'independence' are interlinked. As a result, the executive lawlessness that overstretches into editorial also shapes an anti-establishment conception of independence. The staff have begun to follow an anti-authoritative mindset, in which submission does not necessarily mean docility; instead,

submission becomes a tool to withdraw from all SABC activities a form of resistance to the establishment.

3 The impact of commercialisation on programming content

The anti-commercialisation camp argues that, in as much as commercialisation has changed the identity of the SABC, it has also compromised programming content to favour affluent classes by airing imported English-language programmes that appeal to affluent audiences at the expense of local content. According to respondents, a commercially leaning broadcaster is bound to focus on entertainment, sensationalism and cost-saving, homogenous programming content instead of local content and educational programmes that reflect South Africa in its diversity.⁵⁸² The camp's anti-commercialisation stance has largely shaped the anti-establishment conception of 'independence' and, to a limited extent, the legal conception of independence, since the Broadcasting Act 1999 states that PSB programming content should be free from political and commercial interference.⁵⁸³ The anti-commercialisation camp's views cannot be dismissed lightly for three reasons.

First, their position harks back to the SABC's key mandate, which was generally shared across many African PSB entities. Like many other African PSBs modelled upon the BBC, the SABC was given a key role in national identity, building and integration.⁵⁸⁴ This role translates into the second reason, which focuses on programming content. According to the SABC charter, it is the SABC's responsibility to broadcast in all eleven of South Africa's official languages, to promote local content in the form of locally produced programmes and to cater to minorities and

⁵⁸² See Chapter 4.

⁵⁸³ See Broadcasting Act 1999 c 1

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid

educational programmes.⁵⁸⁵ Third, the anti-commercialisation camp's argument that a commercialised SABC cannot fulfil the above conditions is widely supported in the literature. McChesney supports the argument by stating that the PSB now faces a marriage of content and commercialism to such an extent that the two are becoming indistinguishable.⁵⁸⁶ Dahlgren buttresses the point by arguing that, under commercialisation, the audience becomes the product delivered to the advertisers; in fact, in extreme cases, programming is basically the filler between advertisements not the other way round.⁵⁸⁷ The key argument is that the SABC's quest for profit intrinsically distances the PSB from fulfilling its role of reaching out to the South African public at large, and, instead, serves the particular interests of advertisers through commoditization, which involves selling goods (in this instance, both programmes and audiences) in exchange for profit. However, while these outcomes may have proven true with other international PSBs, they are not necessarily the case with the SABC editorial. This is the argument supported by the pro-commercialisation camp.

The pro-commercialisation camp argues that commercialisation decreases the SABC's vulnerability to political and state interests. Commercialisation's proponents believe that commercialisation thwarts political pressures and is the process shielding the SABC from governmental control. In addition, they argue, due to the pressure to maximise profit, the PSB better serves audiences by giving people what they want.⁵⁸⁸ This argument conflicts with that of the anti-

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid (n69)

⁵⁸⁶ RW McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: US Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (Monthly Review Press, New York 2004) 153

⁵⁸⁷ Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere; Citizenship, Democracy, Democracy and the Media* (Sage London 1995) 29

⁵⁸⁸ See Chapter 3.

commercialisation camp, which posits that, without pressure to generate advertising and revenue, the PSB would be, in principle, free to pursue programme policies based on considerations like how to best serve the public interest. On one hand, unlike the anti-commercialisation camp, the pro-commercialisation camp appears to be supported by empirical evidence concerning the production of programming content that is locally produced and appeals to diverse audiences. On the other hand, commercialisation does not insulate the SABC from governmental control, as there is much evidence of ANC interference in editorial (as argued in the second section of this chapter). This interesting situation could be caused by the fact that broadcasting reform, which brought about the commercialisation of the SABC, was enacted through a centralised decision-making process that placed the ANC led government at the centre of the procedure. According to the anti-commercialisation camp, commercialisation, coupled with the attenuation of popular participation, negatively impacted editorial and, consequently, shaped SABC conceptions of independence. In the next section, I examine how editorial and programming content were shaped by the commercialisation of the SABC in relation to data from both the pro- and the anti-commercialisation camps.

4 The influence of commercialisation on programming content

According to the anti-commercialisation camp, in the period from 1998 to 2002, there was a huge deviation in SABC programming content: Specifically, the PSB shifted from a traditional approach, which prioritised local content, to a commercial approach that prioritised cheap foreign imports.⁵⁸⁹ A number of groups throughout civil society have made this point, citing the following major concerns in their position papers: inadequate development of local programming content,

⁵⁸⁹ In total, 23 of the 36 interview respondents across all tiers supported this view.

failure to reflect the African diversity unique to South Africa (especially in relation to music and languages), biased political and economic coverage and a practice of serving the advertisers instead of the public.⁵⁹⁰ What is, however, concerning is that a review of complaints against the SABC by the Broadcasting Complaints Commission South Africa (BCCSA) dismissed the idea that the complaints opposed a pro-ANC bias or the serving of advertisers.⁵⁹¹ Thus, the inadequacy of local programming content has not found any support from the BCCSA or other agencies. The media channels working to monitor agency in Africa have, however, maintained in their reports that the commercial station SABC, unlike other channels, fails to meet local content requirements.⁵⁹² Through a number of provisions, the Broadcasting Act 1999 ensured that there were sufficient South African programmes on the SABC.⁵⁹³ In its preamble, it stated that programmes must reflect the multilingual and diverse nature of South Africa by promoting the entire spectrum of cultural backgrounds and official languages in the Republic. In addition, the act encouraged the development of South African opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity through the display of South African (rather than foreign) talent in radio and television programming.⁵⁹⁴ The legislation is further broken down into specifics concerning television programming as illustrated in Section 3 of Chapter 3 of the thesis.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹⁰ FXI (n132) 12

⁵⁹¹ See BCCSA chairperson's report (Johannesburg 2006/07)

⁵⁹² LT Dibetso and T Smith, *Lack of Diversity: Analysis of SABC News and Programming* (Media Monitoring Africa, Johannesburg 2012)

⁵⁹³ Broadcasting Act 1999

⁵⁹⁴ Broadcasting Act 1999 c 1

⁵⁹⁵ According to ICASA 2008, Individual Broadcasting Service Licence No 001/PBS/TV/SEPT/08, and the SABC 2004 (Editorial Policies, News, Current Affairs and Information Programming Policy, c 4) <www.sabc.co.za/wpm/wcs/connect/Editorialpolicies_ref.pdf>. The SABC should: 1) have 16 hours and 24 minutes of official languages other than English, but exclude marginalised languages (13 in primetime, which is between 18h00 and 22h00 daily); 2) One hour and 48 minutes of marginalised

The assertions by the anti-commercialisation camp can be supported for two main reasons. First, the McKinsey report encouraged the dropping of local content, including local languages, in favour of English, which had become the language of advertisers in the early 1990s (in Leynand Wynand's time).⁵⁹⁶ The report also encouraged the importation of cheap American sitcoms, amongst other foreign programmes, which competed with expensive local productions. As a result, local content was dropped, and the use of English was increased to attract a more affluent audience and maximize advertising revenue, thus contradicting SABC's public service mandate.⁵⁹⁷ During this period, many religious and traditional programs were dropped.⁵⁹⁸ A number of complaints were brought forward: For instance, the excerpt below was taken from a speech following the dropping of Ezodumo, a popular traditional programme:

[We] would like to call upon the Minister of Communications, Dr. Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburi, to intervene and stop those suffering from the effects of colonialism and Eurocentrism from destroying our African heritage. If they feel that we need to look like Europeans and speak like Americans, they are free to leave our beautiful country and emigrate to where they want. Moreover, this is a clear subordination of the direct call made by His Excellency, Deputy State President Jacob Zuma for the moral regeneration of our society. We will also raise this issue with the deputy president. TV sex and violence has been blamed for this moral decay, and the SABC wants to continue showing us this and corrupt the innocent young minds of our

languages in primetime; and 3) Forty-one hours of official languages other than English during the South African television Performance Period, which are the hours between 05h00 and 23h00 daily. In terms of genre, the ICASA licence requires: 1) Seven hours of news a week, of which three hours and 30 minutes must be in primetime (news bulletins should be 30 minutes long); 2) Seven hours of current affairs programming a week, two of which should be in primetime; 3) Sixteen hours of informal knowledge building a week, two of which must be in primetime; 4) Five hours of documentaries a week, two of which should be in primetime; 5) Twenty-four hours of drama a week, eight of which should be in primetime and four of which must be South African content; 6. Twenty hours of children's programming a week; and 7. Ten hours of educational programming a week. What is clear is that the SABC has been meeting these requirements in its PBS channels, except for SABC 3 (which is, understandably a commercial channel).

⁵⁹⁶ Leynand Wynand was the last apartheid era SABC CEO. See Chapter 5 on for further details on why the McKinsey report was commissioned

⁵⁹⁷ Fourie (n110) 23.

