

Mediated Religion in South Africa
Balancing Air-time and Rights Claims
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At one level, this essay on religious broadcasting in South Africa addresses the heightened relevance of the media sphere in today's global network society for the identity and survival of religious collectivities (see Castells 1996).¹ But it is perhaps more concerned with the growing significance of the local and global media in shaping attitudes of religious tolerance or intolerance, and in managing religious diversity.² Recent scholarship on religious discrimination and persecution more generally demonstrates the particular vulnerability of new religious movements and minority religious groups in this respect (Adams 2000; Richardson 1995, 2000).³ In fact British legal scholar Malcolm Evans goes so far as to claim that "the origins of contemporary forms of human rights protection flow from attempts to protect the religious freedoms of certain identified and vulnerable religious communities" (Evans 2000: 182).

Hent de Vries frames these interconnections well when he argues that "[t]he relationship between religion and media sheds light on the question of how cultural identity and difference are constituted, as well as on how they relate to the aims of sociopolitical integration" (Vries 2001: 21) (cf. Spitulnik 1993: 300). Because of its paradoxical universalizing and particularizing tendencies "[r]eligion ... forms the condition of possibility *and* impossibility for the political." Rightly chiding Casanova for his neglect of the media sphere, he suggests that "[t]he mediatized return of the religious" illustrates "an increasingly complicated *negotiation* between the private and public spheres" (Vries 2001: 17, emphases in text). This accounts for some of the new forms

of regulation of expression of religious communities being developed by both state and non-state actors.⁴

Studies of Africa's rapidly expanding and diversifying media sector, notably of the cultural and religious dimensions of media production, distribution, reception, and consumption, are growing apace (see Meyer, Larkin and Schulz, in this volume). However, insufficient attention has been paid to the ways in which media institutions and representations may constitute an important site of conflict between religions and the state, and among religious groups. So recognizing with Debra Spitulnik that "the mass media are extremely potent areas of political struggle" (Spitulnik 1993: 303) the present essay examines the case of South Africa and the various negotiations--at times acrimonious--over public religious broadcasting at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). These debates came to a head as South Africa moved into its post-apartheid phase in the 1990s. The literature on the role of religious organizations, predominantly the Christian churches, in this political process is extensive (Cochrane, Gruchy, and Martin 1999; Gruchy 1995; Gruchy 1995; Kilian 1993; Villa-Vicencio 1992; Moosa 2001; Sundkler 1991; Johnston 1994; Oosthuizen 1999; Tayob 1998; Chidester 1996; Gifford 1988; Graybill 1995; Walshe 1995).⁵ The education sector as a politically strategic location for religious representation is well documented also (Chidester 1994, 2001; Dlamini 1994; Mitchell 1993; Steyn 1999; Stonier 1998; Sachs 1993). So too is the significance of the media sector in facilitating the new political dispensation (Tomaselli, 2001; Tomaselli, 2001, Netshitenzhe, 1999).⁶ Less well analyzed is the religious dimension of public broadcasting; for example, the emerging policy questions surrounding religious programming, and issues of control and representation (Baker 2000; Nkosi 1994).

The chapter thus seeks to document and explore this neglected interrelationship of religion and media in the South African context, not just because of the light it throws on the role of public religion in a nation-state in political transition, but also because it provides an important insight into the mechanics of religious representation in the mediated public sphere. This “production and management of meaning” occurs not just at the formal, institutional level but also as the result of internal (and, in the case of South Africa, external) debates and conflicts (cf. McLagan 2000). Discussions will be primarily limited to public broadcasting, and the medium of television, in particular, for reasons of space. As Graham Mytton observes, most broadcasting in Africa is still “centralized, national and state-dominated” (Mytton 2000: 28).⁷ This is especially the case for television (see Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001: 140). So despite current scholarly trends to link the electronic mass media with global scapes and flows (Urry 2000: 161), and to favor “conceptualizing the world as a whole,” I have chosen to focus on a nationally constituted society as a unit of analysis (King 1997: viii). Transnational and translocal forces are clearly active in South Africa, through the agency of religious and media institutions, which can serve to deterritorialize the process of imagining communities. Michael Herzfeld comes to the rescue by arguing that “the various kinds of media, ethnographically studied in context, can provide a very close look at the interaction of the local, the national and the international” and that anthropology’s “subversive localism” can unmask globalization for the “realist fiction” it has become (Herzfeld 2001: 312) (see especially Gunsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002).

