A Historical and Critical Overview of Religion and Public Broadcasting in South Africa

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Abstract
Given the eruption of religion and media studies in the last two decades and following the predictions of leading scholars that the study of religion and media would come to represent a pivotal moment in the study of religion, the current dearth of studies about religion and media, from the Southern African region in general and South Africa in particular, suggest that this area of inquiry is in need of serious critical attention. This article investigates the role of religion in the history and development of the South African mediascape by analysing the role of religion in the banning and introduction of television under apartheid and the place of religion in the formulation of new media policy in the democratic era. This article argues that throughout the history of broadcasting in South Africa, religion has been mobilised in strategies and resources for nation building, and that there exists an unexpected continuity based on regulatory measures between the apartheid and post-apartheid contexts.

Keywords: South African Broadcasting Corporation, public broadcast television, Christian National, religious representation, religious diversity, religious regulation

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Introduction

In this article the following research question is explored, 'How has religion, within the public broadcasting sector been employed as a resource and strategy, and for nation building by the South African state?' By foregrounding religion's role in the history and development of the South African mediascape, urgent questions about religious legitimation, religious regulation, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion will are raised. In addressing this research question, set within the specificity of a single unit of analysis, the context of the South African state, and the public broadcaster the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), these questions are analysed in relation to the multiple complementary, conflicting, and overlapping configurations of religion, media, and politics. It has been widely argued that to a large extent the increased public visibility and presence of religion can be attributed to the rise and ubiquity of electronic and digital media. This analysis however, moves beyond a technological determinist framework in order to more deeply explore the circumstances under which religion is permitted to become public. Against this background, I will argue that religion's role in the story of public broadcasting has been secured by its pliability and utility in support of the nation building endeavours of the state revealing, that although a radical disjuncture between apartheid and democracy is expected, a surprising continuity in the use of religion for a nation building project, however different those projects might be.

In order to substantiate these premises this paper will be divided into three key sections. First, I will explore the largely underestimated role of religion in the conspicuous absence and then hurried introduction of television in South Africa in order to provide a historical and critical foundation from which to consider the contemporary role of religion in the public broadcasting landscape. Due to space constraints it is not possible to expound on the full details of the television debate as it played out in the House of Assembly. Selected speech instances delivered by two powerful television adversaries who consistently spoke out against the medium, Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, and Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, Albert Herzog, will be used to illustrate the force of the religiopolitical underpinnings of the National Party's anti-television position.

The second part of this article focuses on the democratic transformation of the SABC and the context and content of the 2003 Religious

Broadcasting Policy. Finally, this article offers an analysis of both the apartheid and post-apartheid interventions regarding religion and public broadcasting in order to illustrate the varying modes of religious regulation that have characterised religion's presence on television. This paper concludes that the study of religion and media in South Africa can shed light on important issues regarding religion's position and role in a changing society that are in need of critical attention.

Contextualising the Study

During the apartheid era, the absence of television in South Africa was by no means an unremarkable fact of life. On the contrary, the lack of a television service during this time was as a result of a pre-emptive government ban on the technology. If the banning of television was the 'most drastic act of cultural protectionism in the history of the medium' (Nixon 1994: 4), the eventual introduction of television transpired as a part of the Christian National educational, social, cultural, and political project of apartheid. From 1951, when the question of television was first posed, until the decision was made to introduce the technology in 1971, the engagement with the issue of television by the National Party would significantly evolve from a dull neutral response underwritten by a rational developmental perspective to an acutely defiant and an increasingly resilient anti-television rhetoric underpinned by the religious ideology of the National Party. Religion played a crucial role in the eventual introduction of television to the South African mediascape. In 1971 when the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Related to Television - which was launched in 1969 to assess the suitability of television for South Africa - reported back on its findings; religion, and particularly the National Party's special version of Calvinist Christianity, featured dominantly in two of the three strict stipulations under which a television service and ostensibly all forms of public broadcasting would be allowed to operate. The Commission of Inquiry into Matters Related to Television would conceive of a statutorily controlled Christian television service as a crucial line of defense against possible unauthorised international content that could undermine the apartheid state. Television, the enemy of the nation and the people, was eventually enlisted to preserve and protect the spiritual heritage of the apartheid state.

In the democratic era the Religious Broadcasting Policy of 2003 represents the culmination of 'consultation and contestation' that characterised the entire spectrum of transformational endeavours undertaken by the post-apartheid state to consign the legacy of apartheid to history. It also embodies the way in which the new constitutional values of the democratic state have been mediated through religious broadcasting policy and subsequently content production (Baker 2000: 235). The regulation of religion through this policy has led to an arrangement wherein, both, the representation of religion on public broadcast television, and religious broadcasting as a genre have been enlisted in the broader nation-building project, resulting in regulated representations of religion that, although constitutionally sound in form, provide very little space for religious expressions that do not conform to these standards.