⁵⁹⁸ Interview with Head of Editorial, Wits University (23 July 2011)

children. They want to deny them their right to their heritage and infest them with European-American influence. Finally, we believe that our government will act swiftly before it spills out to court, if it means to protect what is ours from perishing in the hands of those suffering from mental slavery, we will do without any hesitation.⁵⁹⁹

Ezodumo had a significant audience rating (AR), but was axed nevertheless.

The cited problem was that it could not attract advertisers and, in addition, that local programming for the broadcaster was expensive. The average cost of imported programming in the region was US\$5,000 an hour, whereas an equivalent local programme cost US\$50,000 an hour. The top one-hour slot on SABC1 in prime-time attracted an AR of 16, which, per rate card, should sell advertising worth US\$90,000.⁶⁰⁰ Given the US\$50,000 in production, marketing costs, a 16.5% commission to the advertising agency and the station overheads (which varied between US\$1,500 and US\$7,000 an hour across broadcasters), the effort to which the broadcasters would go to satisfy the expensive demands of local audiences is commendable. However, the above developments should not be interpreted out of context. It should be noted that this was just at the end of the RDP and represented the beginning of the commercialisation process and the adoption of GEAR. What appears to have changed is that commercialisation increased profitability within the SABC and, in turn, the PSB could afford expensive local content. The anti-commercialisation camp appears to have generalized these developments across the entire commercialisation period, when, in reality, they occurred only at the teething stage. By 1999, a different picture, reflecting additional local content, began to emerge. Below is a table showing the most popular shows on the SABC and other channels in 1999. The table shows that the local programmes existed in

⁵⁹⁹ Duncan (n10) 163.

⁶⁰⁰ Such a rate card and audience means that the programme has a significant audience and attracts advertisers. Consequently, there is no need for it to be dropped. The view of the interview respondent was that Ezodumo does not attract English viewers with buying power.

abundance and were widely followed. Their ARs were high, and advertisers were competing for their slots. For example, a 30 second advertisement slot for the locally produced soap *Generations* cost up to 200,000 South African rands. This dispels the idea that advertisers pursue rich audiences only. Furthermore, during commercialisation, the SABC began to become self-sufficient. The PSB was finally able to afford to fund or pay for locally produced programmes. A former head of news pointed out that Peter Matlare's tenure represented the peak of locally produced programmes. This argument is supported by SABC annual reports from 1999 to 2005. Locally produced programmes, such as *Hotlines*, topped the AR for a number of years through their different series. *Hotlines* was an educational drama produced in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, and it dealt with issues ranging from violence to human rights in South African society. In additional examples, *Soul Buddyz*, which focused on 8 to 12-year olds during the integration period in South Africa; investigative documentaries, such as special assignments; and many other local programmes, including local football, had high ARs. Below is a table that represents some of the audience ratings of locally produced SABC programmes.

Table 9: Top Programmes on Various Channels

Channel	Programme	Genre	AR (%)
SABC1	Generations	Soap(local multilingual soap)	16.73
	Music	Music	14.39
	Unyana Womntu	Drama(local Xhosa drama)	13.98
SABC2	Ha a Mele Ditshiba	Drama(Sotho drama)	14.32
	Kelebone	Drama(Tswana drama)	12.58
	Lottery Game Show	Quiz(locally produced game show)	12.55
SABC3	Top Sport Cricket	Sport(local and international)	9.77
	News	News	8.19
	Gladiators	Variety(local)	7.6

		game show)	
M-Net	Who Wants to Be a Millionaire	Quiz	5.48
	Carte Blanch	Magazine	4.55
	Egoli	Soap	4.49
e.tv	Jumanji	Movie	6.38
	WCW Thunder	Sport	4.82
	First Knight	Movie	4.79

NB: This table was compiled using data from programming schedules, SABC annual reports and Media Monitoring Africa resources.

According to the anti-commercialisation camp, while the SABC preamble of the editorial values of the PSB encouraged local content, its funding model promoted commoditization through a reliance on advertising. The anti-commercialists' argument was that commercialisation led to the commoditization of audiences. As a result, instead of promoting the mandated nation building and integration, there was segmentation of audiences, which also translated into the programming structure of the SABC; however, the empirical evidence proves that this happened only to a limited degree.

However, as argued in Chapter 3, it is also important to note that the SABC is embedded in a specific economic culture promoted by the state and by the particular government in power. The assumption here is that GEAR, through its pursuit of financial discipline and profitability for public sector organisations, made it impossible for the SABC to resist the widespread commodification of the PSB, which translated into programming content. An indicative point concerning the SABC is that, since the last years of apartheid, it has relied on advertisers for a significant portion of its funding. For example, annual reports reveal that, from 1994 to 2012, revenue from advertising has always constituted more than 70% of the PSB's funding, with government support never passing the 10% mark. The anti-commercialization camp attributes commoditisation to the fact that the main source of funding is advertisers, given a lack of government aid. This argument does not hold because, even during the RDP, before commercialisation, advertisers remained the key sources of funding for the SABC. If anything, the opposite appears to have occurred. That is, while local programming receives more airtime, news and current affairs appear to have faced interference from the ANC government during the commercialisation period. For example, at the peak of the commercialization period, ANC power struggles began to manifest themselves within the SABC. Particularly, as pointed out in previous sections, documentaries were pulled off-air and political commentators were banned, amongst other forms of interference in news and current affairs. Thus, it becomes clear that commercialization had less of an impact on editorial than ANC power struggles did. The advertisers, therefore, did not determine content or oppose locally produced programmes, as assumed. Consequently, financial stability was realised, a situation that benefitted editorial in terms of fulfilling local content quotas. Below is a 2002

report on SABC programming content. The table shows how the SABC more than fulfilled its mandate, though the anti-commercialisation camp argues that a closer analysis reveals that these programmes did not air in prime time. However, the percentages (which range between 97 and 100) are significantly high and show an effort on the part of the SABC to adhere to content regulations. For example, six categories had 100% local content. In addition, during this period, an SOS conducted an annual research study evaluating the SABC on mandate delivery.⁶⁰¹ The SABC scored an annual average of three out of a possible five in four key categories: namely, meeting the public service news mandate (universality), meeting the public service news mandate (diversity), meeting the public service news mandate (distinctiveness) and meeting the public service news mandate (independence).⁶⁰²

SABC 2002 Report:

Formal School Services Broadcasts:

- 87% local content and 13% foreign co-productions
- Two days of English broadcasts
- Three days of other languages: Sesotho, Setswana, Afrikaans, IsiZulu, SiSwati, Xitsonga, Sepedi, IsiXhosa

Secondary Schools Project: (Presentation to the National Portfolio in 2003)

⁶⁰¹ Kate Skinner, *Meeting Their Mandates, A Critical Analysis of South African Media Statutory Bodies* (Open Society Foundation Johannesburg 2007) 138

⁶⁰² In this instance, 'independence' (according to SOS) refers to the ability of information to flow freely without restrictions and the fact that the SABC should be free from political and commercial interference. SOS emphasises that, to ensure 'independence', staff should be able to exercise editorial 'independence' across their news and current affairs programming. Ibid (n 91).

- 100% local content with interviews in language of choice

Youth Development Series:

- TAKE 5 - 100% local content, with some interviews in language of choice

Human Resource Development:

- Enterprise Zone - 100% local content
- Education Express - 100% local content interviews in language of choice

Public Education:

- Soul Buddyz - 100% local content and multilingual (majority English, with isiZulu and Sesotho); Thetha Msawawa - 100% local content and multilingual (majority English, with IsiXhosa and Afrikaans); Tsha Tsha, Gaz'lam and Yizo Yizo III, predominantly in IsiXhosa and IsiZulu

