



PJ Fourie

Distributed public service broadcasting as an alternative model for public service broadcasting in South Africa

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to propose/justify a new model for South African public service broadcasting, namely, *distributed public service broadcasting*. The justification is done against the background of a description of the changed and converged new media environment brought about by technological developments with the concomitant new production, content and distribution challenges and with interactivity as the new foundation of communicator-audience relationships. It is argued that the new media environment requires new thinking about public service broadcasting (PSB). The need for a new model is further justified against the background of the continued governance, managerial and financial problems the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has been experiencing for more than a decade, which has led to a new but controversial Public Service Broadcasting Bill (2009/2010) in an attempt to address the problems. It is argued that the problems will not be resolved. Instead, a new broadcasting model should rather be considered. It should, however, be emphasised that distributed public service broadcasting as a new model is only *introduced* in this article. Detail about the model is the topic of additional research that has yet to be done. Finally, the article should be read against the background of what were, at the time of writing in 2010, a number of serious governmental threats to freedom of expression with government proposing, inter alia, the introduction of a controversial Bill on the Protection of Information and also of a Media Appeals Tribunal – both of these constituting further threats to the autonomy of the public broadcaster and which makes it even more urgent that a new broadcasting model be considered. The above topics are addressed in separate parts of the article dealing with context, problems besetting South African public service broadcasting, past and present efforts to address the problems, a justification for a new model – one focusing on the new converged and digitised media environment – new thinking about regulation, the changed nature of social responsibility, a semiotic justification, and a brief introduction to what distributed public service broadcasting could entail.

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INTRODUCTION

Governance, the managerial and financial fiascos that characterised the South African public service broadcaster (the SABC) during recent years, together with the Minister of Communications' publication of a draft Public Service Broadcasting Bill in late 2009 to be debated and eventually tabled in Parliament in early 2011, have again placed public service broadcasting (PSB) in South Africa in the centre of the discourse about the state and the future of South African broadcasting¹. Civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including the SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition (hereafter referred to as the SOS Coalition), are actively campaigning and lobbying around and for the future of PSB in South Africa².

Many of the problems experienced are similar to those experienced in Europe and for which solutions may or may not have been found. In Europe, and in other parts of the world, the debate regarding PSB continues (see, for example Lowe, 2010). However, the contexts differ radically and require different solutions. To begin with, South Africa is a society characterised by various paradoxes and dichotomies. It is a society characterised by discrepancies between the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, the urbanised and the rural. It is characterised by its variety of cultures and languages and various racial and ethnic groups. Periodically, racism and xenophobia flare up, while fear and distrust of the other *loom* on the periphery of the country's social dynamics.

¹ At the time of writing (end of May 2010) and revising the article (September 2010) the debate about the future of PSB in South Africa and various aspects related to broadcasting, such as new local-content policy, the development of community television, the controversial new Public Service Broadcasting Bill and its radical proposals for transforming the South African broadcasting system, was ongoing on a daily basis at seminars, within discussion groups, in discussion papers and documents, in stakeholder meetings, and so on. At the same time, it became clear that the managerial (and governance) crisis at the SABC – despite having a new board – was still not resolved when a controversial appointment of a new head of news was made (see Ngalwa & Naidu, 2010:1). As it is not the purpose of this article either to document all the developments or to try to keep up with all the developments until the time of publication of this article, but rather to focus on fundamental problems and a possible fundamental solution to the problems, it is suggested that readers follow developments on the Internet sites of NGOs, such as the Freedom of Expression Institute, the Media Institute of Southern Africa, the SOS Coalition, the SABC itself, the media sections of online newspapers, and the Department of Communications.

² At a meeting on 10 June 2008, the regulatory and managerial crises of the SABC led to the formation of the SOS Support Public Broadcasting Coalition by representatives from the following organisations: the Media Monitoring Project (MMP) (now Media Monitoring Africa), the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ), the Black Film Makers Network, the Journalism and Media Studies Departments of Wits University, the Law Faculty of the University of Pretoria, the National Consumer Forum, the Southern African Litigation Centre, Sangonet, Oxfam, Bemawu, the Interpress Service, MCM Digital Media, the Afrimap Project, etcetera.





It is a crime- and fear-ridden society in which murder and corruption are becoming the norm³. These characteristics seep deep into South African politics, our day-to-day living and our economy, social structures and social behaviour. It is in this society that the country's First World media system has to function (or dysfunction) and in which South African public service broadcasting has to contribute to both nation building and development. (See Fourie & Wigston, 1996-2004, for overviews of the South African media system.) As such, South African broadcasting is part of the great South African paradox.

It is also in this society that the public service broadcaster can claim but limited success in its transformation from a state broadcaster under apartheid to a public broadcaster – a transformation that started in the early 1990s.

Many commentators argue that the broadcaster has failed dismally in the realisation of its mandate. This mandate is formulated in various South African broadcasting policy and legal documents and boils down to the expectation that it will contribute to development, cultural and social enhancement, education, and nation building⁴. Apart from and despite the complexities and paradoxes of South African society, which obviously affect the functionality of the SABC, three main reasons can be identified for the SABC's failure: government's constant threat to the broadcaster's independence and autonomy (or interference with governance), poor management, and insufficient funding and financial management.

In the remainder of the article these and related problems are briefly described. The purpose is to justify the introduction of regulated distributed PSB as a possible solution to the problems.

Distributed public service broadcasting means that the mandate and remit for public service broadcasting is not restricted to a single broadcaster – usually called the “public service broadcaster” (in the case of South Africa the SABC) – but broadened to include the expectation that all broadcasters in a country's broadcasting system have the legal responsibility to dedicate a quota of their programming to topics of national interest, i.e. programming that complies with the

³ See the websites of the South African Institute for Security Studies (<http://www.iss.co.za>); the South African Institute for Race Relations (<http://www.sairr.org.za>); the Ethics Institute of South Africa (<http://www.ethicsa.org>). In April 2010 it was, for example, reported that since 1994, 3 368 farmers had been murdered in South Africa. That constitutes more deaths than in any war in the world during the same period (see Peyper, 2010:5). The latest crime statistics (September 2010) are available at: <http://www.saps.gov.za>.