Broader Contextual Issues

My ongoing research on religious conflict and violence in Africa more generally (Hackett 2004), and in Nigeria specifically (Hackett forthcoming), notably in connection with the imposition of Shari`a by northern states, clearly indicates the instrumentality of the media sphere in relations between religions and the state, between religions, and between religious organizations and their followers (Hackett 2003). Conflict between religious groups is commonly linked to rights of access to the national media. Because of the asymmetry of resources, capacity and influence, some religious organizations find themselves at the head of the media table while others may not even enjoy the crumbs from underneath it. These patterns of exclusion and inclusion, coupled with issues of fair representation, have been exacerbated by the processes of democratization and liberalization. While I am not here addressing media representations of religion(s), nor the content of mediated messages, it is worth noting that government and legal authorities can be influenced by negative portrayals of non-mainstream groups (Richardson 2000:125, n. 30) (Dillon and Richardson 1994). Bias and misinformation affect whether air-time is accorded to minority groups. It is popular to oppose the “cult menace” (Richardson 2000: 115). We should not underestimate the influence of globalizing discourses of satanism and anti-cultism which emanate principally from U.S. courts and the media, as well as religious and para-religious organizations (Richardson 1996). Currently, several European countries, notably France, have jumped on the anti-cult bandwagon (Hervieu-Leger 2001) (for Africa generally, see Hackett 2002) (on South Africa, see Faure 2000).

In most post-colonial African states the stakes of religious coexistence have changed (cf. Haynes 1996, 1995; Gifford 1998). Mainstream religious organizations which enjoyed the patrimony of colonial and independence governments now find themselves threatened by newer

religious formations, notably of the revivalist type. These minority groups are often acutely aware of their rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression.⁸ They claim these rights in the new spirit of communal self-determination, constitutionalism and the global *lingua franca* of international human rights that is sweeping the African continent.⁹ In post-apartheid South Africa, this is commonly referred to as the new “rights culture” or the new “human rights dispensation.” Furthermore, the liberalization of the media sector has opened up all sorts of new outlets for expression, many of which escape government control in relation to balancing and non-discrimination. With the growing dominance of the market paradigm, air time is frequently bought rather than meted out. In other words, ownership and commercial interests of media institutions increasingly trump respect for national diversity (Tomaselli, Tomaselli, and Muller 2001). This causes frustration to many religious organizations who maintain a state-centric mentality; but savvy religious leaders, usually of the younger and more entrepreneurial variety, know that a good media presence is proselytizing writ large in a competitive religious environment and are prepared to foot the bill (Hackett 1998).

The right to disseminate one’s religion easily surpasses the freedom to believe and to practice one’s religion as the most controversial aspect of religious freedom.¹⁰ African constitutions may not accord the same primacy to free speech as is the case in the United States, where the judicial protection of free speech has increasingly guided the protection of related constitutional principles (Richards 1999: 14). However, the structural connections between free speech and religious freedom or liberty can be noted (Richards 1999: 9). Almost all African states have included in their constitutions a bill of rights (van der Vyver 1999: 110). Religious freedom features prominently in one form or another in those constitutions, although it is often subject to various conditions. The media sphere constitutes a critical “test site” where the

interpretation and implementation of these “new” rights can be publicly evaluated by all concerned.

Contestation and Consultation

The story of religious broadcasting in South Africa

South Africa offers an illuminating case for considering the relation between religion, media and the public sphere. Since the first universal franchise election in 1994, there has been a widespread effort at every level of society “to introduce new and better, more democratic, more demographically equitable, more politically and gender sensitive ways of doing things” (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001: 123). There has been an accompanying debate about how to manage cultural diversity in a way that reflects constitutional ideals (“united in ... diversity”) and does not evoke negative historical memory (Tayob 1998). The reform of the media has been central to these socio-political changes in the “new South Africa,” for, in the words of leading media analysts, Ruth Teer-Tomaselli and Keyan Tomaselli, “newspapers, magazines, television and radio are both the *sites* and the *instruments* of transformation” (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001:123, emphases in text). As “sites” of transformation, the structures, management, ownership, and workforce of the media industries have been subject to debate and reform. As “instruments” of transformation, the media provide the platforms for debate, the stories, the images and visions of personal and national identity, both real and ideal.

Within the contested power relations of the mass mediated public sphere, religious broadcasting policy and practice constitute a significant micro-sphere. Given the former close ties between the apartheid regime and the Dutch Reformed Church, the reapportioning of airtime for the country’s diverse religious groups has been a key element in the refashioning of the South

African state. David Chidester highlights the transformation in state broadcasting as offering not just “new possibilities for broadening the representation of South African religious communities in public media” but also as a “growth area for the future of the study of religion in South Africa” with its critical potential for “analyzing symbols, myths, and rituals that generate powerful moods and motivations” and engaging structures of power (Chidester 1998:17-18).

Under apartheid, the SABC, as a tool of the state, offered only Christian programming. Despite the political constraints of the time, several religious broadcasters objected to the juxtaposition of news and religious programs as a strategy for displacing “the actual context of conditions” (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001: 105).¹¹ The very conservative orientation of the programming and restrictions on preaching with political content drove a number of English-language churches in 1979 to challenge the racism and narrowness of the SABC. They, the South African Council of Churches (SACC), even appealed to the churches to boycott the SABC and to consider alternative broadcasting facilities. While they failed to counter the intolerance and extreme right-wing views of the organizer of religious television programs, they took advantage of the greater flexibility of radio with its live broadcasts. Some preachers were able to address socially relevant and politically sensitive issues through such rhetorical devices as allegory and analogy (ibid.: 107).