It can be argued, therefore, that, in a sense, commercialisation affected editorial in both positive and negative ways. It was positive in that fiscal austerity enabled the PSB to save money and, thus, air local content in the process, supporting the pro-commercialisation group's perspective that commercialisation delivers what audiences want. However, it was negative in that the process of commercialisation was centralised and driven by an ANC government that attenuated the extended popular participation in PSB decision-making, thus making it easy for the ANC to access editorial news and current affairs and, thereby, giving editorial direction to editorial. These positives and negatives shaped the three conceptions of SABC independence. First, the anti-establishment conception of 'independence' was largely shared by both the pro- and anti-

commercialisation camps. The anti-commercialisation camp held the perspective that commercialisation countervailed the SABC and the camp's role by realigning broadcasting to commercial interests. This led, not only to the resentment of the largely pro-commercialisation management, but also to accommodation and submission as a form of detachment. Second, the pro-commercialisation camp's anti-establishment conception was intertwined with both political and professional conceptions. The camp held the perspective that the ANC was controlling the newsroom and, as a result, it exhibited the same tendencies as the anti-commercialisation camp, in which accommodation and submission were a form of resisting the ANC. According to this camp, the ANC's intervention curtailed professional values and, in the process, shaped both a political and a professional conception of 'independence'. The two groups' reactions reveal the point that was raised in the opening section of this chapter. The respondents appeared not to be free from the matrices of power in their understandings of independence. As a result, a discussion of SABC 'independence' concerns the asymmetries of power, as shown by the CPEM approach. The respondents articulate their understandings from a particular 'locus of enunciation' that they believe to be divine and natural, and identity is at the centre of these interpretations. For example, on one hand, the anti-commercialisation group eschews commerce because it believes in the traditional values and roles of PSB, and on the other, the pro-commercialisation camp holds the perspective that only through commercialisation can the SABC deliver its mandate. What is obscured here is a tension between the state and commerce. The traditional values of the SABC allow the state to intervene in the running of the SABC, but commerce leaves the PSB to the market. As a result, the understandings of 'independence' derive from power struggles between the state

and commerce. This chapter, therefore, highlights that the ANC exhibited more power through its control of editorial.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the staff within the SABC considers its 'independence' to be influenced by two key developments. The commercialization of the SABC and the ANC power struggles. The chapter has argued that these two developments have adjusted the traditional role of the PSB (i.e., serving the public interest) by setting it against the ANC-driven national interest and, in the process, shaping the four 'independence' conceptions outlined in this thesis. The chapter has taken the position that commercialisation largely contributed to the fulfilment of local content quotas and, consequently, helped to maintain the SABC's legal PSB mandate. However, commercialisation could not insulate the SABC against the power of the ANC and its political power struggles. A situation in which the SABC served the interests of the ANC and its factions could not be prevented. According to all interview respondents, these factors contributed to significant shifts in the SABC's operating environment and, consequently, in the understandings of 'independence' held by staff across all SABC tiers. As a result, and due to editorial's autonomy, a professional, anti-establishment and political conception of the SABC became paramount one that defined professionalism as being delimited by the power of politics. However, editorial was defined, instead, by executive lawlessness, accommodation and submission.

Chapter 7: SABC 'independence' conceptions and dilemmas of universality: An analysis and implications for further research

1 Introduction: A rejection of universalism in SABC 'independence' understandings

This thesis set out to understand how staff within the SABC construct and understand the meaning of the SABC's 'independence', as well as what influenced these conceptions in post-apartheid South Africa. The empirical part of the study relied largely on interviews, to some extent, on public policy documents and the CPEM as its explanatory framework. The interpretivist method was used to inhabit the organisation with the intention of providing insights into the complex world of lived experience from the points of view of SABC staff. In addition, the SABC staff's interpretations of the larger horizons of the political economy in which the SABC exists guided the analysis, particularly with regard to the construction of the four conceptions of 'independence'.

These four conceptions of 'independence' are: 1) the anti-establishment conception, 2) the professional conception, 3) the political conception and 4) the legalistic conception. First, the anti-establishment conception sees staff throwing off an identity that they view as the residue of a system of oppression. Staff do this through a subtle form of radicalism, in which they disengage from authority through acts of insubordination or disengagement from SABC activities. Second, the professional conception of SABC 'independence' is inspired by how SABC staff perceive the degree to which colleagues have control over their own work which, in this case, relates specifically to the roles of the professionals working in the media as intermediaries between the citizens and the state. From the perspective of the professional conception of independence, SABC staff should not be under political, hierarchical or commercial control because this might jeopardise their

value and role. Third, and linked to the professional conception, is the political conception of SABC independence, which concerns the ways in which SABC staff members perceive themselves to conduct their work without any sort of interference (in the form of either threats or inducements) from politicians. Fourth, and final, is the legalistic conception, which draws heavily on 'independence' as defined in various broadcasting legislations. This conception considers politicians and commercial power to be the two key factors to focus on in order to define SABC's independence.

Apart from identifying these four different conceptions of 'independence' the thesis also presents several other important findings. Firstly, SABC 'independence' conceptions were influenced by two key developments: the commercialization of the SABC and ANC power struggles. Underlying these two key findings is an even more fundamental finding. That is, understandings of SABC 'independence' must grapple with pertinent issues of power, knowledge and identity. This implies a need to understand the hidden and complex connections among power, knowledge and identity. These independence understandings in short, also revolve around the highly contested articulations of the very emergent idea of South Africa that is interpellated by two key ideologies of Keynesian (nationalistic in perspective) and neo-liberal democracy. It follows, therefore, that SABC 'independence' must, indeed, be fully understood within the framework of the global system of power.⁶⁰³ Chapter 3 has shown that successive post-apartheid

⁶⁰³ The global system of power refers to the transcendence of national commitments by powerful forces particularly, global-level governance institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF that pursue agendas of some universal interest through the dictation of neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes to Global South nations in the name of development. These dictates come with conditionalities that ultimately create tensions between the governors and the governed in the Global South.

South African governments have deployed complex ideologies that have been predicated on a delicate balancing of neo-liberal and Keynesian ideas about democracy and economic development which, in turn, have shaped the politics of South Africa through macro-economic strategies like RDP, GEAR and the DSM. These strategies, then, shaped staff understandings of the role of the SABC and its independence including their interpretations of notions like objectivity and neutrality. For example, neutrality and objectivity are 'real values' with real meaning for the journalists and producers who ascribe to the professional conception of 'independence'. However, behind objectivity and neutrality, this thesis has argued, are hidden local and global power self-interests. It is these interests and the play of power that informs conceptions of SABC independence. I therefore argue that articulations by interview respondents are situated. The respondents speak from a specific location within a set of power relations at the institutional, national and global levels. Eurocentrism and its dominant position, which masquerades as a universal perspective, together with its definition of objective 'independence', founded on Schramm's four theories of the press, have therefore been questioned in this thesis.⁶⁰⁴

In particular, this thesis has argued that Eurocentric media theories have largely failed to connect with Global South media contexts. The logic that the Western media is the example of 'free media' that every other media system

⁶⁰⁴The four theories of the press constructed Africa and Asia as places in which media freedom was absent and authoritarian regimes maintained firm control over the media. This normative, hierarchical classification of predominantly national media systems contrasted libertarian media-state relations in the Global North with authoritarian media-state relations in the Global South.

WL Schramm, *Mass Media and National Development: the Role of Information in the Developing Countries* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA 1964); FS Siebert, T Peterson and WL Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do* (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL 1956)

should emulate diametrically presents Global South media as Western media's antithesis. The importance of meaning and context in explaining the role of the media (and of PSB in particular) cannot be understated; consequently, the thesis has also emphasised that a focus restricted to the micro-context of the SABC itself could be limiting, as it falls short of connecting the local to larger structures, power relations and global processes. It is, therefore, essential to draw attention to local forms of agency, and it is equally important to focus on how these are linked to larger structures. Thus, this thesis employed the CPEM approach, which focuses on how the making and taking of meaning is shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations. Connected to the SABC are a wider web of social relations and practises of wider global power matrices. It is these power relations that shape the definitions of objectivity or neutrality in relation to PSB 'independence'.

The thesis has, as its explanatory framework, used the Marxist-derived CPEM approach in explanations of 'independence' conceptions. The limits of this approach have also been discussed. For example, the CPEM approach places the economy at the centre of its explanations. While this is important, this also has limitations. When the economy is placed within a particular context such as that South Africa, this also shows the limits of using political economy literature to find answers generated by this context, such as questions relating to the significance of race for building explanations. It is important to remember that due to its apartheid historical past, South Africa has been built at the intersection of capitalist and white supremacist social structures.⁶⁰⁵ Consequently, race is an important

⁶⁰⁵ Frank Wilderson, 'Gramsci's Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society' in *Social Identities* (vol 9, no 2, Carfax Publishing, Berkley2003)

organising principle in South Africa, and discussions of literature focusing on decoloniality in Chapter 2 added further insights to understanding conceptions of SABC 'independence' from a subaltern position.

But this thesis is not a straight forward rejection of traditional ideas, such as the CPEM approach and Wilbur Schramm's four theories of the press, as a foundation to understanding media independence. Instead, the thesis highlights the importance of pluri-versality, since Eurocentric perspectives of the media wrongly claim universal applicability. This, of course, does not mean that Western ideas are irrelevant. They continue to present critical insights for social theory. But, in order to do so, they need to be decisively transformed from the form in which they appear in conventional economic thinking. The nature of this transformation could also mean a radical change, which would reject the economy as the base of social science explanation and, in its place, position identity as being central to explanations. In addition, such an alteration would give space to voices from the Global South, rather than solely the Eurocentric voices that claim universality. The thesis, therefore, recognises the hidden hand of universality that hides behind the facade key concepts such as objectivity and neutrality that inform conventional, western understandings of 'independence' of a public service broadcaster. The SABC staff's ideas of 'independence' are, therefore, mapped by their connections and interpretations of the global power matrix. The emphasis on the larger global power matrix does not, however, justify or ignore the internal constructions of SABC 'independence' conceptions at either the national or the organisational level. In fact this thesis has traced different understandings of 'independence' as

expressed by staff within the SABC at four different levels, that is the SABC board, senior management, middle management and producers.