⁴ The Green and White papers on SA broadcasting leading to the 1999 Broadcasting Act and preceded by the Triple Enquiry can be seen as the initial and most important broadcasting directives in SA, similar to the European policy document guiding European Union broadcasting, namely the *Television without Frontiers Directive* adopted in 1989, revised in 1997 and again in 2007 and now called the *Audiovisual Media Service Directive*. In the South African documents the ideals, objectives and aims based on the principles of PSB are debated, outlined, and put forth as legislation. (For an overview and more detailed references to these documents see, for example, Fourie, 2003; 2004; 2005; Fourie & Wigston, 1996; 1998; 2000; 2002; 2004; Fourie & De Jager, 1998.)





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basic principles of public service broadcasting (see Fourie, 2003) and which seeks to contribute to national development, be it political (e.g. the expansion of democracy), economic, educational, social or cultural.

The argument⁵ is that only through a regulated distributed public service obligation extended to the full spectrum of the South African three-tier broadcasting system (public, private and community broadcasting) can broadcasting hope to contribute to development, education, nation building and cultural and social enhancement, can public broadcasting hope to be less at risk of government and other political interference, and can managerial and financial problems be addressed more effectively.

In addition to the problems besetting PSB in South Africa and the new media environment necessitating new thinking about PSB, distributed PSB can also be motivated against the background of postmodern and social semiotic media theory, in which the emphasis is on broadcasting as a fragmented, hybrid, diverse, intertextual, intergeneric mass-communication phenomenon and also the omnipresence of broadcasting and on its being part of the media sphere of meaning. This semiotic motivation is introduced in the final paragraphs of the article. It is expanded on in Fourie (2010b).

Before continuing with the description of (some of) the problems with which South African public broadcasting (more specifically the SABC) is beset, it should again be emphasised that the purpose of this article is solely to *introduce* distributed PSB as a possible model. The finer details of the model, for example aspects related to its management, funding, assessment, monitoring, and parameters for defining programming for funding, etcetera, are aspects that still need to be researched in South Africa, from a South African perspective and taking South African contexts into account.

1. PROBLEMS BESETTING SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

1.1 Background: intimidating legislation

What in 2008 was commonly perceived as the crisis of South African public service broadcasting (see e.g. Duncan, 2008a and 2008b) was preceded by a number of efforts on the part of government to interfere with the country's constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression, including also meddling with the autonomy of the public broadcaster. (For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the SA government and the media,

⁵ The same argument and suggestion towards a solution was dealt with by this author as far back as in 2003, 2004 and 2005 (see Fourie, 2003; 2004; 2005). However, given the further developments in information and communication technology (ICT) and with it the constantly changing media environment comprising, inter alia, new media, online and other publications, new genres, new ways of access and new delivery platforms as some of its main characteristics, the solution of distributed PSB in a country as diverse as South Africa appears to be even more necessary and workable than was argued in 2005.





see Fourie, 2009.) One such example was government's first attempt (after apartheid) to amend the new Broadcasting Act No 4 of 1999 (which was at that stage internationally seen as state-of-the-art broadcasting policy) with the Broadcasting Amendment Bill of 2002. This highly controversial Bill – which was profoundly criticised by media NGOs, stakeholders and the media itself – expected the SABC's Board to develop policies on programme and editorial content that would have to be approved by the Minister of Communications. In defending the Bill, the then Minister of Communications, the now late Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, criticised the broadcasting system, including the SABC, for continuing to be dominated “by content that most of the time is about far-away countries and events that have no bearing to our existence” (*The Star*, 2002). The Bill further expected a revision of the SABC Charter introduced in the 1999 Act, in which the mandate and remit of the SABC are outlined based on the classic principles of public service broadcasting. (See e.g. Fourie, 2003 for an overview of these principles.)

After lengthy discussions and after being referred back to the regulator, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (Icasa), the Bill was eventually accepted as the Broadcasting Amendment Act (No 64 of 2002) with reinforcement of the Charter and the requirement that the SABC should develop editorial policies independently but through a public process.

The Act, however, was not the end of government's attempts to interfere with the public broadcaster. Throughout 2006/2007, the media regularly reported such attempts. The SABC's own apparent readiness to be a vehicle for African National Congress (ANC) government propaganda was also frequently criticised. It was in this time, for example, that the SABC took a controversial decision not to broadcast a documentary critical of the then president, Thabo Mbeki, and that the existence was exposed of a blacklist of political commentators critical of the ANC, who were not to be used by the SABC. It was also in this time that the then executive director of the Institute for Freedom of Expression, Jane Duncan (2008b), published an in-depth analysis of what she saw as Mbeki's role in the erosion and decline of freedom of expression in South Africa⁶.

Other legislation implicitly impinging on the freedom of expression of the media, including the public broadcaster, is the similarly controversial Film and Publications Amendment Act

⁶ Duncan (2008b) shows how President Thabo Mbeki's administration was marked by repeated attempts to infiltrate the independence of both the public broadcaster (SABC) and the independent regulator (Icasa). To substantiate her argument, Duncan specifically refers to the Broadcasting Amendment Act, the Electronic Communications Act, the Film and Publications Amendment Bill and to more recent examples related to controversies about the independence of the SABC Board, the appointment of Icasas councillors, and the editorial independence of the SABC. She argues that interference was/is done under the umbrella of development and development needs to attain so-called development goals within the government's framework of an overall economic policy.





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of 2009⁷. First published as a Bill in 2006, this Act was/is seen by all concerned as a grave violation of freedom of expression. After a lengthy battle, the Act was passed under the pretext of protecting children against pornography. Similarly, the Electronic Communications Act (No 36 of 2005) is experienced as a potential threat to freedom of expression, also to the public broadcaster. The purpose of this Act is to provide for the protection of the destruction of information, loss or disclosure of certain information, and to provide for the regulation of the manner in which information may be protected. Again, there is concern regarding how the Act may be interpreted.

After a series of attacks on the media for being anti-government, non-patriotic and not contributing to national development (see Fourie, 2009), the ANC government threatened at its 2007 Polokwane Conference to establish an additional⁸ tribunal to monitor the media. At this conference, the split in the governing ANC party between supporters of the then president, Thabo Mbeki, and the president now in office, Jacob Zuma, came to a head and it has since dictated and directed ANC governance and policies. This split is also echoed in the governance and management of the SABC. In a discussion document entitled "Communications and the Battle of Ideas" the Polokwane Conference dealt, in 26 points, with issues such as media freedom and diversity, public broadcasting and signal distribution, the media and social cohesion, and the media and gender. However, one of the main points was the ANC's concern over the adequacy of the existing system of self-regulation and the possibility of establishing an additional monitoring and/or regulatory instrument, namely a Media Appeals Tribunal (MAT).