In one of the few published analyses of religious broadcasting policy in South Africa, Russell Baker, a research associate at the main hub of media studies in South Africa, the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, directed by Keyan Tomaselli, aptly describes it as characterized by “contestation and consultation” as well as “progressive developments” (Baker 2000: 237). He traces these developments through various policy documents specifically oriented to the coverage of religion, devoting particular attention

to the more recent phase of religious broadcasting policy. He notes the role played by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) in establishing a discussion forum--the Independent Forum for Religious Broadcasting (IFRB)--aimed at addressing the problems associated with religious broadcasting and SABC's consultative process (ibid.: 242). This resulted in the production of the IFRB's Charter for Religious Broadcasting in 1984. The forum consisted of members representing the various Christian churches (Afrikaans, English, and African Independent), as well as the Hindu, Muslim and Jewish communities. They advocated "fundamental changes in the relationships between religions and churches and the SABC" and "both equitable distribution of broadcasting time and greater theological control over the content of religious programmes" (ibid.: 242-243).¹²

In response to these public concerns and the new democratic dispensation, SABC circulated a Working Draft Policy on Religious Broadcasting to religious organizations in October 1994 (for the text, see Baker 2000: 238-241) and established the Religious Broadcasting Panel (RBP) in the same year.¹³ The RBP met several times between 1995 and 1998, serving as interface between the SABC and religious communities.¹⁴ It set up committees to address concerns of individual communities, such as traditional African religious groups, who complained about being included in the category of African independent churches, or as nothing else but culture (see Mndende 1998). Steps were taken to cultivate interfaith programming, and to improve training and development for staff from previously disadvantaged communities.¹⁵ The head of Religion from the British Broadcasting Corporation conducted workshops at the major centers. Dangor notes that one of the most heated debates in the RBP was over time allocation (see below).

Public Storm and Independent Criticism

A particularly revealing source regarding the contentious exchanges between SABC and the religious communities is the retiring chairman's report to the annual forum of the IFRB delivered on November 16, 1998.¹⁶ In this report Bishop Peter Lee refers to the mandate of the IFRB, namely "to make religious representation on behalf of the religious community into the broad process of broadcast policy revision in South Africa." He alludes to the "considerable public controversy" related to religious broadcasting between 1996 and 1998. He attributes this controversy to two reasons: first, by SABC's unilateral decision "to breach the agreement solemnly made with the religious community regarding religious broadcasting" and second, the "drastic" reduction in amounts of time available for religious programs. He blames this decision for raising a "public storm" about the place of religion generally on the airwaves not just of the public broadcaster but also those of commercial and community license holders. The Chairman also talks of the "bad faith" created by SABC's reneging on its earlier commitment to the religious community, its public lies, and its poor treatment of the RBP. This panel, according to him, "suffered huge frustration and eventually found itself sidelined within the SABC"--a situation which he claims was ongoing. He also criticizes the lack of transparency regarding some of the later elections to the panel. Furthermore, he strongly bemoans the lack of reference to religious broadcasting in a government White Paper, despite representations by the IFRB at various broadcasting policy colloquia and the earlier "furore" over religious programming.

Bishop Lee vehemently criticizes the "secularizing tendency of the present management" for ignoring the grassroots influence of religious organizations and for "overriding the spirit of the Constitution." He goes on to cite section 31 of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution which guarantees the rights of cultural, linguistic and religious groups. Despite this provision, the

broadcasting White Paper still ominously omits the category of “religious” groups, while referring to cultural and linguistic ones. Lee also regrets the lack of serious treatment of religious issues in a published discussion paper on a code of conduct for broadcasters, limiting consideration to “blasphemy and possible offence to religious sensitivities.” He ends the report by pledging to lobby the government on these issues and by urging the respective religious groupings to challenge this ongoing “process of being sidelined by public policy.”

When SABC announced cutbacks to cultural and religious programming in 1997 (75% reduction to 106 minutes per week or 0.5% of its total output), and informed the public that in the future all magazine programs would be sourced from outside the Corporation, an “enraged public and religious community” joined the fray of confused and upset staffers and independents.¹⁷ Rev. Martin Frische, chairperson of the Association of Christian Broadcasters, graphically accused the SABC of cutting the tree on which it sat by ignoring the (moral) importance of religion in society. Dr. Ed McCain, acting president of United Christian Action, spoke of the “high-handed, dictatorial attitude” of the SABC in failing to consult with religious bodies over the cutbacks. The outraged response was not just limited to the Christian constituency, Abie Dawjee, a spokesman for Jamiatul Ulama (KwaZulu-Natal) (a council of Muslim theologians) and a member of IFRB, stated: “[w]e are appalled at this cut. The religious majority, a vast share of the population, will be deprived of broadcasting...” He went on to bemoan the loss of the small gains that the Muslim community had made in the face of Christian-dominated broadcasting.

