

Women and Media in South Africa: A Study of Post-Apartheid Era

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Abstract

The South African media industry in the post- apartheid period is relatively open, with various participants active in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, etc. Press freedom given by the Constitution has strengthened the media in South Africa in the post- apartheid period and made it more dynamic and influential. South Africa's media are still in a process of transformation after the transition to democracy in 1994. The media continue to face the challenge of ensuring equal and fair representation to the entire population, and gender and media activists in particular have taken up the challenge of bringing about change. This paper provides an overview of the current South African media landscape with a particular focus on women in the media. It also highlights press freedom and summary of research on women's participation and representation in the media.

Key Word: *Constitution, Media, Women, South Africa, Post-apartheid.*

Introduction

The Republic of South Africa is a constitutional multiparty democratic country and one of the emerging economies in the world. The country has eleven official languages and a three-tier of government at national, provincial and local levels (www.gov.za). South Africa is a multi-racial society and its population consists of different ethnic groups that include- African, Colored, Indian (Asian), White, etc. All the ethnic and language groups have political representation in the country's constitutional democracy that is a parliamentary republic. Although, unlike most such parliamentary republics, the positions of head of State and head of government are merged into a President and his or her tenure depends on the confidence of Parliament.

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South Africa's communications media were radically transformed by the political reforms sweeping the country in the 1990's. The most fundamental changes were the gradual easing of government censorship and its abolition in spite of frequent government censorship under Apartheid. Nineteen years after the first multi-racial elections in 1994 brought democracy to South Africa and ended apartheid, the news media, as well as other social institutions, are still in the process of transformation.

South Africa in the post-apartheid era has among the most vibrant print and broadcast media on the continent. The newspapers have a long tradition. Television broadcasts were introduced only in 1976. South Africa has a dynamic media industry and is one of Africa's major media players. Government censorship during the Apartheid era severely hampered the media industry.

Since the demise of Apartheid has taken the form of significant changes in the media's environment. In the post-apartheid Constitution provides the right to freedom of expression to citizens, which includes freedom of the Press. The introduction of an independent regulator with constitutionally guaranteed independence was a significant step forward for the media industry. The regulator not government directly controls the media which was hardly seen in Apartheid era.

The South African media industry in the post-apartheid period is relatively open, with various participants active in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, etc. Press freedom given by the Constitution has strengthened the media in South Africa in the post-Apartheid period and made it more dynamic and influential. South Africa's many broadcasters and publications reflect the diversity of the population in that all the eleven official languages are represented. However, English is the most commonly used language. Radio is most accessible media in South Africa; television has also reasonably better reach after radio. Low literacy levels may account for low print media population. But in terms of number of titles and ownership Print media is by far the largest media sub-sector in South Africa. Community broadcasting serves as an access point for diverse members of the community to share political, cultural, artistic, spiritual and individual expression. It is empowering the citizens. New Media is also useful and accessible to the people. Television permeates the daily life of most South Africans, helping to construct a hegemonic culture. Television in South Africa is an ideologically charged space that provides a compelling medium for articulating a new vision for the

country. The SABC works towards constructing an image of the 'New' South Africa, after the end of Apartheid.

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Women's Empowerment in Post-apartheid South Africa:

The Republic of South Africa since 1994 has enjoyed much recognition as an exemplary country to political offices. By 2008, for instance, South Africa had achieved 43% representation in the Cabinet and about 33% in provincial Legislatures including the appointment of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the first female Deputy President in South Africa in 2005. The representation of women in the South African Parliament has increased from 27.8% in 1994 to 43.3% in 2009. This puts South Africa amongst the leading countries in the world in terms of the number of women in important leadership positions. However, although some progress has been accomplished on women representation in senior management in the public service, the low representation of women in corporate decision-making positions in the private sector remains a challenge.

At the core of government policies on women is a dual strategy aimed at dealing with the legacy of apartheid and the transformation of society, particularly the transformation of power relations between women and men. South Africa's empowerment of women is about addressing gender oppression, patriarchy, sexism, racism, ageism and structural oppression and creating a conducive environment which enables women to take Control of Their lives. Women have played an enormous role in ensuring that South Africa is liberated. One cannot forget the popular march of August 1956 where they marched to Union Buildings to contest the pass laws. As a result their role was acknowledged by the post-apartheid government, with August now known as women's month.

The role of women in the apartheid era has paved a way for everyone in South Africa. Women are known as the backbone and pillars of strength for many households both in rural and urban South Africa. Women politicians participated in the drafting of the progressive new South African Constitution, Act 108 of 1996, which is based on non-racialism and non-

sexism. The constitution also provided for a Commission on Gender Equality to promote gender equality in all areas of society. The post-apartheid government has tried its utmost best to ensure that women's role is acknowledged. For example, during Nelson Mandela's and Thabo Mbeki's administration, Frene Ginwala was the Speaker of the National Assembly. After she left the position, Baleka Mbete filled her position (Apleni, Lwazi, 2012). Such types of participation of women in political positions in post-apartheid South Africa have empowered South African women.