As referred to in endnote 1, keeping up with the negative developments in South African public broadcasting is a major task. By the time this journal is published, aspects dealt with in this article may well be history and/or may have changed radically. Nevertheless, in September 2010, the appeals tribunal was still on the table and on 9 September 2010, President Jacob Zuma publicly emphasised his commitment to instating the tribunal (see Political Editor, 2010:2). The reasons then given were that a tribunal would be the most suitable place for individuals to appeal against the media (notwithstanding the Press Ombudsman and the Press Council) and that the ANC was not only concerned about the media's freedom but

⁷ In terms of the Film and Publications Amendment Act of 2009 pre-publication screening rules may be imposed on the print, broadcast and new media (such as mobile telephony) of almost any content. It can subject broadcasters (and publishers) to the control of the Film and Publications Board. It can be interpreted to include any 'sequence of images' as being a 'film' meaning that any content aired on television, over mobile phones or by any other media, even on news, in sports programmes and on the on-line pages of newspapers, could be potentially banned.

⁸ This threat came over and above the existing external and internal regulatory bodies for the monitoring of the media, such as Icasa, The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA), and the Press Ombudsman. See Fourie (2008) and Van Heerden (2008) for an overview of internal and external media regulation in South Africa.





the human rights of each and everyone. The primary purpose of The Bill on the Protection of Information is the safeguarding of information against international misuse of information for strategic purposes. This confirmation from President Zuma came despite civil society's major campaign against the proposed tribunal and the government's Bill on the Protection of Information. The Bill, inter alia, makes it a punishable offence (up to 25 years in prison) for the media to possess, communicate or publish classified state information and it contains elements that threaten each citizen's right to information. The Bill defines any government information as classifiable if it is deemed, by a politician and/or a civil servant, to be harmful to the 'national interest'.

In short, in September 2010, the media, the political opposition, journalists, editors, media NGOs, labour unions, academics, legal experts and civil society all regard the Bill on Public Service Broadcasting – together with the continuing managerial and governance crises at the SABC, the threat of a media tribunal, and the Bill on the Protection of Information – to be one of the gravest threats to the South African Constitution since the demise of apartheid in 1994 and moreover to the Constitution's entrenchment of freedom of expression. Despite government's claims to the contrary, these developments strongly remind one and may indicate the beginning of a return to the draconian media censorship and repression of freedom of expression experienced under apartheid.

Even if the issues have been resolved by the time of the publication of this article, the government's periodic behaviour, since 1994, of threatening, blaming and discrediting the media is strongly reminiscent of apartheid tactics and may, as under apartheid, lead to self-censorship and a frightened media. An inhibited, frightened and self-censored media are often more dangerous and detrimental to the freedom of expression than stronger regulation and authoritarian censorship. The criticism expressed in this article – and given the topic of this article, namely broadcasting – especially against the Bill on Public Service Broadcasting, thus remains relevant.

To return to public service broadcasting: the above is only a brief overview of some of the (legal) developments in respect of the build up and/or contribution by government/media relations to what eventually became known and branded as the SABC crisis.

1.2 The SABC crisis and a new Bill

In 2008, and throughout 2009, the SABC was embroiled in a number of managerial and regulatory fiascos, many of which can be related to the split within the ANC. This split was, as mentioned above, echoed in the managerial forums and boardrooms of the SABC. Parliamentarians, for example, complained that they had been forced by government to support certain candidates for appointment to the board. Lloyd, Duncan, Minnie and Bussiek (2010:113) write:



... newspaper reports on the SABC often read like scripts for soap opera instalments – with intrigues, personal vendettas and power games between board and management, suspension of top personnel (including the Group Company Executive Officer (GCEO) himself) by either side, appeals to the courts and calls for a vote of no confidence against the board as a whole in Parliament (op.cit.:113-114).

The managerial fiasco led the new Minister of Communications in President Jacob Zuma's cabinet, Siphwe Nyanda, to ask for a review of broadcasting law, including a review of the procedures for the appointment of the board, a review of the relationship between the board and management, and for stronger power to the ruling party to remove the board in toto. In July 2008, the Broadcasting Amendment Bill⁹ was introduced in Parliament with the above recommendations and it was brought into effect in March 2009. The then SABC Board was removed shortly after the implementation of the Act in 2009 and replaced by an interim board. By the end of 2009, a new board was elected by Parliament and appointed by the President.

It was after this commotion that, in July 2009, the Department of Communications published a Public Service Broadcasting Discussion Document and following on this a Public Service Broadcasting Bill in October 2009. (For a detailed analysis of the 2008/2009 crises of the SABC, see Jane Duncan's *Unpacking the crises at the SABC*, 2008a.)

The Bill came as a shock and was rigorously criticised by opposition politicians, academics and NGOs. In general, the Bill was seen as an attempt by government to take control of the SABC under the pretence of emphasising the SABC's role in development.

2.2.1 Critical aspects of the Bill

Funding

With regard to funding, the Bill, inter alia, imposes a 1% broadcasting tax on South African taxpayers. This is to replace the present licence fee. This suggestion was/is met with strong criticism from the public, the industry, and economists alike. Eventually, it was dismissed by the Minister of Finance, the main reasons being that not all taxpayers have access to the public broadcaster, people cannot be made to pay for something they may not even use, but most of all, people may not have the money and are already overtaxed. In defending the proposed broadcasting tax, the Minister of Communications argued that "the present manner in which the public broadcaster raises funds (see point 3) cannot be relied upon. Hundreds of thousands of people do not honour their obligation to pay television licence fees. This leaves the SABC in a dire situation, in which it has to

⁹ This Bill was only promulgated in 2009 after the then Acting State President Kgalema Motlanthe refused to sign it because it was seen to be unconstitutional. It was eventually adopted (still with criticism), but now at least subject to the provision that a due inquiry was to be conducted prior to the axing of the SABC Board or some of its members. Evidence would have to be produced of incompetence, misconduct or dereliction of duty.



spend millions of rand on debt collection services in a bid to recover the revenue due to it" (Nyanda, 2009:1).