Professor of Religious Studies and expert on religion in Africa, Rosalind Hackett's many contributions to scholarship on religion and media in Africa have had formative influence on this study. In emphasising the multiple interconnections between religion, media, and conflict, Hackett foregrounds an approach to the study of religion and media in Africa that compels the researcher to consider these categories within their global and local, historical and socio-political contexts. Hackett's 2006 study of religion and public broadcasting, 'Mediated Religion in South Africa: Balancing Airtime and Rights Claims', highlights the intersection of religion, politics, and media in the development of religious broadcasting at the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Hackett does not separate post-apartheid developments in this area from apartheid history or from the political struggles that have shaped its constitution. Furthermore, by reviewing the development of religious broadcasting in South Africa within the broader context of media democratisation and liberalism in Africa, along with the 'new spirit of communal self-determination, constitutionalism, and the global *lingua franca* of international human rights that is sweeping the African continent,' Hackett convincingly argues that 'the media sphere constitutes a critical 'test site' where the interpretation and implementation of these 'new' rights can be publicly evaluated by all concerned' (2006a: 168-169). Therefore, instead of imposing theoretical and conceptual models that have been developed elsewhere, this article intends to mirror the discursive approach to the study of religion and media that Hackett's work encourages. To that end, the following section begins at what can be considered the first turning point in the relationship

between religion and media in South Africa - the debate around, and the eventual introduction of, television.

'The Devil's Own Box': Religion and Television in Apartheid South Africa

Three contemporary studies about the initial absence and delayed introduction of television in the South Africa mediascape at a time when the medium was common in Africa and around the world illustrate the neglect of religion in the telling and retelling of this narrative. This is not to say that these scholars have entirely overlooked the role of religion in the National Party's anti-television rhetoric. On the contrary, each raises the issue of religion as part of their discussions. However, they have neglected to place the National Party's searing deprecation of this new technology within the religious context of apartheid policy and politics.

Rob Nixon (1994) situated these concerns within a framework of 'rationalised fantasy'. Ron Krabill (2010) attributed the National Party's anti-television stance to a combination of a commitment to cultural purity and opposition to cultural imperialism, and the broader internal political struggles within the House of Assembly in general and the National Party in particular. Carin Bevan (2008) claimed that the role of morality in explaining the absence of television has been over-emphasised in historical recollections of the television debate and reserves much criticism for Nixon's and Krabill's approaches to the study of television's prehistory in South Africa. Bevan's study is therefore a deliberate attempt to highlight, what she considers, the other equally important practical reasons for television's delayed introduction. While Nixon, Krabill, and Bevan have addressed the issue of religion in the great television debacle, by separating the religious and political character of the National Party into independent conceptual and material domains, they have done so in a marginal way and failed to properly situate the television controversy within the religiopolitical context of apartheid South Africa, thereby underestimating the pervasiveness of religion within National Party politics and disregarding the pliability and diverse utility of Christian Nationalism in the apartheid project.

I agree that to cite the moral danger of television as the main reason for keeping television out of South Africa would be reductionist and an over-

simplification of a complex set of discourses that amounted to the most drastic pre-emptive strike against the medium in its absence. However, to continue to overlook the implications of religion and its expression as morality in the political economy within which the television debates took place, would be to maintain assumptions that religion, culture, politics, media, and morality are self-contained, separate categories. Consequently, I argue that the National Party's ideological and material prohibition of television, and then its carefully orchestrated introduction, was motivated by the religious convictions that were embedded in the politics of apartheid. This motivation was made explicit by key political figures of the National Party debating in the House of Assembly.

Although television had been a topic of debate in public discourse and in Parliament as early as 1950, in the late 1960s the television saga gained momentum. At this time satellite technology was quickly improving, the direct reception of unauthorised, ideologically incompatible television transmissions from overseas was becoming a tangible danger, one which threatened to unravel the system of separate development upon which the apartheid regime was based. Television was one of the first issues that Verwoerd addressed upon his inauguration as president of the republic.

In 1960, Verwoerd made a speech in the House of Assembly regarding the principles to which the government subscribed with respect to television. The first was that the government thought television was a spiritual threat to the nation. Verwoerd specified that television would be kept out of South Africa until such a time that the risks associated with it could be fully assessed. The spiritual risk alluded to in this part of the speech was undoubtedly underpinned by the religious convictions that inspired the National Party and provided religious legitimation for the banning of television. The following statement from that speech amplified the government's official reasons for not pursuing the introduction of a television service:

> It is true that where a physical danger threatens a country, the Government of that country will try to keep such an invention permanently out of that country. That applies to poison gas, for example; it applies to the atom bomb for example . . . however wonderful and modern the invention may be the physical danger attached to it makes it perfectly clear that you cannot use it. A similar attitude must be adopted when there are spiritual dangers or, when

there is a possibility of harm to the community's social life (Hansaard 1960: col 3002).

