

**FIRST Democratic
BALLOT PAPER'S**

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PLEASE



1994

48

Make your mark next to the party you choose.
Etisa leshwao pela mekgatlo oo o o kgethang.
Yenza uphawu ecaleni kwelcamba lolikhetzako.
Endla mfungho othelo ka vandi leni u si hlawulaka.
Baya leshwao go letagana le letiko la gago.
Yenza uphawu lakho eduai nahlangano oyikhetzako.

Place a mark next to the party you choose.
Dix leshwao la gago go letana le phatli yoo o o kgethago.
Kha vha ite luvayo phanda ha dzangano lwa vha akhetla.
Yenza uphawu lakho ecaleni kwagata olo olukhetzayo.
Dweba uphawu esikhateni zisoduze kwenhlangano
oyikhetzayo.

PROV 1994

PAN AFRICANIST CONGRESS OF AZANIA		PAC		<input type="checkbox"/>
VRYHEIDFRONT - FREEDOM FRONT		VF-FF		<input type="checkbox"/>
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY		ACDP		<input type="checkbox"/>
AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT		ADM		<input type="checkbox"/>
AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS		ANC		<input type="checkbox"/>
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MERIT PARTY - MERIETE PARTY		MP		<input type="checkbox"/>
NATIONAL PARTY - NASIONALE PARTY		NP		<input type="checkbox"/>

E.CAPE

BALLOT PAPER: from the series Life under Democracy – Dale Yudelman

South Africa's media and the STRENGTHENING OF DEMOCRACY

Before one can assess the role of the media in consolidating South Africa's infant democracy, one has to define what role the media *should* be playing in South Africa's particular brand of democracy. South Africa is a constitutional democracy, which is both representative and participatory, not just an electoral democracy where voters only have power during elections every five years

By William Gumede

South Africa's media, like all other institutions in the country faces the challenge to 'transform', to adapt to the country's new democratic constitution, racial integration ethos and the economic redress for previously disadvantaged communities.

But the media also has a crucial role in strengthening and consolidating the country's infant democracy, while at the same time media companies have to survive as businesses in increasingly difficult markets. Journalism as a profession is itself undergoing a transformation as a result of political, economic and technological changes.

News is now widely and instantly available from an explosion of new sources of information, such as social media, blogging and mobile devices. Combined, these dramatic structural and market changes have made many 'old' media, such as newspapers redundant.

It is in the media that South Africa's transformation debates are being waged and fought. It is also in the media where "democracy most concretely manifests, because that arena both represents and constitutes the independent political institution wherein citizens can engage in the discussion of matters of the commonweal".¹ The media is also the forum where communities and groups are portrayed, both by themselves and by others and to themselves and to others.²

Before one can assess the role of the media in consolidating South Africa's infant democracy, one has to define what role the media *should* be playing in South Africa's particular brand of democracy. South Africa is a constitutional democracy, which is both representative and participatory, not just an electoral democracy where voters only have power during elections every five years.³

The very obvious role of the media is to provide information to citizens, not only specialised reporting, but also just informing people on what's happening, so that they can make informed decisions. But the media also provides the platform for criticism, questioning and for pressure to be put on leaders to be responsive and accountable to the wishes of citizens.

The idea of the media as watchdog, as guardian of the public interest, and as a conduit between the government and the governed is rather compelling. Amartya Sen,⁴ the Indian economics Nobel Prize laureate, for example, sees the media's role not only as a watchdog against the abuse of power, but also against natural disasters. The media is also an early warning and a force to pressure government into action, against coming social, political and economic disasters and upheavals, warning office bearers of citizen anger, dissatisfaction and outrage.

The media has a protective function in a democracy, by giving voice to the vulnerable, and on disadvantaged and neglected issues. Conventionally the debate has been on strategies to secure media coverage for poverty-related issues, but the extent to which the perspectives of the poor are reflected in the media is equally important. “(T)he poor cannot assert their rights if they don’t know what these are. If they are unaware of the laws and procedures for availing themselves of their entitlements or the mechanisms they can use to remedy their deprivations, they will always remain poor. Democracy cannot take root if the poor and powerless are kept out of the public sphere.”⁵

South Africa is one of the world’s most unequal societies,⁶ which obviously has political effects. The less equal tend to be less visible,⁷ more ignored and less likely to attract politicians to help them, unless opportunistically ahead of elections. The voiceless can only be heard if the media are accessible to them.