In April 2010 the Conference of the Commonwealth Broadcasters' Association (with representatives from all the commonwealth countries) was held in Johannesburg. On this occasion, the Director General of the Department of Communications (DOC) reaffirmed that the Department was still committed to the idea of a broadcasting tax mainly because the licence fee was not sustainable and that the DOC would be working closely with the National Treasury to table the tax proposal jointly. He also reaffirmed that the DOC was committed to the idea of a central fund for broadcasting and stated that, if the new Bill were accepted, the SABC, on its part, would publicly have to put forward programming plans (to access this fund?) and that this would be done in order to make the SABC more accountable (see later discussion of assessment). He admitted that the DOC had yet to work out the overall funding needs of the broadcasting sector, but that for the SABC, the central fund would only be to replace the licence fee – the SABC's other funding streams, such as advertising, would remain in place (Skinner, 2010). With that he reaffirmed the SABC's unfair competitive and privileged role in the broadcasting system.

In January 2010, SOS Coalition called for the SABC to become a Chapter Nine institution¹⁰ and argued that this was probably the only solution to protect the public broadcaster from government interference. In other words, the Coalition proposed the decorporation of the institution.

In order to relieve some of the SABC's pressing financial problems, the State Treasury had to bail out the SABC with R1, 47 billion (see Grootes, 2010). (Also see point 3.) A positive aspect of the Bill in terms of funding, however, includes the identification of the need for a Public Broadcasting Fund, which is preferable to direct government funding and which will (can) allow other broadcasters and producers to access the fund (especially if distributed PSB were to be introduced – as will be argued later in the article.)

Governance

As far as governance is concerned, the Bill was/is seen as an attempt to place the minister "at the centre and enable him to control and at times dictate content and operational issues" (Kupe, 2009:4). In short, as Kupe wrote: "... if implemented – [the Bill-PJF] will constitute a calculated assault on our democratic freedoms."

¹⁰ *Chapter 9 institutions* are institutions described in Chapter 9 of the SA Constitution as state institutions supporting constitutional democracy. Initially these included the Public Protector, the Human Rights Commission, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities, the Commission for Gender Equality, the Auditor-General, and the Electoral Commission.





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The Bill introduces three new boards: a local-content advisory board, a public service broadcasting advisory board and a panel to evaluate the performance of the SABC. These structures are, to a certain extent, in line with policy developments in, for example, the European Union. However, the implementation and functions of these boards still have to be debated, investigated and considered vis-à-vis existing internal and external regulatory arrangements and bodies. The concern is that the proposed boards may be the beginning of the dismantling and the replacement of existing bodies with more rigid ones.

With reference to the public broadcaster's role in international communication, the Bill proposes that there should be an international division to absorb the SABC's Channel Africa, which, as part of the SABC's expansion plans on the African continent, is not successful. The SOS Coalition considers this provision to be unconstitutional because it sees the role of the broadcaster's international division as one of promoting current government policies. This constitutes a direct interference with the SABC's freedom of expression.

The most serious provisions of the Bill, however, relate to the almost unlimited powers it may give the Minister. In his defence, the Minister of Communications argued that he "... has looked at the challenges facing the public broadcaster, which included governance and management capacity. A new vision and mandate for public broadcasting services in line with South Africa's development agenda is required. The governance of the SABC needs to be strengthened" (Nyanda, 2009:1).

New channels, mixed model and an incompetent regulator

As regards content, and as far as new channels and developments are concerned, the Bill obligates the SABC to apply within 12 months for licences for extra channels to deal with education, health, youth, sports, parliamentary services and 'government and interactive services' (Harber, 2009:2). Excellent as this may sound, it is however unrealistic if one takes into account that two regional channels for which provision was made in earlier legislation (especially to address the language issue in South Africa) are still not functional, owing mainly to a lack of funding. The same applies to four earlier, licensed private (subscription/pay) television channels of which only one, On Digital Media's *TopTV*, was launched in May 2010¹¹.

¹¹ *TopTv* is the second subscription/pay private-television platform in South Africa with more than 20 channels offered in seven packages at a cheaper rate than DStv – which has thus far been the only subscription television platform with more than 50 television and more than 50 audio and radio channels. Not only does *TopTv* afford competition for DStv but also for the SABC, which has already lost audiences (especially Afrikaans viewers) to DStv's (M-Net's) kykNet and to the only other free-to-air channel in South Africa, namely e.tv. The latter has also started both a 24-hour news channel on the DStv platform and an Afrikaans news bulletin on DStv's kykNet.





It is argued that this provision of the Bill does not take cognisance of the incapacity – if not incompetence – of the regulator (Icasa) to execute its obligations. When the Bill was published, the chairman of Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Communications, Ismail Vadi, launched a harsh attack on the incompetence of the regulator (see *The Weekender*, 2009). Early in 2010, it was also reported that government was finalising the amendment of legislation governing Icasa in order to resolve the tension between the regulator's council and its management (see Mochiko, 2010.)

If the Bill's proposed new channels for the SABC are to be seen as commercial channels established with the purpose of funding the SABC's only two public service channels, this objective may again fail just as the objective of using SABC 3 to fund SABC 1 and SABC 2 as public channels was/is failing. Harber (2009:2) holds that this mixed model has until now not worked in South Africa. He states:

...at the moment, the subsidisation is actually working the other way, since *SABC 1* makes enough money to subsidise the loss-making commercial channel, *SABC 3*. This needs to be fixed, rather than perpetuated.

After publication of the Bill in October 2009, a month was given for the public and stakeholders to respond. This was later extended by the Minister to 15 January 2010, after which 32 submissions (see Nyanda, 2009) were received. According to Skinner (2010), most submissions pointed out that there were fundamental problems with the Draft Bill, including major constitutional problems.

2. ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS

The SABC and government have engaged in a number of attempts to solve the broadcaster's problems. Despite criticism against it, the new Public Service Broadcasting Bill can indeed be seen as such an attempt. Many of the attempts, now and in the past, also correspond to those taken in past decades in Europe and by the European Union. One can to a large extent read the processes, documents and the eventual new Broadcasting Act of 1999 as being in line with Europe's well-known Treaty of Amsterdam, thereafter adding protocols to protect PSB as an institution, to protect it from competition with the private sector, to uphold the legitimacy of PSB funding, and to ensure that PSB broadcasters meet their mandates.