This thesis has traced how commercialisation and ANC power struggles have shaped 'independence' conceptions within the SABC. In particular, the thesis has argued that these two developments resulted from the larger global political economy, in which Bretton Woods institutions influenced policy in South Africa. This is a key example of how the 'local' needs to be understood as a space in which global forces become recognizable and in which they are enmeshed in local human subjectivity and social agency. The Bretton Woods institutions had scope for influence, particularly because they encountered a weak South African state that found itself in conflict with its own institutions and citizens.

2 The impact of a weak state on SABC 'independence' conceptions

Evidence from the empirical Chapters 3, 4 and 5 reveals that the ANC (as well as market forces) continue to exert control over the SABC, in its attempt to consolidate power due to its weak state position shaped by its subordinate position in the global power matrix. The ANC's inability to provide for the majority of the poor due to Bretton Woods institutions' policies led to a weak state, as well as the politicization and commercialisation of the SABC. The situation allowed the state and the government to adopt a paternalistic relationship with the SABC something that also characterised the apartheid SABC. Pressures from commerce and (mainly) the ANC have shaped conceptions of 'independence' of the SABC. The flawed appointment procedures, the deployment of cadres and censorship have made it difficult to have a decentralised SABC, and the result has been a deliberate distortion of its public service role. The SABC found itself in a difficult position. It

had to guard, not only against state and government interference, but also against forces existing in the same socio-political environment, such as the Breton Woods policies. This was typical of the old adage of a man who tries to save himself from drowning by trying to pull himself out of the water with his own hair.

Arguably, regardless of the trajectory arguments the interview respondents followed, in discussions of SABC 'independence', professionalism and the role of the PSB appeared to be at the centre of the discussion. It appears that the SABC is required to play different roles at different times, under different administrations and with reference to different macro-economic strategies. Changes in political strategies have led to changes in interpretations of the role of the SABC, due to changing values and shifting power relationships. 'Independence' has been, therefore, imagined differently, but with undercurrents that distinctly serve political purposes. As a result, the four key conceptions of SABC 'independence' are both interpretations of and are shaped by these shifting power relationships and their manifestations. It must be highlighted, once again, that, in this study, SABC 'independence' does not have a fixed meaning. Each conception of 'independence' is seen as a composite of elements drawn from a range of available modes of subjectivity, determined by ideological positions and locations of respondents within the power matrix. While these conceptions maybe, at times, fluid, in the sense that they not entirely sealed off from each other, but can overlap, and, at other times, contradictory, they are constructed in varying ways in different contexts, particularly at different levels of the organization of the of SABC. 'Independence' is, therefore, not an immovable edifice; it is, instead, socially constructed, and its meaning is a site of political struggle, in which the pursuit of

finding the role of the PSB is complicated by the ever-shifting developmental goals of the South African state.

As argued in the second chapter, conceptions of the SABC's 'independence' SABC 'are specific not just due to South Africa's cultural, and historical uniqueness (in comparison to the rest of the world's PSBs), but also due to the nature of the organisation itself. The SABC has found itself under pressures that are both global and local and, as a result, it faces challenges of commercialisation and political pressures. Traditionally, as argued in the first, second and third chapters, at its establishment, the SABC was a PSB that served the interests of the elite few, characterised by an interfering state that determined both staff appointments and programming content. But this thesis suggests that conceptions of 'independence' need to be tied back to what is specific to the South African experience, culture and values. The thesis therefore argues that 'independence' should be understood as part of a complex and dynamic historical process which is shaped by complex structures the evolving liberal democratic order in South Africa. Context, I argue, is, therefore, key to understanding SABC 'independence' conceptions.

In the previous chapters, particularly Chapters 1 and 2, I have reflected on how 'independence' is largely defined in an objectivist sense, both in PSB literature in general and in South African legal documents in particular. PSB 'independence' is generally identified as freedom from the market and from direct state interference.⁶⁰⁶ But a key argument of this thesis is that an understanding of 'independence', even within the SABC, cannot be limited to such legalistic definitions. Instead, it needs to be positioned in the broader context of the evolving political and economic programmes of South African post apartheid governments.

⁶⁰⁶See BA 1999.

As argued in Chapter 5, South Africa was born into an odd global terrain that included a fading socialist past characterised by state intervention as well as a neo-liberal environment defined by fiscal prudence. It is, therefore, in this setting that the ANC found itself straddled between approaches that could deliver efficient broadcasting services but without ignoring the previously disadvantaged sections of the SA population. Also the choices made by the ANC led government had a bearing in SABC staff's constructions of practical SABC 'independence' meanings.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the ANC began by adopting RDP, the government's social democratic macro-economic strategy, which encouraged state intervention in the economy. Due to its inability to stabilise the economy, the RDP was quickly discarded in favour of GEAR, a macro-economic strategy that reduced social spending and implied reduced state involvement in the economy, due to its stringent monetary and fiscal targets. GEAR was later discarded for the DSM, which brought the SABC even closer to the ruling ANC.⁶⁰⁷ Moreover, shifts in macro-economic strategies had three important consequences. First, these shifts became a divisive political issue within the ANC (e.g., GEAR was not accepted by the left within the ANC). Second, fiscal prudence meant ignoring the plight of the poor. Third, GEAR and the DSM saw the rise of dissenting voices, which meant that the ANC had to control the main communication conduit (i.e., the SABC) and align it with its developmental objectives or risk losing power. As a result the ANC fragmented and became weaker. In order to consolidate power, it had to control the SABC. On the surface, the ANC led government might be seen as all powerful and dominant; however, in reality, it was weak (hence, its need to curtail public discourse by controlling the PSB). The approach led to new interpretations of the

⁶⁰⁷ After 2005, three additional macro-economic strategies were adopted.

role of the SABC including the nation building or watchdog roles, which I discuss in detail in Section 2 of Chapter 2. These interpretations also informed the SABC 'independence' conceptions held by staff.

Across all four tiers, the SABC staff pointed out two key factors that were manifestations of these external factors and that played critical roles in shaping their conceptions of independence. These two factors were the commercialisation of the SABC and the ANC power struggles. The discussion regarding the shift in the broader macro-economic strategies, therefore, provides context for the discussion of these two key factors which have been, to varying degrees, critical in shaping the SABC staff's 'independence' conceptions. However, what is important is merging the larger horizons of the South African political economy with the internal SABC constructions of 'independence' meanings.

Consequently, by combining a CPEM and interpretivist approach it was possible to highlight a variety of SABC 'independence' interpretations from the viewpoints of SABC workers and senior management within the SABC. The CPEM as discussed in Chapter 2 focuses on PSB mainly as a topic through which to examine asymmetrical power relations. The CPEM is, therefore, not interested in investigating 'independence' as an expression of views held by SABC staff. Instead, CPEM focuses on showing how 'independence' is an objective phenomenon which has to be understood through the lens of power relations.

Chapter 6 focuses on programming content as a key empirical reference point, because different understandings of 'independence', as shaped by ANC power struggles and the commercialisation of the SABC, manifest themselves in

specific ways in the content of programs.⁶⁰⁸ A pervasive theme in Chapter 6 is that ANC power struggles extend into the politicisation of the SABC. The commercialisation of the SABC, the chapter argues, has also evolved into a political issue because it occurs through top-down directions from the executive, which the executive uses as an excuse to appoint cadres to key positions. Consequently, editorial direction, which is central to the ways in which professional and political conceptions of 'independence' are built, becomes common, since the ANC is perceived to be interfering with the day to day running of the SABC.

