SPEAKING OUT AS CITIZENS: VOICE AND AGENCY IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

At the heart of the 1996 South African Constitution is a new vision of citizenship. The Constitution is premised on the eradication of apartheid separation and provisions for a shared humanity. Bearing in mind an authoritarian history and a systematic denial of voice to the majority of people, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission entrenched the right to speak and the recognition of a shared humanity as factors in our shared public life. But questions about who is a South African, who belongs and who has the right to speak and criticise erupt frequently in the media as themes alongside issues of great public importance being debated. There is also a steady increase over the years since 1994 in protest action, which could be considered a demand by citizens to be heard. These protests have provoked violent response from state agents, thus undermining ordinary South Africans' sense of their ability to affect political processes. We ask whether these features of our public life are indicative of a crisis in citizenship in a post-authoritarian, "new" democracy and what mediated modes of practising citizenship, apart from casting votes, are available to South Africans and whether these have value in deepening democracy. The article explores the relationship between the media and the emergence of new forms of citizenship in democratic South Africa by providing a brief overview of various notions of citizenship before illustrating how these notions find manifestation in contemporary South Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

It is often claimed that the media serve an important role in new democracies to facilitate public debate which may shape policy, re-order societal hierarchies and renegotiate cultural identities – in short, to deepen the emerging democracy. Although the democratisation of formerly authoritarian countries after the end of the Cold War does not follow identical patterns, there are parallels between the media in South Africa and the media in the post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe and Asia. In many of these democracies of the "third wave" (Huntington 1991), authoritarian control of the media for political means gave way to processes of democratisation and marketisation. Consequently, the extent to which media could contribute to the transformation of society has been limited (Sparks 2009; Splichal 1992). The political changes in these transitional countries have had profound implications for the restructuring of the relationship between media and civil society (Murphy 2007). In South Africa it has been noted that the media have operated as a site and an agent for change (Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli 2001).

Despite the wide-ranging changes that the South African media has undergone, and the role it has played as an agent of democratic discourse, consensus about how exactly it should deepen the democratic gains of the post-apartheid era and facilitate citizen participation in this democracy has been elusive. Eighteen years into South African democracy the very notion of citizenship is fiercely contested. While the decisive shift to formal democracy in 1994 restored the legal and political rights of all South Africans – reinstating to all the *status* of citizenship – the high levels of inequality (among the highest in the world measured according to the Gini coefficient) have prevented the majority of citizens from exercising the *practice* of citizenship in the ways that matter most – voice in the public sphere and decision-making power at local level to impact on the processes that affect their daily lives.

THE STATUS AND PRACTICE OF CITIZENSHIP

Robins, Cornwall and Von Lieres (2008: 1069) insist that to research citizenship and democracy the starting point must be the "the perspectives of citizens themselves" and whether active citizenship is realised in their everyday lives. Despite the "normative vision" of citizenship that asserts engagement with the state via the mediated public sphere, in reality citizens do not always manage to acquire new political identities by claiming their democratic rights (Robins *et al*. 2008: 1071). As has been the case in other post-colonial and post-authoritarian settings, existing unequal relationships to government persist even when new democratic spaces have opened up.

In South Africa and Africa the persistence of inequality and the inability to endow the category citizen with full rights and capacities has historical roots, as Mahmood Mamdani's work shows. Mamdani (1996: 17) uses the term "bifurcated" to characterise the state and citizenship in both the colonial and post-colonial eras in Africa. He shows how states can limit the possible modes of being a citizen, and how African states under colonialism and in their post-colonial incarnations divided their peoples into "citizen" and "subject". Under British colonialism in South Africa citizenship was a "privilege of the civilised" while the "uncivilised" were "subject to an all-round tutelage" – relegated to the state of subjecthood. Mamdani (*ibid*.) shows that the British adopted two approaches to ruling colonies like South Africa: direct rule as a form of urban civil power (which excluded natives) and indirect decentralised despotism through the tribal authorities as "their principle answer to the native question".