2.1 Ownership and regulation

In terms of ownership, regulation and the liberalisation of the market, one of the first steps was the highly successful selling of some of the SABC's public service radio stations to private investors in the 1990s. This was followed by an in-depth and lengthy inquiry into ownership legislation (2002), and positive revisions of the same, followed by the licensing of four new additional private pay-television channels and the announcement of two new regional television channels for the SABC. (With the exception of On Digital Media, none of these 'new' channels were already operative in September 2010.) (see endnote 11)





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However and notwithstanding, it is argued that the SABC, despite its intentions, is slipping up in terms of opportunities brought about by the new media and its technologies. How PSB can gain from the new media, convergence and digitisation is dealt with extensively by Debrett (2009) with reference to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and Television New Zealand (TVNZ). South Africa can learn from these broadcasters' experiences. One of the potential gains of digitisation is the possibility of introducing more channels.

This then is also exactly what the group chief executive officer of the SABC highlighted at the recent Commonwealth Broadcasters' Association Conference (April 2010, Johannesburg), when he underlined the impact of the digital migration process on the SABC. He confirmed that the SABC would be launching a further nine television channels to make up a full bouquet of 12 channels. He stated that it was essential to have these extra channels in order for the SABC to fulfil its public mandate. As always happens, he, however, complained that the SABC did not as yet have the funds to run these new channels. The final date for the digital switchover has been changed a number of times and has not been finalised.

2.2 Funding

As far as funding¹² in Europe is concerned, Bardoel and d'Haenens (2008:349) claim that the main source of income for most PSBs remains the licence fee, but most countries have mixed systems. In addition, the overall financial position of European Union (EU) public television channels differs considerably, with, for example, the BBC's budget being about seven times higher than the total budget of the 23 public broadcasting organisations that made up the public broadcasting service in the Netherlands in 2008.

In South Africa, the mixed funding model prevails. However from the figures below, it is clear that the SABC is predominantly reliant on commercial income (advertising and sponsorships), making the competition between the SABC and private broadcasters even more excessive if not, as is justifiably argued by the private sector, unfair. According to Lloyd, Duncan, Minnie and Bussiek (2010:152), the funding mix for the SABC in 2008/2009 was:

- Commercial funding: 77% (R 3.663bn) (0.37 billion Euro)
- Licence fee income: 18% (R865m)

¹² Regarding the funding of PSB in Europe, the Amsterdam Protocol as endorsed by the European Commission elucidates the unique nature and social significance of PSB by placing PSB, inter alia, on a level that is not "automatically subject to the same system of competition as other goods and services". However, simultaneously, the European Commission acknowledges that public funding distorts free trade in the broadcasting market. Such funding is therefore permissible only if a number of conditions are met. This boils down to the expectation of clear and formal task definition in the form of a law, a licence meeting certain requirements, a public service contract, and a national agency to monitor the fulfilment of the task (Coppens & Saeys:267).





- Government allocation: 2% (R106m)
- Other (including sale of merchandise, rental of studios, etc.): 3%

After annual reporting profits between 2005 and 2008, the SABC reported a deficit of R 790 million in 2009 (op cit.:151). According to Lloyd et al., the high-profit years coincided with an advertising boom that cooled down on account of the economic downturn starting in 2007. This demonstrates just how vulnerable the SABC is to any reduction in advertising income (op cit.:152).

Collecting licence fees remains a major challenge confronting the SABC. A licence costing R225, costs the SABC R110 (per licence) to collect from non-payers. Given the SABC's deficit, the National Treasury, as already mentioned, had to bail out the SABC in November 2009 with R1,47bn. The bailout was seen to allow the SABC to settle its debts and start afresh under a new board. The money was further planned to be released in instalments, thereby enabling the government to oversee and monitor how the money is/was spent, including tight control measures and regular management reports to be introduced (Benjamin & Ensor, 2009). As pointed out, at the same time, the new Bill introduced the possibility of levying a broadcasting tax in an attempt to address the funding problems. As argued above, this tax has been vehemently criticised and the search for a more workable and durable solution to the problem of funding the public broadcaster continues.

In April 2010, the media reported that, despite the government's bailout and promises that the SABC would settle outstanding debts by the end of March 2010, this had however not happened. The SABC still owed, amongst others, independent producers. A Television Industry Emergency Coalition was formed with whom the SABC chief executive undertook to meet at least once a month. (see Ferreira, 2010) It was also reported in May 2010 that despite its financial problems, the SABC was seeking to rent probably one of the most expensive sites in Johannesburg, the Sandton Convention Centre, at a cost of R26 million for 1800m² for the duration of the World Cup Soccer event in June/July 2010 (Tolsi, 2010:1). From the above it is clear that despite attempts to address the problem and despite the possibility of levying a tax and extending the opportunities of mixed funding, funding remains a key problem both of and at the SABC, which also includes the management of funding. Given the SABC's history, this will probably remain a problem for some considerable time to come.

3.3 Remit and performance assessment

The problems at the SABC have drawn attention to the urgent need for assessment and for holding the broadcaster and its managers accountable. This issue is increasingly raised by NGOs (including trade unions) and even by government itself. Nothing clear has yet emerged, but as in Europe (see Coppens & Saeys, 2006:263), the process seems to start with a renewed emphasis on the 'classic' principles of PSB or the remit of the public broadcaster. As far as this is concerned, there are the so-called public service contracts, or in South Africa





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the SABC Charter, which is legalised in the Broadcasting Act. The Charter is again on the table in the 2009/2010 Bill. However, despite this Charter, what exactly constitutes public service broadcasting and how it differs from what is being done by private and community broadcasters, and how to assess it, remain vague, debatable and problematic. This is even more so in the new media environment with its new media platforms.

Formulated differently: except for local-content policy¹³ and how to measure and report local content, clear performance and measurement criteria regarding the social responsibility of the public service broadcaster (apart from offering local content of a national character) and regarding what this social responsibility actually entails, remains problematic.

Furthermore, as far as assessment of PSB is concerned, in South Africa there is the argument that performance criteria and how to monitor these are already dealt with in various codes of conduct and in the licensing criteria of existing internal and external regulatory and monitoring institutions, such as the code and licensing criteria of Icasa, the code of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), and the code of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCSSA). These institutions and their work could, however, be made more prominent in the public eye. Furthermore, the public broadcaster's annual report to government can be more widely publicised and debated, and consideration could be given to the Dutch practice of having the public broadcasting system as a whole screened every five years, by an ad hoc commission of experts (see Bardoel, 2003a). Yet, one must bear Born's (2003) warning in mind, namely that an overemphasis on external and self-assessment could make the broadcaster become more occupied with justifying its actions than with its remit. Or, as Coppens and Saeys (2006:279) argue, the crucial element of any performance assessment – no matter what criteria and instruments are used or by whom it is performed – remains its validity.

