Public Broadcasting and Politicisation in Post-Apartheid South Africa

The Organisational Culture of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's News and Current Affairs Division

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Failed Broadcasting Transitions

• Eastern & Central Europe
  • Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Ukraine, Czech Republic
  • “...the introduction of PSB has either so far failed, or has produced very uncertain results” (Jakubowicz)

• Africa
  • Effectively state broadcasters
  • Limited autonomy: Namibia, Botswana
  • Unclear: South Africa

• Obstacles: political will, transplanting institutions, legal guarantees and political pressure, funding, jouno attitudes (Poland, S. Korea)
The 'Miracle' of Building PSB

State Broadcaster

Institutional Structure

Legal Framework

Funding Model

Public Service Broadcaster
The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)

- Institutional continuity
- Consensus on PSB
- Successful transformation; legal guarantees
- Financially self-sustainable
- Limited political pressure

- 1936, 'voice of Apartheid'
- 1993 independent PSB
- biggest broadcaster in Africa
- 3 TV and 18 radio channels
- 74% TV, 76% radio audience
- 11 languages
**CONCEPTS & DEFINITIONS**

- **Politicisation**
  - a *process* by which political agents successfully seek or are granted influence in a statutorily independent organisation
  - to the extent that the political independence of that organisation is compromised (= the *product* of politicisation)

- **Emerging Democracy**: post-transition, consolidating (Linz/ Stepan)

- **Organisational Culture**
  - Beliefs, values, practices
  - Change & continuity (*Rodrigues* 2006)
Methodology: Data Collection

- **Ethnographic fieldwork**
  - In-depth interviews with >100 SABC staff (1-6 h)
  - 6 months observation in 7 newsrooms (multi-site)

- **Scope**
  - political dimension *only*
  - focus on perceptions: 'view from within'
Methodology: Data Analysis

(5) Political Field

(4) Journalistic Field

(3) Statutory Level

(2) Intra-org. Level

(1) Individual Actors

Organisational Culture
Politicisation at SABC: Symptoms & Manifestations

• Uncritical or biased reporting
• Coverage of stories with no journalistic value
• Events-driven journalism
• Receptive to political pressure
• Self-censorship

• Fewer stories generated in-house
• Loss of initiative, motivation, creativity
• Low morale

• Organisation as provider of benefits to silent majority
• Independent-minded journalists leave

• Drop in quality of content
• Loss of credibility
• Financial consequences
New Beginnings | Disillusionment | Attempted Professional | Come-back of Polit. Loyalties & Crisis | Rescue
---|---|---|---|---
1993 | | | | Old PSB

Politicisation | | | | Credibility


Zuma out | Mbeki out, COPE
Politicisation of SABC: Key Findings

• Response to pressure is the main problem

• Predisposed to continuity, i.e. sliding back to old culture

• Politicisation is
  • non-linear
  • non-uniform
  • not conclusive (co-evolution)
Politicisation is Non-Linear

**CONTINUITY:**
- political appointments on top, political pressure
- conservative old guard, role perceptions, culture of passivity

**CHANGE:**
- sub-groups as change agents (activists, de-politicised young)
- media competition, training, public pressure
Politicisation is Non-Uniform

- Television vs. Radio
- News vs. Current Affairs
- Head Office vs. Regions
- English vs. other languages
Politicisation is Not Conclusive

- Political role of PSB is context-specific
- The question of 'independence'
- Political field and SABC are co-evolving
The Co-Evolution Continues...
Thank you.

Comments?

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