Mamdani's meticulous work places a burden on us to revisit the long history of the formation of citizenship in South Africa, and to engage with a past in which differing patterns and identities of being, belonging and speaking were laid down. Mamdani (1996: 8) says generally of African postcolonial states that although the state was deracialised after independence it was not democratised. This suggestion that democratisation does not imply complete transformation, resonates with Sparks' notion of "elite continuity" (Sparks 2011: 11), to which we will return shortly. Preben Kaarsholm (2008: 5) echoes this view when he characterises the South African ruling party as having a tradition of "secularism and modernism… under constant challenge from varieties of 'traditionalism' and cultural essentialism".

In addition the African National Congress in power has struggled with interpellating the subjecthood of the citizen in post-apartheid South Africa without drawing on struggle-era discourse of race. Leaning on the theoretical work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Chipkin (2012: 263) shows that in South Africa the struggle for liberation was constituted around the creation of a "people" and an "enemy". The political space was divided racially into two camps – into black and white – with each of these camps becoming nodes of articulation of all sorts of "antagonisms". Chipkin shows how the designation "black" attracted and housed the struggles of women, workers, the youth, the poor. The people who waged the struggle for liberation against apartheid were therefore synonymous with the identity "black". When the struggle was won, the "demos" of the democracy was, as a matter of course, also identified as "black". Chipkin quotes Mouffe: "The moment of rule is indissociable from the very struggle about the definition of the people, about the constitution of its identity" (2012: 268) which leads Chipkin to conclude that "blackness [is]the essence of the social" (2012: 267).

The double effect of this inherited situation, as explicated by Mamdani, plus the ruling party's inability to rethink citizenship and society beyond racial categories, as shown by Chipkin, is that both subaltern South Africans and those elites with power to mobilise their middle-class privilege are affected by the undercutting of their rights to set agendas, determine issues and assert their belonging via a variety of identities and speaking positions.

The ANC's insistence that it speaks for and represents the black majority does not seem to adequately extend to empowering that majority to speak for itself – except via the five-yearly ballot. Simultaneously the government, considering itself the true voice of the majority – a claim backed by high voter turnout and consistent successful performance of the party in each general election – frequently characterises the media as the mouthpiece of "white" elites. This reinforces Chipkin's insight that the state continues to constitute the "demos" of this democracy in the racial terms that characterised the struggle. Especially under former President Thabo Mbeki, this antagonism has been expressed in essentialist identity terms which called into question the right for "white" elites to criticise the government. Mbeki for instance reacted to criticism of his administration in an email party newsletter (2005) by saying "the white elite continues to believe that it has a responsibility to provide 'thought leadership' to an African population that is 'intellectually at zero'". Mbeki (2003) has also on occasion reminded black journalists, "You were African before you became journalists and that despite your profession, you are still Africans", a statement taken by many in the media to construct a certain essentialised, "authentic" African voice in order to dismiss critics of the government (see Wasserman 2011). This equation of race with loyalty as a South African is a hallmark of public discussions, debates and altercations and is exacerbated and complicated by the news media taking up the self-appointed position of ad hoc political opposition against the ANC's one-party dominance of the political arena (see Wasserman 2010a).

Patrick Heller (2009: 134) characterises South Africa as having a consolidated formal constitutional democracy but with little capacity among its subaltern citizens to shape public policy. Heller is preoccupied with post-colonial nations which have embraced democratic transitions and in which formalised, and even consolidated, democracy does not necessarily lead to active citizenship with depth of content and effects on political process. In South Africa, the ruling ANC has turned local government structures into a site for the (often inadequate) delivery of desperately-needed and essential services (shelter, water, electricity, schools, clinics) thereby making South Africa's poorest people "clients" dependent on "patronage" (Heller 2009: 140). The result, says Heller (2009: 137), is a public domain characterised by powerful interests on the one hand "lobbying" for access to the government's ear and, on the other hand, by "inchoate" local protests when

service delivery fails. Heller (2009: 144) describes this as the "bifurcation" of South African civil society. Neither of these two modes of engagement – while they may be successful in getting media attention or the resolution of problems at times – could be considered voice or participation in the full sense that enriched citizenship in a vibrant public sphere is supposed to offer. The media often claim to facilitate citizens' participation in political processes. To what extent have the South African media succeeded in fashioning new forms of citizenship in the post-apartheid era?