Chapter 6 examined how the ANC power struggles superseded commercialisation and became key in shaping conceptions of 'independence'. The general view of the respondents was that political interference should be minimised. The strength of this negative evaluation is also a central feature of the political conception of 'independence', which increases the fluidity of the professional and political conceptions. For example, as argued in Chapters 5 and 6, if a politician gives direction to editorial, the action is, itself, political and, of course, shapes a political conception of SABC independence. However, at the same time, the action diminishes professionalism, and in the end, depending on the situation, an individual can foreground either (or both) a political or professional conception of independence. In as much as the principal interest of this study lies in understanding SABC 'independence' through the lenses of the staff at the SABC,

⁶⁰⁸ In the preceding chapters, the argument has been that the pro-commercialisation camp largely holds a political conception of SABC 'independence' that eschews state involvement in the running of the SABC. To the pro-commercialisation camp, commercialisation is synonymous with 'independence' from politics. The counter-thrust to the anti-commercialisation camp's argument is that there is no evidence that programming content changes in favour of advertisers' needs as a result of commercialisation. Therefore, the pro-commercialisation camp believes, the market is the only structure capable of delivering a form of 'independence' from the state. It is, therefore, important in Chapter 6 to examine programming content as a key empirical reference point through which these different understandings of 'independence' manifest themselves.

attention must also be directed to the larger horizons of the political economy of South Africa and the globe, the chapter has argued. There is overwhelming evidence that, mostly since GEAR, there have been continual and incremental attempts by the government to control the SABC through appointments, patronage, censorship and other measures. In fact, changes in policies or leaders have been accompanied by changes in SABC roles.⁶⁰⁹ Consistent with the argument in this section, the domineering ANC-led government attempted to curtail public discourse by controlling the SABC, even using it as its mouthpiece as a way to mask its own inefficiencies and weaknesses in achieving objectives, such as the re-distribution of wealth. As a result, the SABC found itself caught up in a situation in which the ANC failed to appropriately balance re-distributional political objectives with fiscal prudence.

These struggles are not peculiar to PSB in South Africa. Instead, as Chapters 2 and 3 argued, there are similarities with other African countries, in which a weak state interferes, not only in PSB, but in the media in general. In South Africa, the larger socio-political environment can be understood by analysing the macro-economic strategies that successive governments adopted. For example, attempts to solve economic problems saw the imposition of GEAR, which was marked by controversies. The social tension created by the macro-economic strategies' inability to provide a reasonable standard of living for the majority of South Africans was also translated to the cultural sphere, including media.

⁶⁰⁹ According to lower-tier respondents, ANC power struggles have been followed by the ANC's unbearable meddling in two key areas of the SABC: the appointment of key personnel and interference with the operational environment. This meddling has contributed to the construction of a political and professional conception of independence. Moreover, this interference, which represents quite a deviation from the early and mid-1990s of the Mandela era, has begun to manifest itself in the form of factions and an unprofessional working environment characterised by suspicion, back-biting, nepotism and self-censorship, among others.

The situation saw a rapid shift from democracy (as espoused in the RDP era of Mandela) to the democratic centralism of Mbeki, in which the executive, rather than parliament, exerted power. In the process, there was centralized 'bulldozing' of policy. Reforms in broadcasting during this era were subordinated to the neo-liberal priorities of economic growth, which were widely associated with the attenuation of participatory decision-making in the formulation of media policy.⁶¹⁰ GEAR involved market reforms based on a model of economic efficiency, which was highly technical. Consistent with Nyamnjoh's argument GEAR involved choices that were not easy to explain to the general public.⁶¹¹ The thesis does not justify or try to mask the interference in the running of the SABC by the ANC led government, but, instead, highlights the ANC's attempt to shift and find its place in the context of global economic relations by attracting foreign direct investment through sound fiscal policies. The adoption of GEAR and the DSM impacted the SABC. This, in turn, shaped conceptions of the 'independence' of the SABC.

Democratic centralism can be traced in various ways. First, GEAR was introduced without any public consultation. This practice of 'bulldozing' can also be observed in connection to the passing of broadcasting legislation, as argued in Chapter 3. The increase in the rate of broadcasting policy documents produced during this period (as mentioned in Chapters 3, 4 and 5) pointed to despotism and a lack of participation due to the dedicated pursuit of re-aligning every public institution from the RDP era to the principles of GEAR and the DSM, which represented the ANC's overall macro-economic strategy. The intentions behind this re-alignment of public institutions, including the SABC, were noble in themselves.

⁶¹⁰ Pillay (n143) 167.

⁶¹¹ See Chapter 3.

Problems arose, however, when there was insufficient time for public consultation. An example occurred during the period between the production of the Green Paper and the passing of the Broadcasting Act 1999. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the public was given only 17 days to comment on the Green Paper. This can be contrasted with processes during the RDP era, when consultations took more than five years, allowing every interested individual to participate.⁶¹² These tendencies began to give rise to points raised in Chapter 2 with which the political economy of the media is concerned, such as determining how the making of meaning is shaped at every level by the structured asymmetries in social relations and how micro-contexts are shaped by general economic dynamics. Evidence related to the three categories of ownership and funding, governance and regulation, as well as programming suggests that the macro-economic strategies had a significant impact on SABC 'independence' and related conceptions of 'independence'. For example, under the RDP, there was political balance across governance, regulation and programming structures. Different political parties were represented, and the diversity was also reflected in appointments of key personnel, particularly on the board. Under GEAR and DSM, however, the three indicators saw the ANC attempting to tamper with the internal affairs of the SABC. Governing and regulation structures saw an increase in ANC personnel and, in the process, the politics shaped the meaning and conceptions of independence, such that interview respondents (particularly the middle and lower tiers of staff within the SABC) claimed that the SABC was not independent of the ANC.

This forced the introduction of policy and the dependence of the SABC on macro-economic strategies formulated and shaped by the IMF and the World Bank,

⁶¹² Duncan (n10)

which presented the ANC with the opportunity to engage in autocratic practices. Such practices occurred in a number of ways. First, as the ANC began to hold the view that it represented the public, since it was voted in by the majority of citizens in a free and fair election, it felt it had the right not to listen to any 'dissident' voice in civil society. Second, the ANC government acquired a hybrid nature, with traces of parliamentary democracy and traces of a disguised form of autocracy. One result of this was a shift from the RDP era, when there was proportional representation of the various sections of society in the board and management of the SABC. The GEAR and DSM periods saw the board and management skewed towards ANC personnel, so that GEAR and developmental state objectives could progress with less internal resistance. Given the above evidence, it could be said that concerns about ANC interference in the SABC were justified. I, however, argue that the reason for such interference was the ANC's inability to provide a reasonable standard of living for the majority of South Africans, which was ultimately translated to the cultural sphere.

In retrospect, the then-South African Vice President (now President) Jacob Zuma reinforced Mamdani's argument (discussed in Chapter 2) by viewing public opinion as a dissident voice. Jacob Zuma's perspective, particularly with regard to civil society, will be further discussed in the next two sections, since it informs the ANC's view on the role of the SABC and the national as well as public interests. On the other hand, there is civil society, which views the ANC as a mob of authoritarians seeking to control the SABC, while the ANC saw civil society as a masquerade that pretended to express the hopes of the South African people while suppressing them in pursuit of its own political agenda. The political distance

between the two bourgeoisie groups exemplifies the difficulty of synchronizing the SABC conceptions of 'independence'. What exacerbates the situation is that the two groups sink further into the misplaced notion that SABC 'independence' can only be defined through legal and external means, thus masking the importance of internal interpretations of 'independence' by SABC staff and how SABC staff interpret external forces, such as macro-economic strategies, politicians' attempts to interfere with the SABC and commercial forces, in relation to their own lived experience within the PSB.

It would be unfair to dismiss the ANC's instrumental role in the SABC as non-existent. As argued before, the ANC viewed the law as legitimating coercion through representation (e.g., through its democratically elected parliament). This was a result of the tension faced by the ANC government in its attempt to align economic efficiency with its official trajectory. The authoritarian approach to the imposition of GEAR and the DSM was an attempt to facilitate transformation of South African society from the top. As a result (or, rather, unwittingly), the party elite became a legally defined social entity. Any individual or group, such as civil society, that was against the new regime was seen as counter-revolutionary. This was evidenced by Mazwai in Chapter 5, who was quoted as saying that the duty of the SABC was to report and promote what the president says. Ideas or individuals that did not adhere to the Mazwai idea were, therefore, expendable, without even following legal procedure, as evidenced by the numbers of SABC staff who were suspended with or without pay. Furthermore, it is clear that the ANC government was regressing back to the apartheid era by resuscitating the state apparatuses of central control and bureaucracy in its endeavour to counterbalance material inequality with abstract legal and political equality. This occurred through

legitimation, which Thomson defines as a psychological relationship between the governed and their governors that engenders a belief that the state's leaders and institutions have the right to exercise political authority over the rest of society. The major risk with such an approach is the centralization of the state, which leads to the weakening of important public sphere institutions, such as civil society, and the use of the SABC as a tool of the government of the day. Given the current challenges, the neo-liberal dictates, the agenda of the ANC and the commercialisation of the SABC, it remains impossible to consider a pluralistic and 'independent' PSB in South Africa.