Mediating State and Religious Interests

SABC as the “pulse of Africa’s creative spirit”

From 1998 onwards, following the revision and approval of the RBP, SABC, in its annual report (for 1997-1998), described its (new) role with regard to religious programs as follows.

The SABC, in its role as a public service broadcaster, has an obligation to reflect all faiths in an unbiased and appropriately representative manner. This, therefore, sees the presence of dedicated religious broadcasts on both radio and television. These cover the various formats of devotional, worship service, magazine, panel discussion, phone-in and music programmes catering for a wide spectrum of ages and preferences, and in all 11 of the official languages.¹⁸

Referring to the RBP, “which tries to ensure respect for all religions and equitable representation for the expression of each faith within the total amount of religious broadcasting air time” (ibid.), the SABC report further states that “the total amount of time allocated to religious broadcasting should be such that those religions with the smallest ratio of air time enjoy meaningful and sufficient programming on a faith-specific basis” (ibid.). The report also indicates the adjustment in guidelines for the allocation of airtime for the various religions:

Christianity	70% (as previously)
Hinduism	7.5% (increased from 5%)
Islam	7.5% (increased from 5%)
ATR	10% (increased from 5%)
Judaism	5% (increased from 3%) ¹⁹

By the following year, the 1998-99 annual report had dropped the reference to the goal of reflecting “all faiths in an unbiased and appropriately representative manner” and, significantly,

it did not feature in any of the subsequent reports. In the report of 2000-2001, the mention of “respect for all religions and equitable representation” has disappeared, yet the report describes the “positive impact on television audiences” of religious programs as they “continued to educate and inform viewers about the various religions and the life of their communities.”²⁰ It vaunts the fact that the program, “Crux,” on the life of the Church, was one of the first magazine programs in South Africa to avail itself of virtual reality technology, and that the program, “Crossing the Divide,” brought together a pagan and an occultist on air. The highlighting of this particular encounter seems to trivialize an otherwise important and innovative program.

The noticeably slicker website in the 2000-01 report was clearly seeking to reflect the diverse South African religious scene, and one could see images of black Zionist Christians, with a woman drumming in the foreground, and the Torah. On the page outlining plans for the future, there was a composite graphic with images of a multitude of religious leaders and practitioners. Apart from the Pope, the majority of faces were non-white, with Hindus and Zulu traditional worshipers in the foreground. The 2003 report has less complex images, but there is a stunning full-page image of a female Zionist worshipper <FIGURE 8.1 Religious programmes for all faiths. SABC programming reflects a mix of South Africa’s major religions--Christianity, African Religion, Islam, Hinduism and Judaism. SABC 2002-2003 Annual Report’>

A number of tradition-specific programs were developed for television in the post-1994 period, but these were consolidated under the rubric of the popular and award-winning multi-faith documentary, “Issues of Faith,” or featured as documentaries.²¹ Some Christian programs retained their separate status--an option preferable to the more conservative end of the Christian spectrum. A new development is the Sunday morning breakfast show (“Spirit Sundae”) which aims to be “inclusive of the full spectrum of religion in South Africa.”²² With its more creative

and flexible approach, it covers topics “ranging from current affairs to the arts, religious festivals, cooking and holistic healing.” In addition, there are worship programs and evening devotions for each of the main religious traditions (e.g. the Jewish Voice, Aum, Izwi Labantu, Reflections on Faith), as well as and morning devotions in various languages (Afrikaans, Sotho, Nguni) which reflect the variety of expressions of Christianity around the country. These devotional programs continue to claim the highest audience ratings.

In terms of “multi-faith” programs (and “faith” is clearly the SABC term of preference nowadays), there are the “Issues of Faith” documentaries on SABC2, which discuss topics such as liberation, caste, *ubuntu*, and human rights in relation to different religious communities. On SABC1, which aims to reach more youthful audiences, there is “Tapestries of Faith.” Along these lines, SABC1 broadcasts “You Gotta Have Faith” every Friday morning. This is billed as a “life orientation program” which discusses the way religion affects the choices people make in life. A 2001 program series, “Paul and the Menu: Cooking with Spirit,” explored and celebrated religious multiculturalism through food under the aegis of a zany Anglican priest.²³ The popular “Free Spirit,” a program trendily described as “less about religion and more about spirituality,” and destined “to enhance the lives of spiritually open South Africans” is the brainchild of Religion Commissioning Editor Yashika Singh.²⁴ It is not only repeated midweek, but also has a related website.²⁵ Music programs tend to have a Christian emphasis, such as the award-winning “Gospel Gold” <Figure 8.2 Gospel Gold: Among the top performing religious programmes on television, it provides a platform for South Africa’s gospel music industry. SABC 2002-2003 Annual Report> and the ever-popular BBC classic “Songs of Praise.” A gospel talent show, “Gospel Star” has also been added to the “Crux” (the Christian magazine program) slot on SABC1.