THEORISING CITIZENSHIP IN RELATION TO THE MEDIA

In order to explore the relationship between the media and the emergence of new forms of citizenship in democratic South Africa, a brief overview of various notions of citizenship will be given, before providing examples of how these notions find manifestation in contemporary South Africa.

The Marshallian schema

T.H. Marshall (1963), who studied the content of citizenship and its evolving nature post-World War Two, proposed three successive stages of modern citizenship: a) *civic,* which entailed personal liberty, freedom of speech, property rights, access to justice; b) *political*, involving the vote and the right to hold public office; and c) *social*, where education, employment and welfare benefits are rights that enable the beneficiaries sufficient social standing to exercise their freedom of speech and to participate more deeply in a democracy.

In South Africa, with its history of dispossession on political, social and economic levels, these three "stages" have been incorporated into the post-apartheid constitution with the state bearing responsibility for fulfilling the civic, social and political stages simultaneously to enable those most affected by colonialism and apartheid to attain equality as citizens. In other words, the *status* of citizenship that Heller refers to was conferred on all South African citizens across these three categories with the establishment of formal democracy in 1994. But, as Hartley (2010: 238) points out, Marshall's schema has never unfolded without problems as each step forward has been "resisted, denied or compromised". These resistances, denials and compromises can be seen in the South African context as part of the limitations to the *practice* of citizenship Heller refers to.

Cultural citizenship

For media scholars, the question then arises what role the media and other cultural forms may play in enabling citizenship. Here the extension of Marshall's schema by Toby Miller (2007) to include the notion of *cultural citizenship* is helpful.

Miller adds "the right to know and speak" to the political, social and civic rights, and – importantly – takes citizenship out of the realm of the state alone to include the private sphere of consumption in the consideration of citizenship.

Miller argues that "the last two hundred years of modernity have produced three zones of citizenship" (2007: 35): a) the *political* (the right to reside and vote); b) the *economic* (the right to work and prosper); and c) the *cultural* (the right to know and speak). Miller broadens the last category to include people who express themselves via media and the markets in ways that do not ostensibly conform to the political and economic forms of citizenship as envisaged in Marshall's classic typology.

Miller's contribution is rooted in cultural studies (which he characterises as a study of inequality and identity) and in the relationship between the identity of citizen and consumer. Hartley (2010: 238-239) comments about such studies that they encompass claims made by groups that may mobilise under the banner of identity politics and "discourse publics" (referring to Michael Warner 2005), experiencing themselves as *both* "citizens and consumers, publics and audiences, workers and traders, all at once". Markers of the membership of these communities and publics may be style and, in the case of subcultures, alternative food, housing and family arrangements (e.g. in the hippie or eco-movement) or fashion. Especially for those who have traditionally been excluded from civil, social and political rights, "culture" becomes a "battleground where demands for rights and duties are fiercely asserted and denied" (Van Zoonen 2005: 8). This form of citizenship as consumption, Hartley (2010: 238) points out, might be "startling to social theory, but lived by millions".

Media citizenship

The cultural dimensions of political citizenship (Van Zoonen 2005: 9) are of particular interest to scholars investigating the link between media and politics. Within this broad category, Hartley (2010: 239) sees a phenomenon emerging which he calls "media citizenship". This form of citizenship is based on the use of especially popular media to construct identities, associative relations and communities. He describes the actors involved as:

> [t]he very people who have most keenly felt excluded from classic citizenship – groups who uncannily reproduce the Classical exclusion of women, slaves (read: workers), strangers (immigrants and ethnic others) and minors (children) – are most likely to engage in 'citizenship of media' (Hartley 2010: 239).

Media citizenship depends on an active audience in which "co-subjects" organise themselves reflexively in response to a multiplicity of messages and not simply to those considered rational, critical or deliberative in the sense that Hartley (2010: 239) characterises as the "modernist minimalism of the Habermasian public sphere". Seen in this way, not only the types of media that facilitate "serious", rational deliberation can be effective in teaching audiences about civic values and virtues, but also those types of media that are ostensibly focused on leisure and entertainment. These popular media texts should therefore also be taken seriously as part of "media citizenship":

Despite the categorical messiness, people are not fazed by entertainment and comedy formats alongside informative and decision-making ones – and in this they have Athenian antecedents (Hartley 2010: 239).