Albert Herzog exemplified the religious overtones of the National Party's engagement with media. Hertzog's religious arguments against television were indicative of the implicit yet coercive assertion of religiopolitical power exercised around the medium in the interests of a broader nationalist project. Referring to television as a 'spiritual opium and a spiritual dagga', Herzog contended that 'inside the pill (of television) there is the bitter poison which will ultimately mean the downfall of civilizations' (Hansaard 1966: col 5287). Herzog maintained that one had only to look at the recent retreat of Belgium rule in the Congo to understand the full extent of what television's presence could bring. He argued that it was because of television that the Belgians forgot their superiority over the Congolese and disregarded their position as the custodians of black people and their land (Hansaard 1963b). According to Herzog, 'Is it not sad that the Belgians, influenced by this propaganda, morally collapsed to such an extent that they handed the Congo over at a totally undesirable time to the Bantu who were not ready for it?' (Hansaard 1963b: col 6531). For Herzog, imported content was not an option for a South African television service. Herzog argued that British and American television advanced a particular theme of black superiority over white that was untenable to the South African white population, posed a moral threat to the social fabric of the country, and, finally, presented a security threat that could lead to the collapse of the white man's power in South Africa (Hansaard 1963b: col 6529).

Hertzog consistently espoused the argument that television led to moral degeneration, drawing on examples far and wide to bolster his case for its continued absence. Long touted as television's principal and most expressive opponent, Herzog declared that only his own death would allow for the 'devil's own box for disseminating communism and immorality' to find a place in South African homes (Hansaard 1959, 5020). He argued that imported films and advertising, which showed different race-groups mixing, would cause black Africans to become unhappy with what the apartheid regime considered to be their divinely ordained position in private and public life. Herzog's distaste for television was comprehensive. His anti-television rhetoric covered the entire spectrum of the television threat, calling it a 'one-eyed monster' and comparing viewing to idolatry. The little black box that was television was considered as much a threat to the social and political mission

of apartheid as the 'Swart Gevaar', which was the blanket term used to describe the perceived security threat that the majority black population posed to the apartheid state. Albert Herzog evoked the criminal and sinful nature of television with the following anecdote:

> It is afternoon, and the Bantu houseboy is in the living room cleaning the carpet. Someone has left the TV on. The boy looks up at the screen, sees a chorus line of white girls in scanty costumes. Suddenly seized by lust, he runs upstairs and rapes the lady of the house. (Anonymous 1964: 40)

Presenting this anecdote in parliament and to the public, Herzog was deliberately engaging in a fear-mongering exercise that supported Afrikaner nationalist policies regarding the mixing of races and the potential evils that could emerge if this was permitted. Television intensified the threat of racial mixing since viewing could not be policed in the same way that human interactions could under the apartheid regime. Under the National Party government, two laws specifically forbidding and policing sexual relations between the race groups were instituted: the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, which was a refinement of the existing Immorality Act of 1929, and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 that declared marriages between partners of different races invalid and illegal. For Afrikaner nationalists, Biblical scriptures sanctioned this legislation and the anti-miscegenation laws represented a microcosm of the entire apartheid ideology of keeping race groups separate in every sphere of life. In the early 1950s, the Dutch Reformed Church had already conducted a kind of scriptural analysis that purported that Biblical ideas of unity in Christ pertained only to spiritual unity.

Accordingly, television was evaluated in light of the ethnic nationalist framework of the government and found to be completely antithetical to the project of apartheid. Within the discourse of the government's anti-television rhetoric, elements of the Calvinist paradigm would feature significantly, outfitting the position with explicitly religious overtones that situated the television issue within the broader political vision of the National Party for South Africa.

The unprecedented lag between invention and introduction, despite the economic ability of the country to bear the cost, reveals the distinctive set of concerns and rationalisations of the apartheid government that remained

unimpressed even with the medium's 'propaganda potential' (Nixon 1994: 128). One Afrikaner nationalist declared in parliament, 'We dare not sell our national soul and that at the high cost of introduction and maintenance of television' (Hansaard 1963: 6517). Combined with the fear of imperialist importations in the form of American and British programming that would actively undermine the South African way of life and the sovereignty of Afrikaner nationalism, language, and culture; television, in its absence, was tried and convicted of both crimes, and sins. Whereas this section captured the potency of the religiopolitical project against television, the following section will discuss how this same project was used to orchestrate its introduction.

The Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television

By the end of 1969, under mounting pressure due to satellite technology and public dissatisfaction, particularly among the Afrikaner population, and various political shifts within the leadership of the National Party government, 'The Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television' was launched. By 1971, the commission would report on its research and make recommendations for the introduction of a television service in South Africa.

The commission found that television did not necessarily cause the degeneration of a society; rather, the medium reflected and promoted moral, social, and political degeneration that was already present. Given what it considered to be the well-established values and norms of the apartheid state, i.e. those of Afrikaner Christian Nationalism, the commission was confident that with the correct control measures a television service could contribute positively to the social, cultural, and religious needs of South Africa (Meyer 1971). The commission asked the following question: 'Does South Africa need an additional medium of communication?' (Meyer 1971: 14). In what can be considered the commission's most succinct answer to this question, the following statement was made:

> In a world rapidly approaching a stage where the direct reception of television transmissions from overseas sources via satellites will become a reality, South Africa must have its own television service in order to nurture and strengthen its own spiritual roots, to foster respect and love for its own spiritual heritage and to protect and project the

> South African way of life as it has developed here in its historical context (Meyer 1971: 17).

The above quotation articulates the National Party's recognition of the changing circumstances leading to the inevitable introduction of a television service. What followed in the report were the stipulations that would make a television service possible. Times had changed and therefore it was becoming more of a danger to exclude a television service than to organise its introduction in a controlled manner.

The preceding chapters of the report had dealt with surveys about television and society drawn from a wide range of countries, television service structures, communication theory, and attempts to define the nature and essence of television as an educational tool. In the chapter where the above quotation is located, it was made clear that a television service would be introduced but under strict stipulations and that religion in this case of course the National Party's brand of Christianity, would play the paramount role. At all costs, the commission wished to avoid the pitfalls into which other countries had descended. In line with National Party ideology, the commission declared that should a television service be introduced it would, above all, have to be educational and be founded on the Christian values of the nation.

The commission supported the introduction of a television service provided that it conformed to the following three strict stipulations:

> An SABC controlled radio and television service for South Africa,
> (1) should be in the interests of its entire people;
> (2) give direct and unequivocal expression to the established Christian, Western set of norms and values that are valid for South African society in all spheres of life; and
> (3) strengthen and enrich our own religious and spiritual life (Meyer 1971: 16).

Clearly, the second and third stipulations for television's introduction drew directly on religious conviction to legitimate the introduction of a television service under conditions set out by the state. Based on these stipulations, with the control of television vested in the state, the content of television broadcasting would reflect the National Party's religiopolitical ideology. As a

Christian national medium, television would inform and educate the masses in order to maintain and further develop the established social order as it had been constructed through the religiopolitical ideology of the apartheid state.

Television's 'educational' function, which would blatantly become a propaganda tool, was further solidified when the commission called for the amendment of the Broadcasting Act of 1936 to introduce a provision declaring that all radio and television broadcast material would have 'a Christian and a broad national character' (Meyer 1971: 16). The commission declared that only through this legislative injunction would it be ensured that a television service would not undermine the morality of the country but instead fortify the Christian national project.

The commission carefully acknowledged the arguments levelled against television and cited examples drawn from abroad where television contributed to the 'spiritual, cultural and moral detriment of the society concerned' (Meyer 1971: 9-10). Since National Party ideology was founded on a spiritual calling to ensure the survival of Afrikaner culture and the morals of all people through a system of separate development, this perceived divine calling played a crucial role in the way television in South Africa would be conceived and permitted (Hyslop 2000). Given the well-established values and norms of the apartheid state, the commission was confident that with the correct control measures, a television service could contribute positively to the social and religious needs of all people in the South African context.

Notably this would not be the only time that national policy would be amended to suit the National Party ideology. In 1969, the National Education Policy Act of 1967 was amended to ensure the Christian National essence of education. Since the commission considered a television service as a complementary addition to established social structures, particularly in terms of its potential educational and informational function, it insisted that broadcasting and educational practice be held to the same standard (Meyer 1971). By amending legislation, the commission was able to reconcile the anticipated introduction of television with the overriding political commitment to racial separation and the supremacy of Afrikaner nationalism. Furthermore, the new broadcasting legislation would invest the Minister of Education with the power to determine the admissibility and appropriateness of the broadcast content. This reformation of broadcasting policy, therefore, included an essentially religious injunction by merging television with Christian National Education. This prudential use of religiopolitical power, as authorised and

exercised by the apartheid state, ensured that television would reproduce the Christian National Education project in maintaining the religious, social, political, and cultural supremacy of white Afrikaner identity.