Press Freedom in Post-apartheid South Africa

In the post- Apartheid period, freedom of the media was given a lot of focus and is regarded as one of the supporting pillars of democracy. In post- Apartheid period, new constitution was enacted with a Bill of Rights, which guaranteeing every citizen the right of freedom of expression. Chapter 2, Bill of Rights under the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa has given right to freedom of expression. Under Section 16(1) of the Constitution everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media, freedom to receive or impart information or ideas. The freedom of artistic creativity, academic freedom, and freedom of scientific research (see section 16 (1), Constitution). But this right has some limitations also and it does not protect to propaganda for war, incitement of imminent violence or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm (See section 16(2), Constitution).

The Constitution under Section 192 provides the Independent Broadcasting Authority to regulate broadcasting in the Public interest, and to ensure fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing South African Society. The authority is established by national legislation (See section 192, Constitution).

Media in Post-apartheid South Africa

South Africa has a wide variety of television, radio, and print media. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the public broadcaster, offers four free-to-air television channels that broadcast in 11 languages, reaching a daily adult audience of approximately 18

million people (SA Government Information, 2007). In addition, the first private subscription television service, M-Net, broadcasts in more than 50 countries across Africa and the Indian Ocean islands. Satellite television is currently only available through Multi Choice, which offers 55 video and 48 audio channels. E.tv is the only private free-to-air service and it depends on advertising revenue. The SABC's national radio network consists of 15 public service broadcast stations and three commercial radio stations that broadcast in 11 languages (SA Government Information, 2007). South Africa also has 12 private radio stations that received licenses from the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) (SA Government Information, 2007) and more than 100 community radio stations. (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007).

Four major press groups control the newspaper industry in South Africa, providing 20 daily and 13 weekly newspapers, most in English (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007). The daily newspaper with the highest circulation (301,800) is the 'Daily Sun', aimed at the black working class (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007). 'The Sunday Times' is the biggest national newspaper, with average weekly sales of 504,657 (South Africa: the official gateway, 2007). Three of Media24's daily newspapers target Afrikaans readers throughout the country, while almost 150 weekly regional and local newspapers serve particular communities (SA Government Information, 2007).

Print Media:

The print media is by far the largest media sub-sector in South Africa in terms of number of titles and ownership and yet it is the most unregulated. Print is physical and tangible unlike broadcasting and new media which are signal and gadget based like TV, radio, Computer and cell phone. Consequently factors such as print layout and quality together with distribution area and frequency of publication are of great importance. Print media consists of newspapers, magazines, newsletters, journals, etc.

Radio:

South Africa had an estimated 12.1 million radio receivers in mid-1990's (see www.countrystudies.us/south-africa). Now, Radio is the most accessible media in South Africa, with 89% of the population having access (Z-coms, 2009:34). Radio is the medium which has the largest audience of about 29.5million listeners nationally. Gauteng province has the highest radio audience with more than 6.2 million listeners; followed closely by

KwaZulu-Natal Province with just below 5.8 million. Northern Cape Province has the lowest radio audience with just 682 thousand people (Z-coms, 2009:59).

Television:

Television is the second most dominant medium in terms of audience size, with a total 26.2 million viewers. Gauteng Province has 6.1 million TV viewers, which is the highest number of viewers in the Country, followed by KwaZulu-Natal Province with 4.7 million. Northern Cape Province has 705 thousand viewers which is the lowest in the country (Z-coms, 2009:73). In mid1990's South Africa had an estimated 3.5 million television sets (See www.countrystudies.us/south-africa).

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC):

The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is a public broadcaster in terms of the Broadcasting Act of 1999. It was re-licensed in June 2005 in line with Section 10 of the Broadcasting Act. As the national public broadcasters, the SABC is by far the most dominant force in South African television. The SABC is responsible for public-service broadcasting in South Africa, for both radio and television. The SABC was reorganized into two divisions, a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and a Public Commercial Service (PCS).

The SABC's terrestrial television channels devote between 18 percent and 20 percent of their airtime during prime time to news and news related programs. In July 2007, the SABC launched SABC News International, a 24 hour news channel aimed at providing in depth coverage of African Stories. The channel has been structured in a similar way to other international news-providers, such as the BBC (South Africa, 2007/08).

Representation of Women in South Africa's Media in the Post-apartheid Era

Several studies indicate that women remain under-represented in newsrooms across the country, as the majority of newsrooms remain white and male (Steyn & De Beer, 2004). Almost all newsrooms have male editors, except for the Mail & Guardian, which appointed Ferial Haffajee as South Africa's first female editor of a major newspaper in April 2004.

The first and most comprehensive study focused specifically on women in the news was the Southern African Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) which showed that in South

Africa, 30% of women were reporters in television, 44% were reporters in radio and 29% worked as reporters in print media (Made, Lowe Morna&Kwaramba, 2003).