Soap operas, popular music, television shows and films can provide resources for citizenship and provide an impetus for consumers to discuss and engage the political (Van Zoonen 2005: 124, 139). Hartley asserts that such audiences do not necessarily distinguish between messages aimed at "consumer" subjects and those aimed at "citizen" subjects. The merging or porousness of these identity boundaries becomes a hallmark of this new type of citizenship. The public formations that might coalesce as a result of attention to a message or medium are equally fluid. Media citizenship, according to Hartley, is "bottom-up, self-organising, voluntarist, tolerant of diversity, and also a *great deal more fun* for participants than the modernist minimalism of the Habermasian public sphere" (Hartley 2010: 239, italics added).

DIY/DIWO citizenship

The growth of new media technologies have led to the postulation of a further category of citizenship, still within the broader area of cultural citizenship and related to media citizenship, but "more inviduated and privatised than previous types" – one which Hartley (2010: 239) calls "DIY/DIWO citizenship" (do-it-yourself or do-it-with-others). The ability of digital connectivity to boost consumer productivity and connect citizens with other citizens who share the same interests, has led to a greater participatory culture, one which facilitates new social networks and collaborations. Hartley (*ibid.*) refers to this form of citizenship as "DIY citizenship" because it is dynamic and constructed bottom-up rather than through formal processes. The mass media can no longer "speak both to and for the entire citizenry", or assume the existence of *the* public. As a result, Hartley says:

… much smaller groups can self-organise and self-represent, and act both culturally and politically, without bearing the weight of 'standing for' the whole society. As a result, 'DIY citizenship' is arguably

becoming more democratic as individual media (content-platforms) become less popular (Hartley 2010: 240).

Silly citizenship

The spread of the Internet, the proliferation of technologies and the fragmentation of the audience have led to the further collapse of distinctions between "public and private life, power and entertainment, politics and celebrity, television and viral video" (Hartley 2010: 241). This has led to the rise of what Hartley calls "silly citizenship". Comedy is a prime vehicle for the construction of this kind of citizenship, with the best known example perhaps Jon Stewart's *Daily Show*. Spoofs, parodies, send-ups and home-made video that go "viral" has become "part of the mediated political landscape" and provides a resource for political identities, news surveillance and civic understanding (Hartley 2010: 241).

Many of these forms can be classified as what Thussu (2007) calls "news as entertainment", or "infotainment". These forms privilege entertainment, diversion and spectacle over what would usually be considered serious public information. They can also be described as "news lite" or "quasi news" (Thussu 2007: 163). These forms can be viewed pessimistically (as Thussu tends to do) as depoliticising their audiences, or as providing vehicles for cultural imperialism or the spread of global capitalism. (See Louw 2011 for application of this critique to an African context.) These "'silly media'" can however also be viewed more optimistically, as providing an alternative public sphere, and read as manifestations of the everyday experiences of and attitudes towards citizenship.

SOUTH AFRICAN EXAMPLES OF MEDIATED CITIZENSHIP

How can these categories of mediated citizenship be applied to the post-apartheid South African context?

Media citizenship

Hartley's definition of media citizenship as practiced by "people who have most keenly felt excluded from classic citizenship" (2010: 239), including minorities and strangers, can be applied to groups who have either gained visibility in the media in the post-apartheid era as a result of shifts in the market, or those who perceive to have lost visibility and are trying to reclaim it by organising themselves through media. The first group – who gained visibility in the media – can be exemplified by the readers of tabloid newspapers such as *Daily Sun*, *Daily Voice* or *Son*, made up largely of the socially and economically (albeit not politically) marginalised black majority who are still largely neglected by the mainstream commercial press. Through mass-market tabloids, these readers

now have access to media narratives that validate their everyday experiences, construct modes of belonging and provide tools to engage the state – even if this remains on the municipal level around service delivery, and the containment of such engagement within a commercial media conglomerate limits the extent to which the political-economic status quo can be challenged (see Wasserman 2010b).