Wanting 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 current (global) trend toward framing news and issues in a much more entertainment, human interest guise may also mitigate conflictual differences between religious positions, and neutralize any “prophetic” critique of the state by religious leaders. Although, to SABC’s credit, they air some hard-hitting documentaries, such as the one (in 2001) on the controversial Nigerian Pentecostal miracle-worker, T.B. Joshua, who has been attracting supplicants from southern Africa.

Current Challenges

In addition to trying to balance the (devotional and informational) needs of South Africa’s diverse religious constituencies and promote (inter)religious understanding and tolerance in the interests of nation-building, two of the most contentious issues that SABC has had to face on the religious broadcasting front have been outside funding, and “the neglect of African culture in the public media.”²⁶ The question of funding became critical in the late 1990s with drastic cutbacks, forcing creative measures on the part of the religious broadcasting staff.²⁷ For a time American Christian programming took up the slack (as it has in many other African countries), but this was eventually seen as compromising the democratization process in the country. Moreover, there was reluctance to allow religious groups to use independent funding as a means of securing additional broadcast time. However, due to financial considerations, a decision was taken to allow selective sales of air-time, sponsorships and classical advertising as long as “profits from such endeavors enable SABC to fund more of its own local religious

productions” and “such contracts do not in one way or another compromise either the editorial independence or integrity of the SABC or its Policy on Religious Broadcasts” (cf. Nkosi 1994).²⁸

The second challenge for religious broadcasting in South Africa has been to contextualize and reflect African reality.²⁹ The SABC Policy on Religious Broadcasting (revised and approved by the SABC Board in 1998) alludes to some of the battles fought over the place of traditional African religion: “In order to correct further neglect of African culture in the public media, special attention should be given to African Traditional Religion (ATR) and traditional cultures.” <Figure 8.3 Seeking to cater for those who adhere to Africa Traditional Religion (ATR). SABC 2001-2002 Annual Report> This needs to be seen against the background of the African Renaissance movement launched by President Thabo Mbeki in the late 1990s (see Makgoba 1999).³⁰ For several analysts, the capacity of the media to serve as facilitators of democracy and African cultural self-determination is closely linked to both structures of ownership and diversification of production (Baker 2000; Netshitenzhe 1999).

One of the strongest voices on behalf of traditional African religions and fiercest critics of discriminatory practices by political and religious authorities has been Nokuzola Mndende. A former parliamentarian and freelance presenter turned educational consultant, and armed with higher degrees in religious studies to boot, she has campaigned forcefully to expose the racism “now clothed in religious attire” (Mndende 1999). Because of their failure to include ATR in educational policies, civic events, and the Truth Commission, Mndende refers to the present government as “nothing else but Christianity at prayer.” She vehemently criticizes the SABC for referring to *indigenous* African religions as “minority religions” and for not censoring the negative portrayals of these religions in their programming.³¹

Mndende strategically resorts to rights talk when criticizing the then chair of the Human Rights Commission (Anglican cleric Dr. Barney Pitso) for disbelieving that there are Africans who can practice African religion without Christianity: “[h]ow can we speak of human rights when my right to believe and my freedom to practice my religion is still controlled and despised?” (ibid.: 48). In the same vein, she opines that “[t]o define African Religion from a Christian perspective violates the rights of its followers to have complete freedom of religion: when a particular way of seeing the truth is imposed on others it violates their freedom to seek the truth” (ibid.: 49).

The RBP has also had to deal with complaints from several religious groups about the scheduling of many religious programs on Sunday—to which SABC replied that weekday evenings were reserved for prime-time programming into which religious programs did not fit. In addition, the panel has received requests from various groups to be treated as separate entities, as in the case of the Mormon Church.³² While the RBP feels that it achieved some success in transforming religious programming in the SABC, they made less headway with radio broadcasting which is traditionally more decentralized and predominantly Christian.³³

While Muslim groups in South Africa have made advances in the political and media spheres, in March 2000 concern was still being voiced about negative representations and reporting. A Muslim media group, Media Review Network, reported to the South African Human Rights Commission in Johannesburg that the South African media were generating “Islamophobia” through their demonizing and stereotyping, notably in connection with the bombings in Cape Town and South Africa.³⁴ This is an ongoing problem, as evidenced by their comments to the SABC on its Draft Editorial Policies in 2003, notably regarding the “special vocabulary list” (“fundamentalist,” “extremist,” “fanatic,” “terrorist,”) used by the media almost

exclusively in reference to Muslims.³⁵ The Muslim community has also complained to the RPB about documentaries portraying Islam in a bad light (cf. Baderoon 1999).

Rainbow Nation

Actuality or mirage?