Coppens and Saeys (2006:270-271) maintain that one of the advantages of contracts may be a more management-orientated approach. In South Africa however it seems as if one of the problems is overmanagement (or incompetent management). At the time of writing, a case in point was the then new Group Head of the SABC, Solly Mokoetle's, acknowledgement that part of, if not the most important reason for the SABC's financial problems was that there were more managers than workers to keep the corporation operationally functional. He cited this as the motivation for a new strategic plan on managerial structures. According to him, the overmanaged old structures contributed to instabilities and insecurities. It is these instabilities and insecurities that, as acknowledged by Mokoetle, lead to, amongst other things, a dramatic drop in the audience figures of the SABC's main television news bulletin to

¹³ In early May 2010 the Department of Communications organised a local-content summit to start the process of revising local-content policy. The emphasis was, inter alia, on trends in content development, production, acquisition and consumption, distribution platforms and technologies – and their implications for the industry – funding, decentralisation of content production, programme repeats, and on content adaptation.



its private competitor – e.tv's *eNews Prime Time*. The 1,1 million viewers of SABC 3's *News @ 7* in 2007 dropped to 866 000 viewers by the end of February 2010. Compare this with the free-to-air private e.tv's 1,26 million viewers for its *eNews Prime Time* bulletin at the end of February 2010. (Ferreira, 2010b:6.)

Coppens and Saeys (2006:270-271) also point out that contacts/charters do not necessarily lead to greater autonomy. On the contrary, they can lead to an inside exercise between a government department and the broadcaster instead of a contract and dialogue between the broadcaster and the public. In South Africa, for example, it has led to sidestepping the regulator a number of times. In March 2010 the *Mail&Guardian*, for example, reported a possible breakdown in communication between government's Department of Communications and the regulator "which could result in government funding being cut off to both institutions (Icasa and the SABC) as well as to parastatals falling under the Department, including Sentech and the South African Post Office" (see Gedye 2010:7).

3. **DISTRUBUTED PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING**

From the above it can be deduced that the attempts to address the problems related to the autonomy, financing and management of the SABC have time and again failed and that, given the depth of the criticism against it, even the latest attempt in respect of the proposed Bill will probably not succeed.

The heading and subheadings of the main story on the front page of the *Mail&Guardian* of 28 May 2010, summarise the country's annoyance and disappointment with its public broadcaster and its problems that have been going on for more than twenty years. The heading reads: "*SABC: New board, old chaos*". Subheadings read: "*Chairman at odds with board*", "*Ngubane's lobbying middles digitisation plans*", and "*Molefe appointment broke the rules*". (Ngubane, being the chair of the SABC board, allegedly lobbying for Japanese broadcasting technology; Molefe's appointment as head of news being seen to be flawed and not having been done in accordance with prescribed procedures.) Similarly, in the same week, the SOS Coalition's call for the resignation of the 'new' chair of the board because of the irregularities regarding the appointment of the head of news, accentuated stakeholders' growing frustration with both the SABC and the Department of Communications. In September 2010, conflict related to managerial appointments and the relationship between management and the board continued to enjoy almost daily media coverage.

From a more theoretical and fundamental perspective, it can be argued that a reason for the SABC's failure(s) and problems is that despite their rhetoric about the challenges and opportunities of the new media environment, the broadcaster and the Department of Communications (the government) have not yet fundamentally adapted to these challenges and opportunities. The reasons are political and motivated by fear of losing power over an influential mass-communication medium. Fundamentally, adapting would mean accepting the challenge of a new broadcasting model for PSB. Such a new model could be distributed PSB.



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In the remaining part of the article distributed PSB is briefly justified by advancing arguments about the nature of the new media environment, regulation, social responsibility, market failure, and the media sphere of meaning.

3.1 The new media environment and its challenges and opportunities

Elsewhere (see e.g. Fourie, 2010a) the nature of the changed media environment and changed society are dealt with in more detail.

Bardoel and d'Haenens (2008:341-342), for example, maintain that the changed and changing context of PSB can no longer be ignored in a society that is also changing because of major social trends, such as the individualisation of society characterised by lesser collective participation, a lower interest in politics and established institutions and also a shift from a monocultural to a multicultural society. They maintain, inter alia, that, in a fuller broadcasting environment, there seems to be further specialisation; that the new social binding and collective role of new media such as Facebook and Twitter have taken over the binding role of traditional mass media; that new media platforms offer interactivity and move the audience from linear viewing habits to the gradual growth of non-linear viewing; and that, historically, PSB was justified on technical grounds – the non-availability? or scarcity of frequencies, but that this is no longer a real consideration. Also see Punie, et al. (2002:12-16) for future predictions and a description of the future media market.

Debrett (2009:809-810) regards the new media environment to have forced on us the need to think about *all* broadcasters as public broadcasters, the difference being that a public broadcaster is funded commercially but has a clear remit from the government, while a public service broadcaster tends to be funded by the government. Debrett also emphasises the need to define the PSB principle of universality in a new way – universality now meaning to address the full range of media platforms in order to aggregate sufficient fragments to reach a general public. It is also important to think anew about the so-called democratic principle related to PSB news and current affairs by including different views of what constitutes democracy, and different kinds of democracy and relationships between media and democracy.

Debrett further shows how the new media environment with its emphasis on the possibilities of multiplatforms has created new opportunities in terms of funding by, for instance, producing news as a brand (of a national broadcaster) that can be sold to different broadcasters. He indicates how multiplatforms can be used to address the problems related to the PSB principle of addressing minority audiences and interests and how the new media environment, with its growing interactivity, enhances the possibility of quality programming and in-depth programming – principles or ideals closely associated with PSB.

From all this it can be concluded that in the new media environment “the public service ethos has evolved and expanded, with the ‘holy trinity’ of PSB goals devised by the BBC’s first Director General, Lord Reith – ‘to inform, educate and entertain’ – complemented by the





addition of 'connect' " (Debrett, 2009:816 quoting Born, 2004:486). Similarly, Coppens and Saeys (2006:263) argue that "... the traditional threefold task [of PSB-PJF] as formulated by Reith (information, education, entertainment) is no longer an adequate basis for the operation and financing of PSB".