3 Whither SABC?

Despite the challenges it faces, the SABC remains the sole PSB of the state and maintains a dominant position in South African broadcasting. The SABC will, unfortunately, continue to exist in a divided environment, in which a sense of common belonging will always be countered by individuals who have never imagined themselves to be part of the same nation. Its role of nation building will be countered by the elusive cultural identity aggravated by a PSB reform subordinated to the neo-liberal priorities of economic growth. These complexities feed into and define the roles, not only of the SABC, but also of other PSBs in the Global South. The varied play of interests in which the SABC and other Global South PSBs exist contribute to involving the institutions in multiple centres of power. Consequently, the shifting sands of power become the foundations upon which conceptions of 'independence' are constructed. These shifts influence interpretations of 'independence', since particular conceptions that gain acceptance are used to justify hidden interests from different ideological strands, such as nationalism or neo-liberalism. Even the professional conception of

‘independence’, which buttresses journalistic values of objectivity and neutrality, speaks from a particular location of power. As for the SABC, it faces many burdens from its past, such as interventions by a weak state and ethnic divisions that are carried into the future. ‘Independence’ is constructed and influenced by the ways in which the state acts in national politics and, particularly, in relation to international politics characterised by the hierarchised global matrices of power. In the end, the state and the PSB appear to be enemies; yet, behind the facade of democracy are neo-liberal institutions pulling the strings. It is unfortunate that the SABC may have to follow the path of South Africa, with all its divisions.

Instead of a dichotomised relationship of state versus SABC, the two could work in a complementary manner to oversee the fulfilment of nation-building goals. Instead of the ANC viewing the SABC as a covert operator that constantly seeks to attack and expose the government or the SABC viewing the ANC as an overbearing behemoth, both must complement each other with a certain degree of autonomy. Their problems do not only have to do with the SABC and its independence; instead, they go deeper into the heart of the South African state and its place in the global sphere.

The previous chapters reveal that this study is particularly concerned with the extent to which SABC staff define, experience and interpret ‘independence’ meanings. In particular, they have revealed how notions of ‘independence’ determine how staff within the SABC think and talk about ‘independence’, related, in part and in a complex manner, to their work routines within the SABC. Building on the preceding chapters, the section above emphasised the disparities caused by a weak state that tries to address sharp inequalities through various macro-

economic strategies dictated by powerful institutions which, in turn, make it easy for the state to interfere in the affairs of the SABC in the name of the developmental goals. As this interference increases, the potential of the SABC morphing into a state or government broadcaster becomes more serious. I argue, therefore, that an understanding of the role of the SABC, in conjunction with the dictated developmental state goals, will contribute to the conflicting roles of the SABC that emerge between the anti-commercialisation and pro-commercialisation camps (as shown in Chapter 4). I argue that the two groups' interpretations of SABC 'independence' are premised on their own understandings of the SABC's role in post-apartheid South Africa. In addition, it is evident the state has made significant strides in attempting to influence and control the SABC. This influence and control has taken a particular avenue: one of merging national developmental goals with SABC goals and, therefore, defining the role of the SABC in relation to governmental vision.

To understand the role of the SABC, we have to understand, as pointed out in Chapters 1 and 3, that the SABC was founded on the Reithian model of a PSB.⁶¹³ According to Lord Reith, a PSB should prioritise universalism and efficiency and reject market forces and politics.⁶¹⁴ The Reithian model, of course, provides a useful framework for examining the role of the SABC in post-apartheid South Africa. By looking at this model, it becomes possible to trace the dynamics of the government/SABC relationship and the ways in which SABC staff view their own roles within the PSB in relation to their understandings of independence. Key to the Reithian model is an argument proposed by Schultz: that the PSB is a fourth

⁶¹³ See Chapter 2 for further discussions on the traditional roles of the SABC in the literature.

⁶¹⁴ J Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Polity Press, Oxford 1991) 119

estate that should operate autonomously from the government and commercial pressures.⁶¹⁵ As a fourth estate, the SABC is, therefore, expected to be a watchdog that oversees the state through revealing state abuses and facilitating general debate regarding the functioning of the government.⁶¹⁶ However, the findings in this thesis highlight a fundamental inconsistency in this definition. The definition of PSB in Africa in general and in the SABC in particular could project negatively or be viewed as a deviance in light of the fact that, unlike in the West (where PSB has been differentiated from the state), in Africa, the state is, for all practical purposes, the funder, owner and shareholder of PSB.⁶¹⁷ In an interesting reversal of roles, the state can even be the watchdog, since, in relation to developmental goals, the PSB becomes an arm of the state, echoing Althusser's ideas about an ideological state apparatus.⁶¹⁸

The above differentiation is important because, not only does it highlight contextual differences, but it also ensures that the discussion of the SABC is embedded in a framework of values that define an understanding of development and, therefore, define what to expect from the SABC within the context it inhabits. It is this context that defines the role of the SABC and, therefore, the role of its staff. In post-apartheid South Africa, the SABC has been tasked with the roles of nation-building, unity and reconciliation.⁶¹⁹ The idea of nation-building fits with the perspective that defines communication for development. Consequently, the SABC

⁶¹⁵J Schultz, *Reviving the Fourth Estate* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998).

⁶¹⁶James Curran, 'Mass Media and Democracy' in Curran and Gurevitch (eds) in *Mass Media and Society* (Arnold London, New York 1991) 84

⁶¹⁷See Daniel C Hallini and Mancini Paolo, *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge) 291

⁶¹⁸Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)' in Lenin (eds) *Philosophy and Other Essays* (New Left Books, New York and London 1971) 1227, 86

⁶¹⁹KG Tomasselli, 'Our Culture vs Foreign Culture; An Essay on Ontological and Professional Issues in African Journalism' (2003) 65(6) *Gazette* 427, 442; C Barnett, 'Broadcasting the Rainbow Nation: Media, Democracy and Nation-Building in South Africa' (1999) *Antipode* 31 (3) 427, 441

cannot be detached from the ANC-led government for two key reasons. First, the SABC's mandate is automatically intertwined with national objectives. This is because, by definition, development communication gives the SABC the responsibility to disseminate messages that foster nation-building by changing the behaviours of its audiences, leading to the modernisation of the society in which they exist.⁶²⁰ Second, the linking of SABC objectives to national objectives buttresses the idea that the SABC, the citizenry and the state are a homogenous entity. This approach has several disadvantages.

The key disadvantage of development communication is that the lines between government communication (or propaganda) and news reporting are blurred. In this instance, the SABC's role is subordinated to the ideological commitments of the developmental state and, as a result, a divorce between the state and PSB becomes impossible. This dilemma poses questions regarding whether a broadcaster like the SABC should be called a PSB or a state broadcaster. By definition, on one hand, a state broadcaster is controlled by the state, represents state interests and is funded by public money, while, on the other hand, PSB has a specific mandate to broadcast in the public interest.⁶²¹ It is the dilemma regarding how to best serve the public interest that contributes to interpretations of ANC power struggles and the commercialisation of the SABC in relation to 'independence' meanings by SABC staff. The developmental tenets complicate the scenario, and the lines between national and public interest become blurred. For example, according to the ANC's Joel Netshitenze, the national interest is asserted by the ultimate formal authority and cannot be decreed in statutes, while the public

⁶²⁰SR Melkote, *Communication Development in the Third World; Theory and Practice* (Sage, New Delhi 1991)

⁶²¹See Chapter 2 for definitions.

interest concerns the collective interest of the wider public and is usually represented by civil society.⁶²² In a developmental state model, the national and the public are supposed to merge and become one, since they involve shared values of building a nation. However, complications arise when the ANC emphasises difference instead of convergence.

This lack of convergence promotes and is inter-twined with the anti-establishment conception of SABC independence. Groups within the SABC do not share common values within the PSB, nor with the larger South African objectives. This situation creates a dilemma, since the SABC is supposed to be a conduit through which national objectives are conveyed. However, in the end, a Monroe Price conception of 'independence' that 'independence' can be measured as the capacity of an opposition to provide a useful critique of the government in power also influences an anti-government approach.⁶²³ While there is evidence that the ANC does not have overarching control, the idea on which the anti-establishment conception of 'independence' is built is to eliminate any form of interference by government. However, this remains impossible, since developmental objectives still have to be conveyed by the SABC. In the end, the concern is not the politicisation of the SABC, since politicisation will always define the relationship between the PSB and the South African government, as long as the harsh realities of unemployment, poor GDP growth, inequality and poverty persist. The concern should, instead, be over-politicisation, in which the SABC becomes strongly partisan and SABC staff become significantly integrated with politicians.

⁶²²See J Duncan, *Broadcasting and the National Question: South African Broadcast Media in an Age of Neo-Liberalism* (Freedom of Expression Institute and the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa, Johannesburg 2001b) 38

⁶²³In P Gross, *Entangled Evolutions: Media and Democratisation in Eastern Europe* (The John Hopkins University Press and University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 2002)

In this thesis, while 33 of the 36 interview respondents pointed out the importance of less state interference, it was difficult for the interview respondents to separate developmental state tenets from authoritarianism. These concepts are difficult to separate and present challenges for PSB in Africa in general. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, Thabo Mbeki decided that there should be secrecy regarding issues in the national interest, when he decided a documentary that he thought was not in the national interest should be taken off-air. On one hand, taking a programme off-air could be interpreted by politicians in power as having a bearing on foreign direct investment, but, for the SABC staff (and, particularly, for journalists/producers), it is censorship. The contradiction lies in the meaning of national interest, as pointed out by Netshitenze, the former ANC spokesperson: national interest is a sixth sense; it is not defined in statutes, but in the whims of politicians, and journalists/producers work in the public interest. The argument is that, while the South African constitution protects the public interest, in a developmental state, the national interest overrides the public interest.⁶²⁴ It is, therefore, important to note that the organisational incongruence discussed in Chapter 4 is linked to these contradictions of the developmental state.