Unlike the powerful, which the media should hold accountable, the voiceless depend on the media to not only find them, but to bring them into the civic conversation, so important to democracy.⁸ The pressure to remain profitable can result in increasingly urban, consumer-focused media, with a declining concern for the voiceless – who cannot pay.

But the media could also play a constructive role in reconciliation, multiculturalism and nation-building. For example, the Philippine investigative journalist, Sheila Coronel,⁹ argues, when the media brings in outsiders, whether marginalised because of race, gender or class, it helps to contribute to a social consensus that the injustices against them must be redressed.

But reporting on the lives of those who were previously marginalised, the media plays an important role in validating histories and memories of the formerly oppressed, which were dismissed during apartheid.

To generate a common feeling for nation-building, the media must give diverse coverage to all communities. But they can only do so if their staff are diverse. Daniel Lerner argued that the media can help develop empathy¹⁰ towards others and different cultures. “It is only when individuals in the society began to open themselves up to the experiences of others outside of their own culture”¹¹ that they can transform.

It is important that the post-apartheid media move away from apartheid-era stereotypes of black people in their everyday reporting. For example, it would be crucial that the post-apartheid media in its coverage refrain from cementing in the “public mind a link” between criminality, violence or gangs and particularly communities¹².

In new democracies the media are often required to go beyond the traditional role of just informing, but contributing to public education and enlightenment. By showing quality, diverse cultural, political and social and news programmes to a nation where large swathes never had access to decent education, the media offers opportunities to many to broaden their minds, outlooks and social advancement.

A crucial part of the consolidation of transformation is in inculcating new values, norms and behaviours, as

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set out in the democratic constitution.

The media can help with forming – and accepting – new democratic social values, especially in societies undergoing systemic transformation where the social changes can be perplexing.

Some ANC leaders have what former Chief Justice Pius Langa calls a “minimalist approach” to the values of the constitution and democracy. It appears they only obey those democratic precepts which favour them. Others have not fully embraced the idea of democracy at all. Sections of the ANC leadership elite think they are above the country’s laws.

However, to play a democratic role, the media must be independent, politically and financially. Growing concentration of media ownership – whether politically or financial – is a threat to media independence.

Many democratic institutions are increasingly experienced by ordinary citizens as not responsive, unaccountable or sometimes not even relevant anymore. Clearly, for people to take to the streets, often violently, indicates they have long given up on approaching democratic institutions such as Parliament, or democratic watchdog organisations, such as the South African Human Rights Commission, viewing these institutions as mostly lame-duck, ineffective and subservient.

In South Africa, because of the high levels of inequality and unequal access to key public forums, important opinions are easily shut out because those holding such opinions are too poor to influence party leaders or access institutions such as the media or Parliament. Ignored, the impoverished bottle-up frustrations spill into violence.

Twenty years since the founding of South Africa’s democracy, the country’s existing parties, including both the ANC and the main opposition DA, appear not to be responsive, beyond during elections, to the majority of voters. Given this particular weakness in South Africa’s politics it has often appeared that the media plays the role of ‘opposition’ by emphasising its oversight role, given the glaringly poor oversight role being played by many opposition parties.

South African media has by-and-large played an extraordinarily crucial oversight role, to consolidate the country’s democracy, not least by holding elected officials accountable. The media’s role has been important in exposing official wrong-doing, such as President Jacob Zuma’s spending of R280 million of public money on his personal compound at Nkandla, which would have otherwise gone unchecked.

The continued pressure by civil society groups and persistent reporting of the irregularities around the arms deal – even when media and civil society activists were frequently vilified by politicians and government officials, finally led to the successful prosecution of Schabir Shaik and has kept the pressure on Zuma to stand trial for his alleged involvement in corruption.

It is important that the media doggedly cover corruption, especially to establish a culture that corruption, self-enrichment at the expense of taxpayers, and abuse of public resources are wrong, shameful and unacceptable. By doing this it gives a disincentive to public servants and politicians to partake in corruption. By giving voice to whistle-blowers, the media encourages a political culture of exposing wrong-doing.



Paul Weinberg

Most South African business is deeply embedded in the extreme Anglo-American kind of capitalism. There is an instinctive suspicion of worker rights or of social security for society's most vulnerable; taxation is seen as confiscation and distorting business decisions; and welfare for the vulnerable is scoffed at. South Africa's mainstream media mirror this view.

In contrast, the West European stream of capitalism and its accompanying social model emphasising capitalism with a human face, was at the heart of the construction of the European welfare state, both by the parties of the left and the right – and by labour, business and civil society¹³. Clearly, the version of capitalism underpinning South Africa's business press cannot be sustainable.