From the above discussion one can see that the negotiations over the public, mediated presence of religion in a culturally and religiously pluralistic democracy such as South Africa are increasingly informed by appeal to the globalizing discourse of rights. Yet some critics, such as South African scholar of religion Ebrahim Moosa, are skeptical of the constitutional arrangements for freedom of religion in the South African context (and one could extend the argument to other African states also) (Moosa 2001: 132-134). Moosa claims that expectations of freedom are never realized because religion is reduced to the status of “junior partner” with the state. He attributes the “fiction of the sovereignty of religion” to the framing of religious rights in binary terms (public/private, secular/profane, belief/practice, etc.) which reflect imported liberal and modernist constitutional values rather than the consensus values of the majority community.

Other analysts point to the precarious nature of both the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression in the face of new strategies by state and non-state actors in many parts of the world, not least some European countries, to curtail these freedoms.³⁶ Moves to re-regulate the media in terms of access, licensing, and censorship may be interpreted as a consequence of the loss of control by states over religious pluralization and diversification, or as an effort by politicians to diminish the influence of the religious sector. Some governments see media censorship as a more feasible option for co-opting or excluding unpopular or subversive religious ideologies. In some cases this can be effected by encouraging the market forces which are

reconfiguring religious power relations across Africa. Keyan Tomaselli, who has written extensively on the political economy of the South African media, has warned of the vulnerability of the electronic and print media in South Africa's public sphere in the face of globalization of capital, media and markets.³⁷ He has underscored the need to pursue critical media education, and the adoption of civil charters such as The People's Communication Charter. The Windhoek Charter on Broadcasting 2001 among other things calls on states to transfer regulatory powers on the airwaves and telecommunication structures to publicly constituted bodies under a three-tier system composed of public service, commercial and community operators.³⁸ An important landmark in this connection for South Africa is the Media Development and Diversity Agency Act of July 8, 2002, which provides for a statutorily recognized body, to be funded by government and the media industry, for the development of community and independent media.³⁹

For religious broadcasting policy in particular, Baker argues that, in the age of (post) modern technologies and ideas, "simple objectivity," based on "dubious membership figures," is seriously challenged by the "emerging multi-channel, multi-media environment" (Baker 2000: 228-229, 232).⁴⁰ He rightly considers that the "goal of impartiality will have to be addressed more in terms of the satisfaction of the needs of the full spectrum of the South African audience" (ibid.: 232). In this regard, he underscores the need to incorporate those on the "fringe of formal religions" and advises against excessive normative limitations being placed on religious programs.⁴¹ While such constraints (such as on proselytizing and discrimination) obtain in other locations, he considers the South African religious scene to be too diverse to enforce such restraints and the resultant "bland uniform programming" to be undesirable (Baker 2000: 245).⁴² Instead, he favors the democratic "right to reply" system, while acknowledging that such

responsibility may conflict with the racist and sexist teachings still propounded by some religious groups (ibid.: 246). This concurs with efforts by the Africa Region of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) to encourage churches to work toward more “democratic communication” and to treat their constituencies as “active participants in articulating social/spiritual problems” (Esaya 1992:82-83).

Because of the intimate relationship between the country’s political and economic history and the ongoing divisions and differences of the South African religious landscape, Baker argues that SABC’s religion department should proactively target economically disadvantaged groups, such as the African independent churches, previously marginalized by the mainstream media (Baker 2000: 241). This problematic heritage of religious conservatism and exclusion came up at a series of seminars on “Religion, Liberation and Transformation through the South African Experience” held at the Parliament of the World’s Religions, Cape Town, in December 1999.⁴³ Under discussion was research conducted at the University of Stellenbosch in 1990 and 1996/7 which has shown that people with religious affiliations (except for Jews) were more likely to be politically intolerant (in terms of according civil rights to groups they did not support or agree with) than those who did not profess to be religious. So seminar participants called for religious leaders and communities to develop new attitudes of tolerance, given their power to socialize communities. They were enjoined to promote the African concept of community or *ubuntu* (one can only be human through relationships) and rediscover the emancipatory ecumenism that brought down the apartheid regime.⁴⁴

The South African case demonstrates that the fields of identity and action for religious groups are increasingly located in, and defined by, the interface of modern media, both local and global. It also further confirms Bourdieu’s observation that the “journalistic field,” most notably

television, profoundly modifies power relations in other fields of cultural production (Bourdieu 1996: 68). There have been, and still are, great hopes for the modern media to help realize the African Renaissance, in whatever modality that is imagined—cultural pride, academic recognition, spiritual rediscovery, moral renewal, informational accuracy, political freedom, economic growth or social harmony (Boateng 1999; Chinweizu 1999; Teffo 1999; Tomaselli and Shepperson 1999).⁴⁵ In that regard, the particular focus in this essay on religious broadcasting demonstrates the strategic role that the state can, and should, play in transitional democracies such as South Africa, in promoting religious tolerance. It has further provided a revealing, yet salutary, window onto the entanglements of religion, democracy, and capitalism in one of the world's most strategic nation-states. Yet the story of this “rainbow nation,” to use Archbishop Tutu's enduring symbol, and its quest to balance democratic nationalism with cultural and religious pluralism, and what Achille Mbembe calls “struggles over autochthony,” is clearly far from over.⁴⁶

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Endnotes

¹ I am grateful to Keyan Tomaselli and Ruth Teer-Tomaselli for their critical reading of this essay.