According to the commission, a Christian public broadcasting service would mean that there would be separate facilities for the Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking communities, as well as for Black, Coloured, and Asian communities. Having declared that for the public's interest the South African television service would be educational, cultural, and informational in its programming structure and content, thereby reflecting the Christian values of the National Party ideology, the commission found that through strict control television could be introduced:

> The Commission is convinced that a service that meets all the high standards and requirements dealt with above will develop into a positive force in the religious, spiritual, cultural, social and economic life of the country and all its people (Meyer 1971: 34).

Through this statement the commission made manifest the National Party's ideology of a Calvinist-inspired Christian state under the system of separate development. Where television was once considered the antithesis of the state and of Christian Nationalism, it was now considered a vital aide for promoting and projecting the spiritual heritage of the apartheid state at home and abroad. The commission had ordained the establishment of a state-controlled, Christian-oriented television service. Some scholars, alluding to the states of emergency and civil unrest that characterised South African society in the late 1970's and most of the 1980's have called the introduction of television the beginning of the end for apartheid in South Africa. While it is not within the scope of this paper to assess or elaborate on this claim, it is important to note that even before the official end of apartheid, religion and broadcasting was already raised as a topic for democratic reform (Hyslop 2000; Falkoff 2010; Krabill 2010).

Reconfiguring Religion and Public Broadcasting in the Democratic Era

The previous section investigated religion's role in the absence and intro-

duction of television during the apartheid era while this section explores the role of religion in the democratic reform in the public broadcasting sector. In 1991 at the historic *Jabulani: Freedom of the Airwaves Conference,* delegates from a range of South African organisations met to discuss the future of public broadcasting. The conference recommendations would have a far-reaching effect on broadcasting legislation and SABC editorial policies. The committee tasked with addressing the issue of religious broadcasting noted the Christian National character that dominated broadcasting and called for 'steps to be taken' in the broader reformation of public broadcasting in order to remove this bias. Emphasising the 'importance of the religious/spiritual dimension of society.' The committee made it clear that it was not condemning religion in general or even Christianity from public broadcasting. Instead, it was denouncing the 'profoundly ideological' as opposed to 'religious orientation' of Christian Nationalism (Jabulani! Conference Proceedings 1991: 13). According to Hackett (2006a: 169), '[w]ithin the contested power relations of the mass-mediated public sphere religious broadcasting policy and practice constitute a significant microsphere'. The vital role that religious broadcasting could play in, configuring and representing the relationship between religion and the post-apartheid state is made clear when considering the historical relationship between the Dutch Reformed Church and the state. Broadcast media was identified as an ideal site to modify and broadcast the new story of South Africa to mass audiences.

The aura of controversy that surrounded the establishment of the religious broadcasting genre reflected broader efforts to make sense of religious and cultural diversity in the new context of democratic constitutionalism. During apartheid freedom of religion was granted to all South Africans. However, this freedom was nominal and consistently undermined by the religiopolitical commitments of the National Party government to the Dutch Reformed Church. The 1996 Constitution ensured that freedom of religion and freedom of expression, including religious expression would be promoted and protected by the values of democracy. Public broadcasting, as both a national public pedagogical site and as a state organ would therefore, be obliged to enact these constitutional promises.

In the early days of the public broadcaster's democratic reformation, as Russell Baker has observed, different objectives organised the relationship between religions and the SABC. Baker points out that religions might see religious broadcasting as a platform for 'addressing the religious needs of their

established community and to fulfill their prophetic and proselyting functions' (Baker 2000: 226). Whereas previously, religious broadcasting on television was characterised by conservative, confessional Christian programming that largely bolstered the racist ideology of the National Party, in post-apartheid South Africa one form of redress could be found in the provision of 'meditational and worship programmes' for all religious groups (Baker 2000: 226). On the other hand, the broadcaster's objective in providing religions with space on the airwaves would be underpinned by the broader mandate of public broadcasting derived from legislative requirements and constitutional imperatives 'to address a diversity of religious needs and also to facilitate the process of religious and cultural tolerance and understanding, and thereby its goal of nation-building' (Baker 2000: 226). The onus fell on the broadcaster to balance meditational and worship programming with documentary or actuality programming in a way that would fulfill policy mandates and reasonably accommodate public expectations about the new form of religious broadcasting that the SABC promised to provide.

Prior to 1996, religious broadcasting was managed in-house by the SABC under the auspices of the television news department. The Religious Broadcasting Panel made up of religious representatives from various faith communities in South Africa was established to mediate between the SABC and religious communities. Baker (2000: 243) suggests that the formation of this panel could be read as an,

> acknowledgment that the SABC has no principled basis for acting as a theological judge when broadcasting the viewpoints of various religions and denomination.

