

The South African media system in 2016: A free media under (renewed) pressure

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The paper starts where the authors of the previous chapter on South Africa in *Mapping BRICS media* (cf. Milton and Fourie 2015: 181-201) left off by arguing that "...Since the demise of apartheid in 1994, black media ownership and the expansion of online media are the focal point in South African media development. With regard to print media it is clear that four groups still dominate media ownership, there are still major challenges with regard to access and distribution and the often requested "diversity of voices and opinions" are still hampered in a media environment where convergence and revenue rule. To deal with these matters remains a challenge for media policy and management."

The "state" of the South African media system in terms of print, broadcasting, film, video and online media is updated against the background of the focal points identified above, adding increased threats to freedom of expression and threats about increased external regulation. The update is also set against the background of increased questions about BRICS as such, South Africa's inclusion in BRICS, and the value of BRICS for the media. Questions about BRICS are increasingly raised in the wake of an economic recession affecting all the BRICS countries and against the background of new international and regional political and diplomatic alliances, strategies and crises, all of which are pertinent to the development of a media system.

A main argument in the paper is that the trends experienced by the South African media are independent from BRICS and that BRICS has had a limited if any impact on the South African media (in general). (Naspers' interests in China and Russia are dealt with separately.) Rather, South African media trends are a consequence of the media-metamorphosis (and technology driven) move from mass communication to network communication and from mediated communication to *mediatization*. It is argued that *mediatization* is part of the contemporary South African media system, despite the continuing and even growing economic, political, cultural and educational divides in the South African society.

In the final parts of the paper it is argued that in the digitised and globalised media landscape of today, it is difficult to place the South African media system in one of Hallin and Mancini's categories of polarized pluralistic, democratic corporatist and/or liberal. Neither can it be placed in one of the categories traditionally applicable to South America, Soviet, Eastern or Asian countries. At the most, the South African system fits (at this stage) the democratic corporatist model. However, as far as the role of the state and its ideology is concerned, there are signs that there is a push back to authoritarianism. At this stage, this push finds expression mainly in the "management" of the public

broadcaster and in the way the government and government officials think (and theorise) about the role of the media in society. It is argued that they think of the media in terms of being mainly an instrument for political and social control. It can be argued that the government is influenced towards this way of thinking by member states of BRICS such as China and Russia - that these states are influencing media ideology in South Africa. However authoritarian thinking about the media is nothing new in South Africa. It can therefore also be argued that the ANC is transgressing back to apartheid media ideology and policy. The authoritarian thinking about the role of the media in society and the use of the media for political and social control was dominant under apartheid and there are signs that this is returning.

Fortunately the South African media are still freer than its BRICS partners: The country ranks number 39 on the *Reporters Without Borders' 2016 World Press Freedom Index* out of 180 countries. That is just after the United Kingdom in position 38 and far ahead of its BRICS partners with Brazil in position 104, India in number 133, Russia in number 148, and China in position 176. (Cf. <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> Accessed on 17 June 2016.)

In the paper it is also argued that from the perspective of mediatisation, it is possible to show that there are no striking and outstanding examples (representation(s)) of how the BRICS countries (and their media) have impacted and/or influence the content, form, technology, production and professional practices, ownership and/or regulation of the South African media and media system. In terms of mediatisation theory, there is no striking or outstanding examples of how the BRICS countries are having an impact on the South African media's symbolic power to infiltrate and affect different fields of the South African society; that it has no impact on the South African media as a meta-process of social change and the moulding of the everyday South African social world. The only example of some kind of impact of BRICS on the South African media may be in terms of a few company trade agreements as referred to in the earlier comments about Naspers.

In conclusion, the need to find a new way of describing media systems is emphasised. In this regard it is argued that comparative media system analysis would need to take cognisance of the totality of a country's mediated communication and its mediatisation role in society; that will take cognizance of the move from mass communication to network communication and the increased and interactive role of the recipient in a country's mediated communication.

Reference

milton, v.c. & Fourie, P.J. 2014. South Africa: A free media still in the making, in *Mapping BRICS media*, edited by K. Nordenstreng and D. K. Thussu. London: Routledge.