² Both the US State Department Annual Report on International Religious Freedom (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/>) and an earlier survey of how religious freedom is understood, protected or denied around the world (Boyle 1997) highlight the importance of the media in this connection.

³ See the special issue of *Nova Religio* (4,2 : 2001) on this topic, and the subsequently expanded and updated, Lucas, Phillip Charles, and Thomas Robbins, eds. 2004. *New Religious Movements in the 21st Century: Legal, Political and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*. New York: Routledge.

⁴ Two excellent sources are Human Rights Without Frontiers, particularly their news service on “Religious Intolerance and Discrimination” (<http://www.hrwf.net>), and Index on Censorship (<http://www.indexonline.org>).

⁵ Also of note are the annotated bibliographies on the different religious traditions of South Africa compiled by David Chidester and his team at the Institute for Comparative Religion in South Africa, University of Cape Town (Chidester, Tobler, and Wratten 1997a, 1997b; Chidester e.a. 1997).

⁶ See the special issue of *Critical Arts: A Journal for South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 16 (2001) on “Media and Human Rights.”
(www.und.ac.za/und/ccms/publications_default.htm)

⁷ Although, see (Fardon and Furniss 2000) for the diversification of radio broadcasting across the African continent. It is regrettable that such a useful work could not include any serious treatment of religious radio stations, long active in many parts of Africa.

⁸ This is affirmed by Knut Lundby for rural Zimbabwe at least in his comparative study of media, religion and democratic participation in two small-scale communities, located at distance from metropolitan centers in Zimbabwe and Norway (Lundby 1997:38).

⁹ See, for example, (Ilesanmi, 2001; Mutua, 1999, 2001; An-Na'im, 1990, 1999); (on southern Africa there is an abundance of sources, Ackermann 1992; Boschman 1996; Chidester 1994; Dlamini 1994; Gruchy 1995; Kilian 1993; Mamdani 2000; Mitchell 1993; Moosa 2001; van der Westhuizen 1993; Villa -Vicencio 1996, 1999-2000; Walsh and Kaufmann 1999; Villa-Vicencio 1992).

¹⁰ See the series on Proselytism published by the Law and Religion Program at Emory Law School, and especially the volume on Africa (An-Na'im 1999).

¹¹ Although it should be noted that for many years the religious broadcasting department formed part of Television News Productions (Baker 2000: 232).

¹² Cf. similar efforts by the powerful coalition, the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, to ensure that the SABC was wrested from the control of the old National Party apartheid regime and instead serve as a tool for diversity and democracy (Minnie 2000). For excellent analytical overviews of the contours and ideological battles of the South African media scene, pre- and post-1994, see (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001; Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001).

¹³ On the importance of such independent review bodies, see (Boafo 1992: 49).

¹⁴ I am indebted to Dr. Suleiman Dangor, University of Durban-Westville, South Africa for valuable information on the Religious Broadcasting Panel on which he served. He made available minutes of the meetings to me. He also presented his experiences at a panel on “Religious Broadcasting in South Africa” at the 18th World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Durban, August 11, 2000 in a paper entitled, “Transformation of the SABC from a Christian Broadcaster to a Multifaith Broadcaster.”

¹⁵ The category of “free allocation” (12%), originally intended for the coverage of festivals and inter-faith issues (Baker 2000: 240), disappeared with the renegotiated allocations of air time.

¹⁶ Forwarded to the ANDERE-L list from the World Conference on Religion and Peace, Durban Chapter, February 25, 1999.

¹⁷ Andrew Worsdale, “SABC’s Dire Straits.” *Mail and Guardian*, June 20, 1997. This appears to have been increased, for the 1999-2000 annual report states that 2% of broadcasting schedule time is devoted to religious programs on television across the three channels (SABC1, SABC2, and SABC3), and 7.5% for radio broadcasts. There are no such statistics in the 2000-2001 annual report.

¹⁸ <http://www.sabc.co.za/annual/religious.htm> (accessed July 28, 2002).

¹⁹ According to the 1996 census, 74.1% of the population of more than 42 million claim to be Christian. “Other faiths” total 7.7%. Hindus and Muslims each account for approximately 1% and about 0.4% are Jewish. A sizeable minority of the population, more than (18.3)%, does not belong to any of the major religious traditions, and may be practitioners of traditional religion or have no specific religious affiliation (see Hendriks 1999)

²⁰ <http://www.sabc.co.za/annual/annual2000/religion.pdf> (accessed July 28, 2002).

