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Africanising community radio broadcasting: the case of Vukani Community Radio (VCR) in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Decolonisation and Africanisation of spaces emerging from administrative and settler colonialism have been suggested as forms of challenging colonial legacies that are still largely present in the Global South and particularly within the African continent. Mainly, this has also been the case in recent South African discourses that have called for the decolonisation and 'transformation' of key areas in the country to build a decolonised African country of the future. This thesis, therefore, deals with the subject of the community radio broadcasting sector that is operating during South Africa's 'postcolonial' era, and the steps undertaken by this sector in Africanising itself. Starting from the conviction that the media has a historical role in shaping and communicating cultures as well as identities of the colonised and 'formerly' colonised, the thesis posits that the community radio sector is one of the vital arenas that can be used to understand the continuities and discontinuities of colonial cultures in media institutions. Thus, to comprehend and establish the state of Africanisation within the community radio sector of the country, the study investigated and analysed the case of Vukani Community Radio (VCR); a community radio station that is easily one of the oldest community orientated broadcasters in South Africa. Furthermore, to challenge the idea of colonised and neo-colonised media spaces, this thesis was grounded on an understanding of the complexities of Africanisation as a decolonising project in a media institution that is operating in the post-settler-colonial administration of this country. Adopting a case study approach, this study attempted to understand the urgency of a broadcast media platform in asserting the cultures and identities of 'previously' colonised Africans on the medium's airwaves. To make sense of the conceptual challenges surrounding the study, the thesis has drawn on decolonial discourses, including the theory of Afrocentricity, the coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, the coloniality of being and the decolonial turn. The adoption of these theories by the study, therefore, also demonstrates a conscious delinking of this study from the traditional theories of media and cultural studies that have habitually underpinned the South African canon. Moreover, this study has adopted the use of critical decolonised methodologies approach in the pursuit of answers about the extent of Africanisation of the media institution. The decolonised approach of the adopted method lay in revealing the colonial excesses that have underpinned research methodologies as well as an 'auto-critique' of these excesses in the

context of this study. The data analysed to arrive at the findings of this study included several macro and micro policy documents, a content analysis of three (3) categories of community radio programmes [Talk Radio, African Cultural Lifestyle & News Programming] that totalled 270 hours of community radio content. The study also relied on several semi-structured interviews with various internal and external stakeholders that make up the station's key constituencies. In the analysis of evidence that would uncover the extent of the Africanisation of the community radio station, the findings of the thesis revealed several yet overlapping thematic areas that suggest pathways towards the Africanisation of the media institution. These, among others, included the use of this media institution as an African public sphere, its embracing of the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, its role in the decolonisation of African memory and its approaches towards ethnicity and Africanity within the broadcasting area. These themes emanating from the analysed data of the study also illustrate how this media institution is operating as a pocket of resistance against colonial, neo-colonial and imperialistic media cultures. In addition to these thematic areas, the findings of this study also demonstrate that when only media policy documents are adopted, this can lead to ambiguities in the pursuit of Africanisation as decolonisation. The study however also demonstrates that the urgency of the community radio station in catering for the surrounding constituency can potentially demonstrate an eventual Africanisation of the airwaves. Finally, this study concludes that the Africanisation of the airwaves is demonstrable at Vukani Community Radio (VCR) but its permanent enforcement is dependent on the vigilance of the stations constituencies and how they define and enforce the role of their media institution.

KEY WORDS: Africanisation, Africanity; Decolonisation, Colonialism, Culture, Africa, Media, Ideology, Community Radio, Vukani Community Radio