Some of the main predictions following from this are that the networked interactive environment will create hybrid-funded multicultural broadcasters moving into an era of broadband piloting of programmes and programme concepts, facilitating the targeting of particular audience demographics (Debrett:817), on-demand media and, further, increased competition. From a postmodernist and semiotic perspective, Fourie (2010b) emphasises increased fragmentation and increased redundancy.

What the new media environment, as well as everything it entails, thus demands is a new model for public service broadcasting. Such a model (see Fourie, 2005):

- Will need to recognise a balance between economic and non-economic goals (see Van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003).
- Will need to take a diversity of forms at different sites (see Jacka, 2003:188).
- Will need not be restricted to existing public service institutions (see Steemers, 2003:128-129)
- Should be access driven, but access in acknowledgement of the means and nature of the new media environment (see Raboy, 2003:50; Van Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003:205).
- Should be based on industrial logic (see Alm & Lowe, 2003:223).

In the words of Ed Richards (in 2004 Senior Partner: Strategy and Market Development of Britain's Ofcom), a new model should be based on recognising that the world has reached the end of broadcasting as it was known (Richards, 2004).

3.2 Regulation

The new context has brought about new and changed regulatory models. (See Machet et al., 2002 and Hallin & Mancini, 2004 for an overview of models.) What is important is that new and changed ways of regulating public service broadcasting should be embedded in a consideration of the scope and nature of the new digitised media environment as it is described both above and, for example, in the report of the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR, 2005).

This report emphasises that public interest and pluralism in the media should "no longer be looked at in terms of a single medium or sector, such as broadcasting or the press, but should include the full supply of content and its use via other media whether public or private, on the basis of important social functions" (Bardoel & d'Haenens, 2008:347).





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Such an understanding of the market, an awareness of intertextuality in terms of content and form, and the role of content and form in narrative accrual in the creation of a media sphere of meaning (see sections 4.5 and 5) should form the foundation of future South African broadcasting policy. The work of Lloyd et al., 2010 takes the first steps towards such an understanding.

3.3 Social responsibility/corporate social responsibility

What the above also suggests is that the idea of social responsibility itself has changed and is indeed still changing.

In 2003, Bardoel and Brants (2003:181-182) already reasoned that social responsibility is no longer the exclusive asset of public organisations – including public broadcasters. In the light of liberalisation, deregulation and self-regulation, social responsibility has shifted from the state and its institutions to social institutions and commercial enterprises. In such circumstances, the question arises whether there should be a continuation of the present policy situation in which highly regulated public broadcasters *alone* can be expected to fulfil public service obligations. The question is whether new policy should not be introduced in which both public and private broadcasters share social responsibility and public duties.

Bardoel and d'Haenens (2008:348-349) argue that there has not been an end to state responsibility but that new ways of thinking about democracy have brought about “new ways of regulating social responsibility and the state’s responsibility for social responsibility”. They argue that it “... is important to find the right mix between ‘co-regulation’ and regulated ‘self-regulation’ which in any case implies an important albeit shared role for the state”.

Based on research in the field of corporate communication, it is also clear that the topic of shared social responsibility in South Africa between the state and corporate companies is increasingly emphasised. Good examples can be found in the field of access to telecommunications, combating HIV and Aids, poverty alleviation, and so on. (see, for example, Burger 2009) In South Africa, there are also many success stories as a result of what is known as public-private partnerships or the so-called PPPs, especially in the field of telecommunications.

3.4 Market failure

As a result of changed perceptions regarding social responsibility and the private sector’s increased role and acceptance of social responsibility, public broadcasters’ argument about the private sector’s market failure to produce and offer public service programming and their indifference in respect of the topic of universal service and access, is becoming progressively difficult to maintain. Many examples exist of how South African private broadcasters play an increasing role in the provision-of-information debate and in-depth programming related to ardent issues in South African society and also in the provision of entertainment and drama





with plots and narratives that focus on matters of concern to nation building and which thus inherently focus audiences' attention on intercultural and interracial coexistence.

It was considered that this, together with the SABC's continued, increased, and unfair competition with private broadcasters for audiences and advertising, would probably make the market-failure argument difficult both to uphold and sustain during Icasa's new hearings on ownership and control, which were held in May 2010.

The SABC itself has moved away from what Bardoel and d'Haenens (2008:344, following Jakubowicz, 2002) call the 'monastery model' to the 'full portfolio model', meaning a programme offering encompassing all the broadcasting genres. There is no reason why private broadcasters, as they are already doing in South Africa, should not also offer a full portfolio, including so-called 'PSB programming' or that they should be denied the opportunities of a full portfolio.

3.5 Interactivity and narrative accrual

In addition to this, and from a media semiotic perspective, in the new media environment the topic of intertextuality, and akin to it, the one of *narrative accrual*, are exceedingly relevant. Narrative accrual refers to the accumulation of the meaning of media content on a specific topic through different media and genres. In South Africa, an example would be the accumulation of meaning through the programming (content and form) of both public and private broadcasters on the topic of intercultural and interracial coexistence. Formulated differently, the new media environment implores on us the need to broaden the definition of intertextuality far beyond media genres and media content on a single channel and/or the different channels of a particular broadcaster. Intertextuality (and narrative accrual) should be understood in terms of intra- and intermedia content and eventually the intra and intermedia production of meaning. From a semiotic perspective this means that in the media sphere of meaning PSB is increasingly difficult to define as a separate genre/medium/content. This argument is dealt with in more depth in other research at present being done by the author.

4. TOWARDS A NEW MODEL: FROM PSB AS AN INSTITUTION TO DISTRIBUTED PSB AND PSB AS A GENRE

Taking into account the above arguments about PSB, the paradoxes of South African society, its First World media system, and the changes, issues and problems experienced with South African public service broadcasting, distributed public service broadcasting can be compellingly motivated as a model for the multicultural, multiracial and multilinguistic South Africa – in short, the so-called Rainbow Nation. What is meant by this model and what could it entail?

First, it would mean the dismantling of public service broadcasting in its present form (see Fourie, 2005) and thus the dismantling of the SABC as an institution, and the replacement of the SABC





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with an organisation similar to, for example, New Zealand On Air¹⁴ – thus a broadcasting agency. The proposal of a central broadcasting fund in the 2009/2010 broadcasting Bill could indicate a move in this direction. Second, it would mean the replacement of the concept of PSB as an institution with PSB as a genre, where such a genre would embody the principles of ‘traditional’ PSB (see Fourie, 2005). Third, it would mean that *all* broadcasters in a country would have to broadcast – as part of their programming – programmes of a public service nature, measured either in the form of programme type, time or scheduling quotas.

