18. An activist's personal take on media diversity

Lumko *Mtimde*

The defiance campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the country led to the strengthening of community newspapers like Saamstaan, birth of community broadcasting, and transformation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) from a state broadcaster (the mouthpiece of the then white minority National Party apartheid system) into a public broadcasting service.

As the youth under the banner of the South African Youth Congress (Sayco), fronted by Peter Mokaba, we were also part of the South African National Students Congress (Sansco), South African Students Press Union (Saspu), United Democratic Front (UDF) and Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). President of the African National Congress (ANC), Oliver Tambo referred to us as the "revolutionary intelligentsia". We were active and militant in community work, liberation and youth struggles, and campus politics. Youth activists involved themselves in community newspapers, campaigns for democratizing the airwaves and, later, shaping the projected policy framework for a future democratic media dispensation.

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Campus radio like UWC Radio and Turf Radio played music banned by the SABC, and allowed engagements with peers to speak about anything and everything. Student newspapers such as Students' Voice by the South African Students Congress (Sasco) carried unmediated views. These outlets provided the inspiration to demand a free and diverse media landscape. Saspu held a gathering called the Multi-media Mindblast and launched the *Freedom of the Airwaves* campaign. As part of the Saspu National Executive Committee, I was part of a delegation with its president Katharine McKenzie and Caroline Green that went to Stellenbosch University to submit proposals to Professor Christo Viljoen, head of the Viljoen Commission established by President FW de Klerk following pressure to transform the SABC. I joined the South African team to the Netherlands in August 1991 to attend the *Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves* conference.

Youth activists from the various organisations were central to the MDM's Campaign for Independent Broadcasting (CIB) which engaged in several protest actions that included the transformation of the SABC. I became the chairperson of the CIB (Western Cape), and was part of a group leading negotiations for 'freeing the airwaves' with the National Party at the Union Buildings.

In early 1990, we decided to spearhead a campaign to transform the 'music jukebox' UWC Radio at the University of the Western Cape into a community radio station. This was part of the Sansco national transformation agenda for changing campuses *From ivory towers to people's universities.* The Media Subcommittee of the Sansco was chaired by Satch Radebe (Sansco had become Sasco after the merger with the white students' National Union of South African Students (Nusas)). Little did we realise that we were writing the history of media diversity in South Africa. We were setting up one of the first community radio stations in South Africa.

Engagements were held with the Cassette Education Trust (Caset), a non-governmental organisation led by Edric Gorfinkel – he trained us to produce radio programmes. We came up with cassettes on struggle activities, including the Defiance Campaign that was led by the MDM and UDF. We played these cassettes on UWC Radio, distributed them in taxis, buses and at rallies, as a way of providing progressive content. This was an alternative initiative to the propaganda broadcast by the SABC. UWC Radio was changed to a community radio station based on campus, and we were supported by the Students Representative Council, Executive Director of Students Affairs Saleem Mowzer, management represented by the Rector Professor Jakes Gerwel and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. We got permission from UWC to apply for a broadcast licence from the Department of Home Affairs headed by Minister Danie Schutte, who had twice refused us a licence.

Later, Caset "adopted" and dissolved into Bush Radio with its assets. Bush Radio was then supported by the Frederick Ebert Stiftung (FES), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid), Independent Media Diversity Trust (IMDT), Kgaso Fund (a partnership between the South African government and the Danish Government), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and many other international donors. We focused on using the broadcasting equipment in continuing to produce cassettes, train people on radio broadcasting skills, among other activities. The training became the strength of Bush Radio - trainers included Joe Mjwara of the ANC's Radio Freedom, Libby Lloyd and

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Tracey Naughton.

In 1993, Bush Radio decided, as part of the Defiance Campaign, to pirate and broadcast "illegally" as it was refused a licence by the apartheid government. The plan went ahead on 25 April 1993, and the station was visited by the South African Police which shut it down, and confiscated the equipment. Two leaders, Mervyn Swartz and Gorfinkel were arrested. On my way back to campus at the Salt River train station, I was arrested, and released, after a few hours, from police custody. Bush Radio trained a number of people from several organisations, and facilitated workshops on the setting up of a community radio station. These gave momentum for a "common vision" workshop at Chapman's Peak, Cape Town where discussions revolved around aspects, such as the understanding of community radio as well as its ownership and control. The workshop generated input towards the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act that came into being in October 1993, and the launch of the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) in December 1993 in Soweto. The Act contained a definition of community radio, and made provision for a one-year temporary licence to ensure the broadcasting playing field was levelled in relation to the historic 1994 elections.

The *Community Media 2000* conference was convened in 1995, and gave birth to the National Community Media Forum, an organisation for radio, print and television activists from the community sector. Further, the Open Window Network for video and television, and Community Print Media organisation were set up. The conference consolidated input into the Reconstruction and Development Programme which recognised the need for media diversity and development. This was implemented through President Thabo Mbeki's establishment of Comtask 1996 and transformation of the South African Communications Service (SACS) into the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), which spearheaded and sponsored the enactment of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) in 2003.

Amendments to the IBA Act led to the issuing of temporary community radio licences. Community radio has substantially grown to more than 200 stations licensed by Icasa. Sadly, community television, and community and small commercial print media have not grown at the same pace as community radio.

The MDDA is mandated to promote media development and diversity, support and fund community and small commercial media. At its 10th anniversary, the MDDA made known its deliverables and successes, These included clean governance, 570 media projects supported through grants worth R275

million, more than 247 bursaries awarded in media studies, advocating and ensuring more than R30 million government adspend annually allocated to community and small commercial media, community radio commanding 25% of radio listenership, reduction of signal distribution costs, production of research reports on media ownership and control, and the production of easy-to-use toolkits on governance, advertising and marketing. The MDDA *Trends of Ownership and Control of Media Research Report* (2009) and *Print Media Transformation Report* (2013) exposed the challenges faced by the media in respect of transformation, and necessitated interventions like Judge Pius Langa's *Press Freedom Commission: Report on Press Regulation in South Africa* (2012) and the Nkwenkwe Nkomo *Report on the Transformation of Print and Digital Media* (2013). As the MDDA heads to its 20th year of existence, it will be an opportunity to reflect and review its value, benefit and impact in promoting a diverse media. Moreover, it will be a good time to look at the reconfiguration of state entities, given the possible synergies with regard to the MDDA, Universal Service and Access Agency and the proposed Digital Development Fund in terms of the National Integrated Information and Communication Technologies White Paper.

It is evident that new technologies are leading to a digital economy becoming inevitable in the future. The digital media has become real - digitisation and e-learning are becoming a new reality for our education system. New media strategies and models are needed in order to sustain the policy objectives of media diversity and press freedom for all.

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