White Afrikaans citizens are an example of a group who perceive themselves as having lost visibility and use the media to reclaim some visible space. With the arrival of democracy white Afrikaners lost political power and their identities were thrown in flux. Not only were they forced to redefine their linguistic identity in relation to the subaltern (but numerically majority) group of black speakers of the language, they also had to redefine their cultural identities in terms of their new minority status in the country. Because this group is still an economic majority, they have access to a wide range of media that assist them in renegotiating their citizenship. The media house Naspers, who under apartheid served as a vehicle for Afrikaner journalism and literature, has been particularly influential in the reshaping of Afrikaans cultural identities post-1994. Naspers had to reposition itself radically within a post-apartheid, globalised world (for a discussion on how Naspers did this see Wasserman 2009). The decline in support for Afrikaans radio and television in the public broadcast service led to a proliferation of private media outlets in Afrikaans. These include the mainstream print media, private satellite television channels, the entertainment channel KykNET and the music channel MK (originally MK89), as well as a plethora of websites, blogs and social media sites, some of which are quite reactionary and right-wing (see Wasserman 2009).

Other communities in South Africa who feel socially marginalised as a result of their immigrant status use online media effectively to construct diasporic identities, organise themselves into community structures and in aid of the struggle to attain and sustain social cohesion.

DIY citizenship

The productivity of smaller groups of the public to "self-organise and self-represent, and act both culturally and politically" and which Hartley (2010: 240) describes as "DIY/DIWO citizenship" are also evident in post-apartheid South African media. These groups are associated with the increased participatory nature of new social networks, especially online. Online social networks like Facebook and Twitter have provided space for debates about racism and cultural identity. An example of this is the Green Skin Initiative that used Facebook to counter racism (Krige 2010). Social movements like the Treatment Action Campaign have successfully used new media technologies like websites, email listservs and mobile telephone messaging to build a national and international community of

solidarity (see Wasserman 2007). Mobile phones have emerged in recent years as a technology that holds potential for community-creation. An example of this is the peer-to-peer chat program Mxit, where social hierarchies can also be replicated (Schoon 2011). Like the use of mobile phones to enforce pre-existing social hierarchies (for example gender and class) (Schoon 2011), the existence of a range of politically right-wing groups on Facebook serves as a cautionary note against overly optimistic notions that new media are solely or mostly used to facilitate the reconstruction of positive forms of being and belonging.

Silly citizenship

In his discussion of "silly citizenship" Hartley (2010) emphasises comedy as having the potential to offer new opportunities for imagining one's being and belonging to a particular community and society. In post-apartheid South Africa, there has been a spate of these new formats, where news is presented or analysed from a satirical angle. Some examples are the online puppet show *ZA NEWS*. In an interesting example of convergence, the show is carried on the website of the commercial newspaper *Mail & Guardian*, after the public broadcaster refused to air it (Serrao 2009). The satirical television show on e.tv, *Late Night News with Loyiso Gola,* and the online satirical website *Hayibo* are other examples of "silly media" providing opportunities for ways of reflecting on the meaning of citizenship in South Africa. Advertisements – especially controversial ones like the recent DA Students' Organisation's campaign *In our future you wouldn't look twice* – quickly becomes "culture jammed" and shared on viral networks (see Thomas 2012).

The reasons for the recent rise of infotainment in South Africa can be ascribed to various factors to do with the shift from apartheid to a democracy. This phenomenon is also related to the transition from an isolated regime to one which is now subject to the flows and contraflows of globalisation. The opening up of South Africa's media landscape after apartheid has made it more susceptible to global influences, aspired to by a local consumer middle class. Even if programmes are produced locally, the programming formats are often inherited from abroad. Of the same examples mentioned earlier, *Late Night News with Loyiso Gola* is modelled on Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show, ZA NEWS* is modelled on a combination of the British show *Spitting Image*, the French programme *Les Guignols de l'Info* (still on air in France), and Jim Henson and his *Muppet Show* (personal communication with Thierry Cassuto, 2011). The online *Hayibo* bears similarities to the US publication *The Onion*. While content is localised, the "box" for that content stays Anglo-American (Louw 2011: 37).

While the rise of these globalised formats can provide South African media consumers with new opportunities to construct citizenship in a bottom-up, fluid

and "silly" fashion, they should also be critically examined for perpetuating stereotypes, notions of inequality and social exclusion still remnant from the post-apartheid era .