Organisational incongruence is defined in Chapter 4 as the emergence of a dual and contradictory SABC identity one that generates tension between a market-driven viewpoint and the traditional Reithian viewpoint with regard to what the role of the SABC should be in a developmental state. This tension, in turn, influences how staff within the SABC think about 'independence'. This is a paradoxical situation. The pro-commercialisation camp, which largely hold an anti-establishment, political and professional conception of the SABC, want to imagine

⁶²⁴South African Constitution c 2

an SABC that exists out of its context. To this group, the idea of 'independence' means a total divorce from state interference, while following the whims of the market. However, the SABC, since it exists in a developmental state, cannot afford total autonomy from the state. Of course, there are various risks (as some interview respondents pointed out), such as the over-politicisation of the PSB. However, interestingly, developmental communication has many things in common with both the state and PSB. The idea of developmental communication, if not abused by politicians, is not far divorced from the tenets of PSB, since it is essentially about creating awareness and modernising practises among the citizenry. It is therefore understandable that the state would constantly interfere in order to give direction to PSB in such circumstances. The situation in post-apartheid in South Africa is complicated by the fact that the SABC also stems from RDP experiences.

What is clear is that, since the attenuation of the RDP, a strategy that promoted forms of popular participation, the agenda of the ANC has become incrementally more entrenched in the SABC. Evidence on the ground proves that poor service delivery and new macro-economic strategies adopted have enhanced the over-politicisation of the SABC and that this over-politicisation is likely to deepen. A scenario in which the SABC supports the state in fulfilment of developmental objectives could unravel, and politicians could capitalise on the situation to control and influence the SABC. It is important to note that it is impossible for the SABC to extricate itself from politicians because of the organisation's reliance on the state for direction.

While it is convenient to lay the blame of interference squarely on the ANC, it is important to note that SABC staff are not innocent watchdogs; instead, they are also participants in the political game. Various and competing interests shape their

conceptions of independence. For example, one could be a pro-commercialisation supporter due to the financial benefits that come with such a position, or one could be anti-establishment because the group in power does not have the potential to further the individual's interests. In the end, interpretations of 'independence' lapse into relativism, in which an individual's situation informs his or her perceptions, creating the potential for the individual to become an instrument of other people. This notion is well explained by Karol Jackubowicz, whose perspective is consistent with the above argument and the objective of this study.

Jackubowicz asserts that it is the ideas in our heads that define the rules of the day, not just the formal arrangements of legislation and organisational structures 55.⁶²⁵ Jackubowicz is interpretivist in his approach; he supports the idea that it is the SABC staff's minds that structure their views of the world by actively engaging in processes of construction, counter-empiricism that 'independence' exists. Therefore, SABC 'independence' can be understood, not only through an overbearing state, but also through interested staff with differing worldviews. As a result, it has been important for this study to investigate the ways in which SABC staff interpret the context in which they exist.

This section has highlighted the ways in which SABC staff perceptions of 'independence' can be understood by understanding the PSB's role within a South African developmental state. The most important features of this discussion have been the notions of citizenship and the public and national interest. In the South African context and the CPEM, 'independence' cannot be discussed outside the constraints of citizenship and democracy, which are attached to the developmental

⁶²⁵K Jackubowicz, 'Ideas in Our Heads: Introduction of PSB as Part of Media System Change in Central and Eastern Europe' (2004) 19 (1)European Journal of Communication 53, 74; FB Nyamnjoh, 'Media ownership and Control in Africa in the Age of Globalisation' in PN Thomas and Z Nain (eds), *Who Owns the Media, Global Trends and Local Resistances* (Southbound, Penang Malaysia 2004) 119, 134

state. In South Africa, the national and public interest are two principles that offset each other. The public interest is protected by the constitution, and the national interest espouses authoritarian tenets. The national interest is not decreed in statutes, but is, instead, based on the whims of the government. The question is how these two opposing principles can grow and flourish side by side. In other words, how can a public broadcaster serve the government and the public at the same time? This paradox informs staff members' interpretations of commercialisation and ANC power struggles in relation to SABC independence. If the national and public interest can survive side by side, that means that state interference is a necessary ingredient for the running of the SABC, since PSB objectives have to be aligned with state objectives. Therefore, the SABC and its staff are reduced to the political role of subjects of the state. This relationship has a bearing on the professionalism of SABC staff, which is the focus of the next section. Professionalism is a central tenet for understanding SABC 'independence' conceptions because ties between the SABC and its external environment can be explored and gauged through the professional conduct of the SABC staff and the staff's assessment of the level of professionalism within the PSB.

The meaning of professionalism and a bifurcated approach to SABC roles

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, professionalism refers to the ability of SABC staff to make decisions about their work without interference from external forces, such as politicians, advertisers and other financially powerful people. This thesis has argued that the commercialisation of the SABC and, particularly, the politicisation of the SABC due to ANC power struggles are crucial to understanding how SABC 'independence' meanings are constructed by its staff. These two factors, according

to all interview respondents, appear to cut into SABC staff's professionalism in all four tiers.

The South African constitution and the various South African broadcasting acts require the SABC to broadcast in the public interest. Consequently, in line with Robert McChesney's view of PSB, SABC staff is seen as trustees of the public interest. This implies that they should perform key duties, such as being watchdogs, presenting a wide range of informed positions on key issues and serving as conduits for public discourse.⁶²⁶

Understandings of professionalism within the SABC have not evolved with the requirements of the developmental state. The term 'professionalism' still connotes autonomy, a watchdog role and a divorce from government as being key to competence and credibility. As reflected by interview respondents, the SABC staff are generally suspicious of both the ANC-led government and the commercial values that come with the commercialisation of the PSB. These two factors are viewed as threats to the identity of the SABC and shape the SABC's understandings of independence. Consequently, the staff desires to be seen as professional, with the freedom and ability to run the PSB's affairs, rather than as 'un-professional' due to interferences. On the other hand is the government, which sees the SABC as a key partner in conveying developmental goals and, therefore, believes that the professionalism of SABC staff should be tied to these goals. This view goes back to Chapter 5, in which a board member noted that objectivity is a delusion and that the SABC should support the government in power.⁶²⁷ The struggle between the

⁶²⁶See RW McChesney (n57).

⁶²⁷The idea is that political, religious and traditional leaders should come together to help define what could be seen as the role of the media in the South African context. A COO of the SABC has made public his view that that the SABC should air 70% positive news and 30% negative news. Positive news has been viewed as news supporting the state.

state and its developmental goals, on one hand, and the SABC's pursuit of professionalism, on the other, may be seen in the following terms.

First, the belief in the role of the state as the formulator, protector and custodian of both the public and national interest is not only entrenched in the South African political culture, but can also be seen as legitimate, since the government is voted into power by the majority through a free and fair election. Therefore, the state/government represents both national and public interests.⁶²⁸ As a result, the government finds itself in contradiction, not only with tenets of PSB (which reject state interference), but also in terms of delimiting the professional expectations of SABC staff. South Africa is, therefore, highly statist, such that even the SABC itself finds itself administered by the state's Department of Communication (which falls under the minister of communications, who is also the sole shareholder of the SABC). Owing to political culture, it is, therefore, difficult for the government to accept that the SABC could act independently of the state. The

⁶²⁸ The South African state includes the government of the day, the parliament, the courts, the police, the army and the various government departments. The state is permanent; it remains in place even if the government changes. The government is formed by the political party that wins the majority of seats in elections. South Africa protects its democracy by separating the power of the state into three parts, or 'arms': the legislature (the parliament, the nine provincial legislatures and the local councils), the executive (the part of government that runs the country from day to day), and the judiciary (the courts). The most important work of the legislature (especially the parliament) is to create the laws of the country and to monitor the executive. The parliament is elected to represent the people and to ensure government by the people under the constitution. The parliament also elects the president and can remove him or her from office. The work of the executive is to make policy, to propose laws that enable this policy to be carried out, and to implement the laws passed by the legislature. The majority party, which forms the government, is elected on the basis of its policy and, as a government, it has a duty to carry out this policy. The executive branch is composed of the president, the deputy president, the cabinet ministers (e.g., the minister of education) and the deputy ministers. The president appoints the cabinet. The work of the judiciary is to try cases and to administer justice. The constitution states that the courts must apply the law impartially (without bias). The judiciary is made up of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court of Appeal, the High Courts, magistrate's courts and any other courts established by the parliament. Judges are appointed by the Judicial Services Commission.

key question here is: Is it possible for the SABC to derive its legitimacy from the professional activities of its staff, independent of the state?