Although South Africa's private media is highly concentrated – which is always bad for democracy – most of the newspapers now have black editors and sometimes owners (often black economic empowerment tycoons close to the ANC). In 1994, the new ANC government lost a great opportunity to diversify ownership of the media when the Argus group of newspapers came up for sale. The ANC opted to support Irish magnate Tony O'Reilly's bid to buy the Argus newspaper group. A more prudent idea would have been to break-up the newspaper group – and sell off individual newspapers.

In 2013, the black economic empowerment group, Sekunjalo Independent Media Consortium acquired Independent News Media South Africa, the country's largest English newspaper group. The state-owned Public Investment Corporation (PIC) invested in the deal on behalf of the Government Employees Pension Fund. Yet, again, the government lost an opportunity

to secure diversity by not encouraging the newspaper group to be broken up – and sold into separate stand alone newspapers.

Many of the big newspaper houses, such as Times Media, have majority black shareholding. The then Avusa Media had for a long time had Tokyo Sexwale and Cyril Ramaphosa as prominent shareholders. Like the rest of the economy, most of the transformation in the media since 1994 has been focusing on appointing black editors or personnel. Black owners, boards or staffs do not automatically translate into transformed values. Although many newspapers have black editors and owners it does not necessarily mean they will cover issues from a diverse perspective. For example, the issues of the advantaged – whether black or white – still get the lion's share of media coverage, while the poor in the townships and rural areas are out of sight.

South Africa's private print media, have a reach of two million readers, often mostly urban based, in a country of 50 million. The public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) – which is reached by the majority of South Africans – is beset with corruption, mismanagement and uncritical 'sunshine' journalism, yet very little is done by government to clean up the rot. Government appear little interested in genuinely transforming the SABC into a better run organisation.

The phenomenon whereby former African liberation and independence movements, once in power, re-enact or devise similar secrecy and anti-media laws that were used against them by colonial governments or white-minority regimes when they were in opposition is now repeated by the ANC. This often happens the moment these African liberation movements are under genuine

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pressure from their own supporters, impatient about their disappointing records in government.

The ANC government has proposed two measures that are reminiscent of the apartheid government's curtailing of the media. First, the Protection of State Information Bill, which will give the government broad powers to classify almost any information involving an agency of the state as top secret, not to be reported on, or divulged, in the interest of national security. The public's right to access government documents will also be restricted.

The ANC government of Jacob Zuma has also been mulling over establishing a Media Appeals Tribunal, which would have the power to sanction journalists for 'misconduct'. Clearly, these measures have little to do with protecting the national interest. If that was the case President Zuma and many ANC leaders are bigger threats to the national interests because of their wrong behaviour from alleged corruption to allowing friends to land airplanes at national key points. Furthermore, they have also little to do with allowing for media diversity and racial diversity in coverage or giving the poor voice in the media.

The truth is that some ANC leaders do not want their shenanigans to be publicly exposed – lest their supporters discover they are being duped. Governing honestly and effectively is the best antidote to criticism. Looking at what's happening at the SABC which is 'regulated' by the state, self-regulation of the media is the most prudent way forward for South Africa's media.

Off course, multitudes of South Africans still do not have access to the media. The best course for South Africa would be to have a range of newspapers

and broadcasters that covers the country's political, community and economic diversity.

Instead of government spending money on running the state-owned Bua news agency, or a news agency run by the Department of International Relations and Co-operation (DIRCO) the money would be better spent on supporting community newspapers, radio and television, not controlled by the government, but by local communities.

The lack of state support for community media – community radio, newspapers and television – is one weakness of the democracy. Local media is important to deepen democracy, foster development and diversity and to hold local leaders accountable. This is particularly important because local government is universally seen in South Africa as the weakest tier of the democracy system with high levels of corruption, lack of accountability by officials and slow service delivery.

South Africa can explore the Scandinavian model where funds are made available to independent newspapers to ensure that one newspaper group does not dominate the entire provincial or city media is currently the case in South Africa.

South Africa's media may err occasionally in not giving voice to all the voiceless or to alternative and independent voices. Sometimes it may be used in the factional battles of the ANC to destroy critics, and even on other occasions put profit above investing in quality reporting. However, in spite all of this, an independent media which is flawed is still infinitely better than one controlled and dictated to by government, political and business leaders.



William Gumede is Chairperson of the Democracy Works Foundation, Associate Professor and Convener, Political Economy, School of Governance, University of the Witwatersrand, and former Deputy Editor of The Sowetan newspaper.

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