THE LIMITS OF MEDIATED CITIZENSHIP

Critics point out that the media itself contributes to the bifurcation of post-apartheid society. Sparks (2011) extends his critique of the "limits to liberation" (see the title of the book by Robins 2005) in South Africa to the role of the media. The proclaimed empowerment of civil society that would happen via the media in newly-democratic countries, Sparks states, has been "the empowerment of economic and political elites, not ordinary people and their organisations". While teleological theories of "transitology" (Sparks 2011:6) are largely based on the media's role in established liberal-democratic democracies, Sparks points out that in many emerging democracies, including South Africa, renewal and transformation have gone hand in hand with a continued focus on elite audiences and a high degree of elite continuity in media institutions. The conflicting views on how the media should contribute to the deepening of post-apartheid South African democracy have included, but are not limited to, divergent views on the media's role in supporting "development" and the "nation-building" state.

As has been the case in other new democracies, the dominant liberal-democratic orthodoxy of media freedom (which finds vocal support among many in especially the commercial media) has been criticised for its potential to aggravate tensions and conflicts and privileging the voices of those who have access to mediated communication (Voltmer 2006). The liberal-democratic assumption that a free media would necessarily contribute to democratic deepening has been challenged. Friedman (2011) points out that in a post-colonial country, emerging from a long history of violent conflict and marked by continued and severe economic inequalities, a marketised media can contribute to the widening of social and political rifts. Instead of facilitating greater inclusion of previously marginalised groups, a profit-seeking media within an increasingly globalised media environment can also contribute to the further exclusion of subaltern, economically-marginalised publics from the mediated public sphere (Sparks 2009).

The South African media has certainly enjoyed much more freedom in the 18 years of democracy than it ever had under apartheid, where an intricate set of laws curtailed the media's ability to challenge state legitimacy. (Not that all apartheid-era media always wanted to challenge the government. Most of the Afrikaans-language press supported the regime, while many of the English-language press titles were owned by mining capital whose interests were served by the system of racial capitalism, and therefore only provided a limited, liberal critique of apartheid). The post-apartheid constitution guarantees freedom of expression,

including freedom of the media which makes it harder for the state to restrict the flow of information. Further, the opening up of the economy after years of isolation makes it possible for the South African media to become not only a regional powerhouse, but also to compete globally. A notable example is the previously mentioned media conglomerate Naspers that now wields influence in media markets across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The commercial vibrancy of the South African media and the new freedoms it enjoy cannot however simply be taken as an indication of a diverse and inclusive mediated public sphere. Although all citizens have the constitutionally-guaranteed right to participate freely in this sphere, in practice this participation remains limited. The ability of the South African media to represent the full spectrum of lived experiences and to provide a platform for an inclusive range of South Africans to express their voices and contribute to the deepening of post-apartheid democracy remains imperfect. The impediments to the media's function as an inclusive and diverse space for the practice of citizenship are both structural and political in nature.

Structurally, the media landscape has seen increased marketisation and conglomeration (see Wasserman and Botma 2008 for a more detailed discussion and a case study of this process), with a resultant preference among the commercial media for elite audiences. In a country characterised by high inequality, this preference has severe implications for the inclusivity of the media and the diversity of perspectives in public debate. The public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has not escaped this commercialisation (Tleane & Duncan 2003), and is reliant on advertising revenue to complement state funding and licence fees for its sustainability.

Democratisation also brought the demise of the once vibrant alternative, anti-apartheid press (Switzer & Adhikari 2000) as donor support dwindled or was directed elsewhere. The result is that communities marginalised under apartheid have lost a range of channels in the print media where their views could be articulated. The post-apartheid government, recognising the need for intervention in a media landscape dominated by the commercial media, set up the Media Diversity and Development Agency (MDDA). The objective of the MDDA is to strengthen community and small commercial media to provide under-served communities with access to the media. The community media sector has however also largely been captured by large conglomerates, and independent community media are struggling to remain viable in this competitive environment.