South Africa has about the same percentage of female reporters as in the 75 other countries that participated in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) on February 16, 2005 (Gallagher, 2005). In conducting this project, the GMMP found that 38% of reporters in South Africa were female and 62% male, whereas globally 37% of reporters were female and 63% were male (Gallagher, 2005, p. 18; Lowe Morna, 2006, p.32). While this is a hopeful result, the inequality between male and female reporters remains a reality. The GMMP found that in South Africa, women account for 22% of television reporters, 20% of radio reporters and 48% of print reporters. These figures showed a fairly drastic change over two and a half years, suggesting that the results from the GMBS were probably more credible. In yet another study conducted in Southern Africa, results showed that women comprised 40% of radio talk show hosts.

When examining the percentage of female sources quoted in the news, South Africa is ahead of 13 Southern African countries with 26% of news sources being female, compared to the global average of 21% (Lowe Morna, 2006). In South Africa, 28% of news sources in the press are women, 20% on radio are women and 12% on television are women. Lowe Morna also found that more stories in the South African media reinforced gender stereotypes than those who did not. Women are more likely to be identified as victims than men, and women are more likely to be identified by family status than men.

South Africa's English-language newspapers do not have specific women's sections but call the traditional women's pages "Lifestyle" sections. These sections typically include "soft" news on relationships, health, home and garden, fashion, travel, the environment, and food and wine. The Afrikaans newspapers, at least in their online editions, still have a section called "Women," with similar content as the English lifestyle sections. The owner of the three Afrikaans newspapers, Media24, is also online at www.women24.com, where content from its publications is available in English. One exception is the Mail & Guardian, which publishes a section called "Body Language" where women's issues are addressed from a feminist perspective. When Haffajee became editor of this paper, she indicated that she wanted to publish more stories on domestic violence and rape (Coleman, 2004).

Several magazines are also available for women, including 'Sarie', 'Fair Lady', and 'True Love', a publication aimed at young black women. South African editions of internationally based women's magazines such as Cosmopolitan and Glamour are also sold in South Africa.

The gender gap in news preferences within the South African media audience is fairly small. A study of media audiences found that both men (40%) and women (49%) identify television as their main source for news. Radio is the second most important news source for women and

men (34% in each case), but more men (21%) than women (15%) rely on newspapers as their main source of news. One of the biggest gender gaps was found in reliance upon the Internet for news, with 4% of men relying on the Internet for news in comparison to 1% of women.

According to the audience study, most men and women prefer short news reports, and more women (9%) than men (5%) prefer news that asks for feedback, like letters to the editor and talk shows. A low percentage of men and women identified opinion and commentary as their favourite news genre. The study found that a high proportion of women and men found the portrayal of women as mere sex objects uncomfortable or insulting, with only 7% of men saying such images encourage them to buy the newspaper or watch the news. Both men (56%) and women (73%) said they would find news more interesting if women were featured in a greater diversity of roles (Geertsem, 2008).

A study on radio talk shows conducted in Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe showed that women compose only 25% of callers to radio talk shows in South Africa and 39% of guests called to the shows. The topic that most females preferred to talk about is gender equality and women's empowerment (29%), compared to 8% for men. Most men preferred to talk about current affairs (27%), compared to 15% of women. Both women (27%) and men (21%) were interested in social issues. More women called in when the station aired programs on education and health, indicating that more shows on this topic might increase women's participation (ibid

Conclusion

The Post-apartheid regime is trying to give women every platform to express their opinions without fear or favour. They are being capacitated so as to better their lives. One would recall that the apartheid regime never attempted to give them any chance. Whereas the post-apartheid regime has given them a platform to be more vocal about any issue. When assessing media, South African women have not yet achieved equal access and representation as compared to men. Women are under-represented as reporters, news sources, and audience members. Yet, in comparison with other countries, South Africa has about as many female reporters as the global average.

The post-apartheid government has some positive things to point out for women empowerment, while on the other hand there are shortcomings. South Africa has a huge task ahead to root out all issues affecting women. Of course, one has to be aware that those challenges will not be resolved overnight. It requires every individual in the society to be involved and in this regard media can play a significant role. The media should give in-depth coverage to issues that affect women and provide a greater platform for women to express their views on issues that not only affect them but South Africa as a whole. The media have a responsibility in this new democracy to transform themselves into diverse institutions that provide audience members with alternative viewpoints, including those of women. Yet, the most important change that could significantly close the gender gap in media attention is an improvement in the literacy, education, and employment of women.

Women should begin given opportunity to contributing more to knowledge production through the publication of books, journal articles, newspaper features, policy briefs and participate in seminars or conferences where they will be talking as speakers at events on issues that affect not only women but more importantly national issues. There must more women participation in academia so that they can begin to form new knowledge. Women played a crucial role in the liberation of South Africa and it is important to recount their stories of sacrifice, pain and hardship as part of the on-going process in building a democratic South Africa. Also, Government, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions, the private sectors, civil society, community-based organisations, among others, need to collaborate to ensure that women's empowerment to be successful.

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