The risk with this question, as the thesis has argued, is that there is a dichotomised relationship between the SABC and the state, due to the fact that, by definition, PSB eschews the state. However, practically, in a developmental state, and as the ANC interprets it, professionals should invariably be under state control, and their autonomy should exist in relation to conditions approved by the state. Altogether, this re-constitutes the staff members' roles to ones that may differ from what could be expected from their professional training (e.g., the upholding of principles of objectivity and impartiality could prove impossible). As a result, minimising the role of the government in SABC activities is viewed as being key to realising professional goals within the SABC. Without such minimisation, the PSB is cast as a victim of an overbearing state. Interestingly, as argued in the previous paragraphs, the state views itself as representing the views of the people; therefore, if professionals and other entities resist its goals, the state can claim victimhood, too.⁶²⁹ The argument here is that the ANC views the SABC's calls for autonomy from the government as nothing but a ploy to conceal its intentions to control the PSB on behalf of others or in its own interests, which are divorced from both public and national interests. This argument seems to doubt the abilities of SABC professionals as capable trustees of the public interest, and it finds validity in two ways: First, professionals are not necessarily accountable for the failure of the SABC the government is; and second, professionals are not always apolitical. The argument might hold water, but it appears that interfering with the professional practises of SABC staff is central to the construction of the other three SABC

⁶²⁹ See Jacob Zuma's argument that civil society is the voice of the formerly privileged.

'independence' conceptions: namely, the political, anti-establishment and legal conceptions. This is because all three of these are shaped by the staff's ability to do its specific duties according to professional standards that eschew external interference. Notwithstanding the government representatives' arguments, according to interview respondents, SABC staff still needs to preserve a significant degree of autonomy because there is clear over-politicisation of the PSB.

Evidence from the interview respondents supports the over-politicisation of the SABC across all tiers through various instruments, ranging from partisan appointments to censorship. It is, therefore, clear that political control has led to the development of a delimitation of professionalism, such that all tiers now hold an adversarial attitude towards state authorities, which, by and large, are ANC officials. In addition, pro-ANC and leading ANC factions began to cause major divisions within the PSB, leading to censorship, factionalism and self-censorship. Moreover, the growing inclination towards censorship and self-censorship did not justify, nor was it part of, any developmental goals except for factionalism within the ANC. As argued in the previous sections, to align the SABC with macro-economic strategies, the autonomy of producers and journalists has to be limited, to a certain degree; however, this does not justify extended interference by the state. The state even displayed its intentions of interfering with the SABC by passing additional legislation. For example, in 2008, amid further fragmentation and conflict within the SABC, the ANC-led parliament introduced the Draft Broadcasting Amendment Bill, whose aim was to give leeway to parliament to remove the entire board (since the Broadcasting Act 1999 only allowed for the removal of individual members). This is a concrete example of the ANC abusing its

power, to the detriment of professionalism within the SABC. Consequently, it is justifiable that the SABC became susceptible to the whims of the ANC-led government, which ended up controlling editorial direction. In the end, these fragmentations severely affected the professionalism of the staff and, as argued in Chapters 4 and 5, manifested themselves through nepotism, fraud, intimidation and favours. In the end, a bifurcated relationship, in which ‘independence’ conceptions were constructed in relation to the ANC versus SABC conflict, were established, with each side seeing itself as a victim of the other.

4 Concluding remarks, limitations and suggestions for further research

Notwithstanding the empirical and theoretical contributions to literature on SABC and PSB ‘independence’ conceptions in general, this inquiry intended to bring to the fore how factors operating both within and outside the SABC shape constructions of SABC ‘independence’ conceptions. At the theoretical level, the inquiry traced the social construction of ‘independence’ through the interpretivist approach. The approach advocated here implies a view of SABC ‘independence’ through the eyes of the actors (i.e., SABC staff), which is, to a large extent, in conflict with the prevailing and widely held idea that ‘independence’ is an objective and immovable edifice, as defined through compliance with legal provisions, including the South African Constitution and broadcasting legislation. The CPEM approach offered a framework through which we were able to understand how the key shapers of independence the commercialisation of the SABC and the ANC power struggles have been interpreted by SABC staff members in relation to their own understandings of independence. The argument has been that SABC staff ‘independence’ conceptions are dependent on and are interpretations of the larger horizon of the political economy in which the SABC exists. This larger context,

which manifests in the form of commercialisation, ANC power struggles and larger global power matrices, shapes the nature of the 'independence' discourses that emerge within the SABC. SABC 'independence' meanings, therefore, remain firmly placed within the larger South African political economy and the economy of the globe. In addition, there is tension between the state, as a key financial guarantor of PSB, and the principles of PSB, at the centre of which there is a staff inclination towards autonomy from the state and commercial forces, within a developmental state.

Two key areas may need further attention. First, at the methodological level, this study was heavily reliant on interviews and archival documents for its data. The approach limited the study in that it did not allow total inhabitation of the SABC. As this would have been possible through conducting an ethnographic study. Inhabiting the SABC would have given the study greater scope by allowing the researcher to occupy the everyday lives of the interview respondents (e.g., through participant observation). In addition, an ethnographic study would go a long way in identifying the discrepancies between what interview respondents say and what they do. Furthermore, a comparative study focusing specifically on content of programs during a particular government administration would be useful in illustrating the changes and differences that may inform understandings of 'independence'. Second, this thesis set out to determine how conceptions of SABC 'independence' have been constructed by staff; however, findings revealed also the importance of the larger political economy of South Africa in which the SABC exists for understanding how conceptions of 'independence' are formed. This showed that the South African state plays a pivotal role in both the role of the SABC in South African public life and the professional roles of SABC staff. An

ethnographic study focusing mainly on SABC decision-making processes would help to move the SABC away from the emphasis on the larger socio-economic environment. Such an approach could even break down SABC staff into additional tiers or according to profession or department. Despite these methodological limitations of this study, however, its data are sufficient to argue that 'independence' of the SABC is a socio-political phenomenon, since its various interpretations are related to power, knowledge and identity.

Table of Interviews

	Name	Location	Position	Date
1.	Former SABC COO	Auckland Park Johannesburg	Senior Manager	July 2011
2	Former News Editor	Johannesburg	Middle Manager	July 2011
3	Union Secretary General	Mandela Foundation	Middle Manager	July 2011
4	Journalist/Producer	Auckland Park	Lower tier	July 2011
5	SABC producer	Mandela Foundation	Lower Tier	July 2011
6	Former Head of News	Pretoria	Middle Manager	July 2011
7	Bulletin Editor	Auckland Park	Middle Manager	July 2011
8	Journalist/Producer	Auckland Park	Lower tier	July 2011
9	Journalist/Producer	Sandton City	Lower tier	July 2011
10	Journalist/Producer	Auckland Park	Lower tier	July 2011
11	Former CFO	Auckland Park	Senior Manager	July 2011
12	General Manager(Special Projects)	University of the Witwatersrand	Senior Manager	July 2011
13	Former CEO	Auckland Park	Senior Manager	July 2011
14	Board member	Auckland Park	Board	July 2011
15	Head Corporate Affairs	Auckland Park	Senior Manager	July 2011
16	Union Official	Mandela Foundation	Middle Manager	July 2011
17	SABC former CEO	Auckland Park	Senior Manager	July 2011
18	SABC News reader	Auckland Park/Mandela Foundation	Lower tier	July 2011
19	Journalist/Producer	Sophiatown	Lower tier	July 2011
20	Mwasa Union	Houghton	Middle Manager	July 2011
21	COO	Auckland Park	Senior Manager	August 2011
22	Board Member	Pretoria	Board Member	August 2011
23	Strategic Manger for News and current Affairs	Auckland Park	Middle Manager	August 2011
24	Jane Duncan-former Head FXI	Eastgate	Civil society	August 2011
25	Journalist/Producer	Auckland Park	Lower tier	August 2011
26	Former Board Deputy Chair	UNISA	Board Member	August 2011
27	Former Intern	Auckland Park	Lower tier	August 2011
28	Former Board Chair	Pretoria	Board member	August 2011
29	Journalist/Producer	Johannesburg	Lower tier	August 2011
30	Journalist/Producer	Pretoria	Lower tier	August 2011
31	Former News	Polokwane	Middle manager	August 2011

	Editor			
32	Kate Skinner-Head SOS	Rosebank	Civil Society	September 2011
33	Board member	Rosebank	Board Member	September 2011
34	Union Secretary General	Johannesburg	Middle Manager	September 2011
35	Corporate Affairs	Johannesburg	Middle Manager	September 2011
36	Former Board Deputy Chair	Pretoria	Board Member	September 2011

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