One exception to this picture – and one which is argued to widen the range of options for citizen participation – has been the advent of highly-successful tabloid newspapers. These papers, focusing on the daily lived experience of the poor and

working class, provide an alternative public sphere, where audiences articulate their disillusionment with the political and social status quo. The tabloids, although being commercial ventures that may be criticised for sensationalising the lives of the poor, aim to capitalise on the upwardly-mobile, lower middle-class, black audience and have managed to highlight the extent to which the economic and socially-marginalised majority remain excluded from the practice of citizenship in mainstream news channels (see Wasserman 2010b).

Politically, the range of perspectives offered by the mainstream media has been shaped by a dominant normative framework that sees the media in adversarial terms, as an unofficial opposition to government. In recent years the SABC has frequently been accused of political bias towards the government and the corporation has also staggered from one management crisis to another. This resulted in a serious loss of legitimacy among citizens hoping to find in the public media an inclusive and vibrant countervailing force for the commercial media.

While "media citizenship" has the potential to provide South Africans with a broader range of opportunities to belong than the traditional categories of political, social and civic identities, the media is not an equal playing field. Media citizenship may still reflect many of the historical divisions and polarisations marking citizenship in the political, social, cultural and civic spheres as well. Tabloids, for instance, provide an opportunity for the previously marginalised black working class to gain visibility in the media but these newspapers are not impacting policy debates or influencing mainstream media news agendas, and these papers are still owned by commercial media conglomerates and can therefore not be considered grassroots vehicles for the expression of citizens' voices. And while celebrating the possibilities for "DIY citizenship" which opened up with new media technologies, we have to acknowledge the continued asymmetrical distribution of access as a result of the political economy governing these technologies.

The descriptions of changing patterns of social and media behaviour which provoke theorists to talk of cultural citizenship, media citizenship and even DIY citizenship, which Hartley (2010) offers as advances on Marshall's stages, are fascinating. Yet, their usefulness in contexts such as South Africa needs to be unpacked and examined. Many of the features described by Hartley of self-organising publics consuming messages not considered deliberative and of merging of citizen and consumer identities apply here. But the larger question of whether these can enhance citizenship status in relation to the state, and how these can deepen the practice of citizenship in such a way that democracy can be imbedded, must be asked, given South Africa's history of exclusion and authoritarianism.

Counter-intuitively perhaps, it is on the terrain of "silly citizenship" that mediated contestations of citizenship have managed to impact most notably on the national

public sphere. These include the debates around the provocative "diversity" advertising campaign of a local fast food outlet (consumer) (Nando's 2012), President Jacob Zuma in an art work, The Spear (commercial art) (Hlongwane 2012) and the cartoonist Zapiro's controversial "rape of Lady Justice" (*Mail & Guardian* 2010). The question remains to what extent these controversies remain limited to an elite, cosmopolitan class (which includes politicians) and divert attention away from more pressing, political-economic issues that require urgent attention in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

Nick Couldry (2010: 113) makes the point that "we see everywhere a huge explosion of voice – in reality TV, magazine confessions, blogs, social networking sites" but that nevertheless "voice" is losing its value as a mechanism to impact on political processes and shape citizenship. He agrees with Ulrich Beck's (1992) assessment that the political and social failures of late modernity force ordinary people to develop "biographical solutions to structural problems" (*ibid*.). Couldry (*ibid*.) adds that "voice" is about more than just speaking and the growing incitements to speak". He argues for concerted attention to the conditions which make "effective voice" possible. This is a significant challenge for the South African media. The South African case indicates that formal democratisation of society does not necessarily mean a broadening of platforms for the expression and renegotiation of citizenship. The bifurcation of civil society through an elite-oriented and clientelist politics has been exacerbated by a commercial media that largely contribute to the fragmentation of audiences through its privileging of elite voices. This bifurcation is further entrenched by the failure of public and community media to provide a viable alternative public sphere. The political contestations around the mainstream media have resulted in the media becoming a political player in its own right, representing the interests of narrowly-defined audiences in an antagonistic relationship towards the state. The post-apartheid public sphere in South Africa has therefore not yet delivered fully on the promise of the empowerment of its citizens and their expression of voice.

Endnotes

[1]   Previous versions of this article were presented to the Conference on Pluralism, Inclusion and Citizenship in Prague in March 2012 and to the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Conference in Durban in July 2012

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