This allowed for some religiously sanctioned production control over broadcasting material but this arrangement did not last very long.

As Stig Hjarvard (2011) has noted, the institutional logic of the media can subsume the internal logic of religions. Hjavard's proposition proved true in 1997 when the SABC, as a result of a huge budget deficit, announced massive cutbacks to programming which resulted in a 75% reduction in programming output. The decrease in airtime had far reaching implications for African religions, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism's presence on public broadcast television (Hackett 2006: 172). In response to the cutbacks, the Religious Broadcasting Panel, which allegedly had not been consulted during the

decision-making that affected the genre, commented,

> We are concerned that these decisions are made without any consultation with its own panel and without even informing members of the panel before making the announcements. Is this the practice of a public broadcaster? The action is a sad reflection on the SABC and its ability to understand the requirements of a democratic nation, let alone ordinary decent behaviour toward people with whom you have made an agreement (Worsdale 1997).

Hackett (2006b: 172) shows how, after 1997, the SABC had, in its annual reports, progressively omitted its earlier endeavour to represent 'all faiths in an unbiased and appropriately representative manner'. This, together with the reduction in airtime, indicated that religious broadcasting was moving further away from its original mandate and based on the response from the Religious Broadcasting Panel it was clear that this new orientation did not reflect the programmatic desires of the religious communities that it represented.

The Religious Broadcasting Policy of 2003

The SABC Religious Broadcasting Policy is a guide for all those working on the production of religious broadcasting context. The policy embodies the corrective, generative, and representative ability of media in producing and circulating particular depictions of religion and religious diversity. The policy reflects the profoundly political character of South African public broadcast television, as well as the way that religion, as a concept and practice, has been moulded into the service of the nation-building project on this platform.

The objectification of religion in the Religious Broadcasting Policy raises questions about the inclusion and exclusion of particular groups in accessing resources and airtime. African culture and religion remains one of the areas where the broadcaster has systematically failed to provide satisfactory redress, particularly in the provision of airtime (Mndende 1999b: 94). Dr. Nokuzola Mndende, African Traditional Religion expert and practitioner claims that over and above the lack of broadcast time, the SABC marginalised African Traditional Religions, through additional regulatory measures. Once employed by the SABC, Mndende claims that Christian programming is

allowed to go relatively unrestricted even when comments made therein explicitly denigrate African Traditional Religions, whereas African Traditional Religions programming is forbidden to even make mention of the connection between Christianity and the colonial era in South African history (1999b: 95). Other religious groups have levelled similar complaints, accusing the broadcaster of a Christian bias while questioning disparate airtime allocations, and pointing to a general insensitivity towards religious diversity within religious groups (Scharnick-Udemans 2016: 188).

The SABC declares that the major religions of South Africa, based on the most recent census figures, are Christianity, African Religion, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism and religious demographics determine the allocation of airtime for faith-specific programming. Therefore, although all religions are considered equal and are protected by SABC editorial policy from discrimination by any other religious group, that equity is not translated into equal broadcasting time on public service television nor does it allow for the consideration of diverse practices and experiences within religious traditions. As indicated by the crudeness of a system of parity of esteem, religion in the SABC broadcast policy, although obviously considered an important area of public life, is treated with an absence of sensitivity to diversity, which calls into question the basis upon which religious communities are granted airtime for religious expression.

Despite the disparities in airtime allocations, the SABC aligns religious broadcasting with national discourse about unity in diversity. Referring to religion as culture and faith, the SABC states,

> Within its diversity there are human values that call for the promotion of social harmony, national healing, reconciliation, social reconstruction and nation building (SABC Editorial Policy 2003: 45).

The SABC conflates culture and faith with the characteristics of humanity and morality, claiming that there are human values that emanate from culture and faith that correspond to national values. Situated in the context of the broader nation-building endeavours of the modern democratic state, the policy also reflects global trends in making sense of the relationship between universal human rights that provide the right to particularity of ethnic, cultural, and religious identities, and a national commitment to protect and promote religious and cultural diversity (see Kymlicka & Norman 2003). In order to do

so, it is necessary for the SABC to essentialise religion, contradicting its obligation to the particular by constructing an overarching commonality among religions, for the purposes of serving the nation-building project of South Africa.