²¹ See <http://www.sabc.co.za/rel/index.htm> for the range of programs.

²² http://www.sabc.co.za/annual_03/index.html (accessed August 24, 2004).

²³ <http://www.suntimes.co.za/2001/10/14/arts/durban/aned01.asp> (accessed August 25, 2004).

²⁴ See <http://www.suntimes.co.za/2002/03/31/arts/durban/aned04.asp> (accessed August 25, 2004).

²⁵ <http://www.freespiritsa.co.za/> (accessed August 25, 2004).

²⁶ See SABC Religious Policy at <http://www.sabc.co.za/rel/index.htm>

²⁷ Information from Ed Worster, Commissioning Editor, and Yashika Singh, Producer, SABC Johannesburg, at the “Religion and the Media” panel at the Parliament of the World’s Religions, Cape Town, December 1999. An anonymous independent producer contracted to the SABC put a more positive spin on the cutbacks, saying it was a useful exercise to rid SABC of mediocre and unimaginative producers. See, “SABC’s Dire Straits.” *Mail and Guardian*, June 20, 1997.

²⁸ On the growing difficulties facing African television stations with regard to local production, see (Bourgault 1995: 103-152).

²⁹ More generally, Ebrahim Moosa points to the recurring tensions between local, indigenous values and worldviews and the globalizing (predominantly Western) legal and political order as it is domesticated in non-Western cultures, not least in post-apartheid South Africa (Moosa 2001: 122-123, 130-131). He shows how traditional African values, such as *ubuntu* or African humanism, were included in the 1993 Interim Constitution but omitted in the 1996 Constitution.

³⁰ Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli note that the SABC, as expressed in its new publicity as the “pulse of Africa’s Creative Spirit” exceeded its national mandate and “in the spirit of global (or at least supra-regional) enterprises took on the challenge of spiritually revitalizing the entire continent” (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli 2001:147, n.29).

³¹ Based on her remarks at the panel on “Religious Broadcasting in South Africa” at the IAHR 18th World Congress, Durban, South Africa, August 11, 2000. She was also a member of the Religious Broadcasting Panel, but claims that it was a mistake and that she was only included because they thought she belonged to an African independent church (!)

³² Information from Dangor (1999).

³³ See “Religious and Cultural Programmes on PBS Radio”
<http://www.sabc.co.za/annual/annual2000/religion.pdf> (accessed 8/23/04).

³⁴ This group is by no means representative of the entire South African Muslim community. Information from Keyan Tomaselli, June 23, 2000.

³⁵ <http://www.mediareviewnet.com/comments%20on%20sabc%20policies.htm> (accessed August 25, 2004).

³⁶ Kevin Boyle, “Religious Intolerance and the Incitement of Hatred.”
<http://www.article19.org/docimages/975.html> (accessed 08/23/04)

³⁷ See his reported comments in “Report from the Working Group on ‘Freedom of Expression’” (1998) <http://und.ac.za/und/ccms/media/naphrc.htm> (accessed 2/4/01). See also (Tomaselli and Nkosi 1995).

³⁸ “Widen Scope of Press Freedom in Africa, Conference Urges.” Panafrican News Agency, May 6, 2001. See also (Kizito 1992).

³⁹ Media Development and Diversity Agency (Pretoria). Press release, July 23, 2002.

⁴⁰ His and Bishop Lee’s fears have been borne out, as the political scene has hardened. Mainstream religions still dominate the SABC airwaves and Rhema and TBN broadcast on Dstv. Information from Keyan Tomaselli, email, August 26, 2002.

⁴¹ The SABC 1999-2000 annual report refers to the need to include programs that reflect the “Shembe and Bahai faith [*sic*].” Note: *Shembe* refers to the renowned Zulu independent church, founded by Isaiah Shembe, the Nazaretha Baptist Church. Incidentally, the African independent churches form the largest grouping within the Christian category, according to the 1996 census, although the greatest market share growth goes to the Pentecostal/Charismatic group (Hendriks 1999: 79).

⁴² Although consider John Urry’s argument, in the context of a wider discussion on (global) citizenship, that “paradoxically it may be that aspects of global homogenisation, consumerism and cosmopolitanism, are necessary conditions for preventing social divisions in the contemporary world” (Urry 2000: 187).

⁴³ *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 106 (April 2000):61-83.

⁴⁴ See (Bernstein 2002: 204-210) for discussion of the vagueness of the concept and the ambivalence of black South African elites toward their cultures of origin.

⁴⁵ For a critical review of this “brilliant marketing concept,” see (Bernstein 2002: 230-243).

⁴⁶ A very valuable set of studies and reflections on these questions by a number of South Africa's leading scholars of religion and some German researchers can be found in a special issue of *Journal for the Study of Religion* 11,2 (September 1998) on "Religion and Politics in South Africa." On the cultural politics of territories, borders, and identities in Africa, see (Mbembe 1999).