The dismantling of PSB as an institution

Despite all the problems with/of the SABC and with PSB, the struggle for PSB itself has been going on for decades and continues. Perhaps the struggle has become a business in and for itself sustained by political, academic, research, and personal agendas far removed from the interests of the public and society. With the exception of Italy (see D’Arma, 2009:780), the complete dismantling of PSB as an institution or its full privatisation is thus seldom mentioned in other countries. The converse would rather seem to apply in that the European Broadcasting Union’s Digital Strategy Group and organisations, such as the South African SOS Coalition and the South African government, still see institutionalised PSB as the only trustworthy model for the delivery of public service broadcasting, while they see the model of distributed public service broadcasting as a non-viable solution.

If, however, the vast and continuing problems with PSB are not sufficient motivation for considering distributed PSB as an alternative, then, at least in countries such as South Africa, with continuing development needs and the need for social construction or social reconstruction, the social responsibility of *all media* needs to be emphasised and in this respect may be an even more urgent reason for considering distributed PSB. Ways can be investigated of dealing with the typical problems associated with distributed PSB. It seems as if the main problems are (i) defining PSB as a genre and, using the precise definition as a point of departure, next deciding how to fund such a genre in terms of what qualifies as PSB and what not; and then to a lesser extent (ii) the management of the fund; and (iii) the monitoring of the broadcasters. These, however, are administrative and not phenomenological or conceptual problems. As such they are not insurmountable.

PSB as a genre

It is not the objective of this article to give a detailed description of what PSB as a genre could be. As it was argued in Fourie (2004; 2005), suffice it to say that, in defining PSB as a genre, the ideal content principles of public service broadcasting could be used as a foundation, namely

¹⁴ New Zealand On Air is an independent New Zealand broadcast-funding agency. It is an autonomous agency separate from central government and governed by a board of six members appointed by the Minister of Broadcasting. New Zealand On Air is responsible for the funding of public service programming content across television, radio and new media platforms in New Zealand. (See New Zealand on Air. Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NZ_On_Air. Retrieved 2010-04-22.)





that programmes should have a clear objective (independent of their format – be it documentary, drama, magazine programmes, current affairs, educational programmes) towards:

- The development of audiences in matters related to national development, national history, culture and identity.
- The principles of distinctiveness and creativity.
- Performing the “journalistic grammar of democratic political conduct” (see Garnham, 2003:195) so as to ensure that the programmes are investigative, revealing and that they set the table for debate.

As argued by Alm and Lowe (2003:223) in their work on the outsourcing of core PSB competencies, such a genre could embrace the values of PSB, namely content that:

- Nurtures, supports and defends cultural pluralism.
- Instils a sense of security and reliability.
- Sets standards for quality and professionalism.

As far as the regulation of such a genre is concerned, present South African local-content policy and the regulation thereof can be a point of departure. Funds could be made available in the form of incentives to the whole spectrum of broadcasters instead of trying to address the problem(s) of funding and regulating a single so-called public service institution that is in competition with all the other broadcasters. As mentioned, the 2009/2010 Bill’s discussion of a central broadcasting fund, which however still needs to be worked out in detail should it indeed be passed, and the Bill’s consideration of the future role of the Media and Development Agency¹⁵, together with existing South African regulatory and monitoring bodies, could provide a basis for planning future regulation and monitoring.

Focussing on a public service genre could be a first step towards addressing both the numerous paradoxes with which present PSB policy is faced and the tensions that arise from the dichotomies between public/private, culture/market, service/profit, national/global, citizen/consumer, and between quality/quantity. It could, in a developing country, acknowledge the need for social responsibility across the board. It could stimulate local production, the local production industry and also the development of a uniquely South African style.

In terms of access, focussing on PSB as a genre and getting rid of what increasingly seems to be an artificial distinction between public, private and community broadcasting, could expose the public/audiences (fragmented as they may be) to more “socially responsible content”. In this way, a beginning can be made to address the problem of the rich/poor divide in information. As regards the roll-out of technology towards a universal service, there is no reason why this

¹⁵ The South African Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) was set up by an Act of Parliament (Act 14 of 2002) to enable “historically disadvantaged communities and persons not adequately served by the media” to gain access to the media.





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should not be regulated in order to assure the private industry's contribution in this respect – especially in the light of digitisation and the digital switch-over, which, as promised by the Minister of Communications, will open the possibilities of more channels and broadcasting opportunities.

On a macrotheoretical level, moving beyond PSB as an institution and focussing on PSB as a genre would be in line with postmodern thinking about, amongst others, the media and media planning in general (not a specific medium viewed in isolation) within the broader context of the media sphere of communication and meaning(s).

It is a fact that although the SABC may claim that it alone has an official PSB mandate, in practice, all the South African media (and broadcasting) support and adhere in different forms and ways to the ideals of development, cultural enhancement and nation building, and as such are acutely aware of their social responsibility and are contributing to it. This needs to be acknowledged.

5. CONCLUSION

The governance, managerial and financial fiascos that have characterised the South African public broadcaster (the SABC) over the past years, together with the publication of a draft Public Service Broadcasting Bill in late 2009, have again placed public service broadcasting in the centre of the discourse about the state and the future of South African broadcasting.

The article emphasises that the radically changed media environment necessitates new thinking about public service broadcasting. In the light of such rethinking, the article advocates distributed public service broadcasting as a model for South African broadcasting. Consecutive parts of the article has sketched governmental threats to the autonomy of the SABC and the crises of the SABC with reference to governance, management and funding. The main proposals of the new Bill, together with attempts to address the problems, have been dealt with.

With this as background and justification, the adoption of distributed PSB as a model for South African broadcasting has been encouraged. Such a model has further been motivated by using arguments related to the nature of the new media environment and its challenges, the changed nature of social responsibility, the problem of upholding the market-failure argument, and, from a semiotic perspective, the problem of no longer being able to recognise PSB as a separate and distinctive part of the media sphere of meaning. What remains to be done is to research in more detail what distributed PSB as a genre could entail and how distributed PSB could become functional and operative.

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