Over and above the discursive project of the politics of religious diversity within the policy of the SABC, the effect of how religious material is mediated through technological means also plays a significant role in shaping understandings of the lived reality of religion in South Africa. The positivist tone of the policy requires that the 'dialectics of mediation and immediacy' in media policy and practice is made to 'disappear in the act of mediation' (Eisenlohr 2012: 44). The SABC Religious Broadcasting Policy attempts to provide a reflection of the reality of South African society. As I have shown thus far, in the South African context, mediums are saturated by the socio-political environment in which they are positioned. Public broadcast media are not only funded and sustained by the state in the form of multiple and significant financial bailouts but the institutional structures and policies of the institutions which control these mediums are profoundly implicated with much broader national projects that are responsible for the kinds of material that are produced. In the South African context, media and the processes of mediation manage to recede from the political underpinnings of their emergence by appealing to a national discourse of unity within diversity.

With religious broadcasting, the SABC undertakes to provide two kinds of programming. The first is faith-specific programming. According to the SABC Religious Broadcasting Policy, faith-specific programming is given to the major religions of South Africa in order to afford these groups a space for self-expression and celebration of their religions 'without censure' (SABC Editorial Policy 2003: 45). However, the meaning of 'without censure' is subjected to limitations set by the SABC, which insists that within religious broadcasting programmes particular care is taken to ensure that 'there is sensitivity to the beliefs of others, and that no religion is either attacked or undermined' (SABC Editorial Policy 2003: 45). Faith-specific programmes are defined as meditational and worship programmes. The policy allows the discretion of the presenter, as a 'member of a particular religious organisation,' to determine the specific religious content of the programme.

Multi-faith programming is considered by the SABC to have an explicitly educational aim. Audiences are positioned as like-minded citizens, who see the common human values that the SABC assumes are inherent in all

religious traditions. In its tone and content, multi-faith programming is meant to promulgate socially valuable attributes such as religious dialogue, respect, and understanding. In a Request for Proposal Booklet published in 2006, the SABC lays down the specific regulations to which both multi-faith and faith-specific religious broadcasting must conform.

Objectives for Religious Broadcasting

- To provide a platform for dialogue, ethics, morals and values—promote inter-faith understanding and dialogue
- To contribute to religious understanding and tolerance whilst engaging South Africans in dialogue in the process of nation building
- To affirm religion as an important cornerstone of society and family whilst celebrating the richness, unity, uniqueness and diversity (SABC RFP Book 2006).

These objectives provide more scope for the production of multi-faith programming than the 2003 Religious Broadcast Policy and place more constraints on the production of faith-specific programming. As it stands in the SABC policy booklet, read in conjunction with these proposal guidelines, it is clear that the SABC is predominantly interested in representing those religions or those parts of religions that reflect the educational and nation-building projects of religious broadcasting. In reflecting on the change of tone in religious broadcasting after the airtime cutbacks of 1997, Hackett (2006a: 174) observes that under the SABC's desire,

> to be seen as promoting national harmony and integration, rather than division and conflict, producers may opt for a pastiche of viewpoints, rather than allowing direct confrontation.

The representation of religion on public broadcast television is subjected to a number of underlying factors of which the educational imperative of religious broadcasting is consistently foregrounded. This imperative is problematic because there is no coherent model for how to represent and manage religious diversity on public platforms. The concept of religious diversity is drastically oversimplified in the SABC policy. The notion of religious pluralism in the

policy is based on anecdotal evidence substantiated with out-dated census data. It provides little more than a superficial account of the diversity of religions found in South Africa. The idea of diversity within religious traditions is brushed over in the policy, once again re-enforcing the impression that the purpose of religious broadcasting has less to do with religion than with nation building.

Making Sense of Religion's Regulation on Public Broadcast Television

During apartheid the SABC was central in epitomising what Christopher Merrett (1994) has referred to as informal censorship. Informal censorship was constituted by extra-legal repression that supported the broader national control mechanisms instituted by the state. Merrett observes that in 1981,

> 79 per cent of broadcast time was given to the government, 21 per cent to opponents within the system, and, of course, none at all to those who questioned the very basis upon which South African politics were constructed (1994: 90).

Over and above skewed resource allocations and the direct censorship of ideologically undesirable material, programming was also developed with a built-in censorship mechanism that resulted in the gross stereotyping of 'women, racial characteristics, and political belief in the interests of the dominant apartheid ideology' (Merrett 1994: 69).

Within the context of post-apartheid South Africa and the freedom of expression provisions of the Constitution, the conventional notion of censorship as repressive state actions provides a limited understanding of censorship. The undertones of the restriction of free speech or free expression, and the control and suppression of the circulation of information would be directly contested by the values of openness, transparency, and independence advanced by the Constitution and embodied in the mandate of the SABC. Although accusations of censorship that have been levelled against the institution have been largely left unaddressed, explicit censorship would not be tolerated. If sense is to be made of the role of religious broadcasting policy in delivering on the SABC's nation-building objectives and programming

obligations to faith specific groups, common-sense understandings of censorship must be shelved. These only provide basic understandings of that which is prohibited from broadcast, and overlook the 'productive aspects' of censorship (Kaur & Mazzarella 2009: 6). Thus, the generative capacity of censorship becomes important to consider. As Raminder Kaur and William Mazzarella (2009:7) confirm, 'Far from silencing, censorship can be read as a relentless proliferation of discourses on normative modes of desiring, of acting, of being in the world'.

In establishing a particular image of religion and religious diversity for the production of broadcast material, the SABC's Religious Broadcasting Policy has developed a discourse for regulating religion in post-apartheid South Africa. However, since, in the South African context, the approach that is taken to regulating religion and religious diversity is underwritten by constitutional provisions about religion and religious expression, and therefore supported by human-rights and law-based discourse; censorship as cultural or religious regulation is seen as integral part of the context that makes freedom of expression possible. Whereas explicit censorship of religious groups would be considered intolerable, based on the national goals and constitutional framework of the SABC, religious regulation in the form of editorial policies ensures that these mechanisms which could ostensibly be read as censorship are advanced as an alignment with democratic principles.

These democratic principles are enlivened by a preoccupation with the past, present, and future of South Africa and South Africans. As former commissioning editor for the SABC and broadcast industry professional Pat Van Heerden (2013) reflected on her experience working for the national broadcaster,

> I am frightened by the idea that 'our people' are not interested in anything else but seeing their own reflections, a kind of myopic narcissistic nationalism. This at a time when a connected world is calling into question the over-structured national identities in our geo-political landscape. But according to many at the SABC, 'our people' need a saturation of their own reflections.

While a content analysis of programmes would be necessary to affirm to what extent these observations are accurate, based on the content of the policy, it is clear that the broadcaster has come to sanction the production of a regulated

depiction of religion that is consistent with the constitutionally sanctioned nation-building endeavours of the state.

The post-apartheid story of religious broadcasting is a one of the most revealing in exemplifying the challenges of building a democratic nation from the fractured and fragmented vestiges of an oppressive system. In partnership with the state, the SABC has developed a format for the broadcasting of religion, religions, and religious diversity that is meant to cultivate a collective national consciousness and a shared moral sensibility among South Africans. In representing religion, the SABC regulates religion. The aura of legitimacy for the broadcaster's control of representations of religion and religious diversity is drawn from the Constitution of South Africa, which does not create a strict separation between state and religion. On the contrary, instead of being relegated from public to private or being subjected to the free market principle of competition, religion is invited by the public broadcaster into the political economy of broadcasting as an integral part of the development of a new South African nation. Furthermore, the stringent rigours of broadcasting practice mean that religious actors are rendered little agency; they do not enter the public sphere on their own terms. Very little room is provided for the spontaneous exchange of religious ideas. Broadcasting practices and technological mediation create a ready-made mould, a storyboard, so to speak, in which religion is invited to read from a national script. From the pre-production phases to the times and dates of transmission, religion is regulated. Rather than being set free by the public broadcaster, religion has been cast in a supporting role in a film starring the new South African state (Scharnick Udemans 2016).

Conclusion

The development of the media landscape in post-apartheid South Africa does not correspond to the shape and form of media transformation across the continent. Media ownership has not been decentralised. The state monopoly of broadcast media remains largely intact, although it is not enforced in a repressive manner. This arrangement is out of step with other African contexts, wherein the effect of democracy on media has been characterised by deregulation, liberalisation, and globalisation, which are justified under constitutional auspices and nation building endeavours. The differences

between South Africa and other developing African states in terms of both political and media reform illustrates the variability of democracy and the contestation surrounding the materialisation and representation of religion and religious diversity. Whereas the apartheid history of public broadcasting has shown religion's role in the regulation of public media, through assessing the way in which the SABC has mediated constitutional conceptions of religion through institutional practices and evaluating what this means for the representation and expression of religion and religious diversity, this article has shown that religious broadcasting in the context of the South African democracy is less about the promise religious representation and more about religious regulation in service to the nation.

This article has sought to provide the historical and critical foundation from which a study of the contemporary relationship between religion and public broadcast television in South Africa could be considered with the scrutiny necessary to advance the field of religion and media studies that is currently underdeveloped in South Africa. In highlighting religion as a central concept for analysis within the history and development of the South African mediascape, it has been demonstrated that many democratic practices and configurations while well intentioned and generally accepted as normative remain necessarily contested and in process. In doing so, this paper hopes to provide an impetus for studies of religion and media that move beyond descriptions and explanations of media forms and content; and that instead include religion as an crucial critical lens for understanding the depth and breadth of socio-political life as it unfolds in this media saturated age.

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