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Contested spaces: an analysis of the ANC government's approach to the promotion of media development and diversity in South Africa, with a particular focus on the policy process that led to the formation of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MIDDA).

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Chapter Three
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

A qualitative research approach was selected for the study. As researcher Merriam (1998:5) argues, qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that "help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption to the natural setting as possible". Other terms often used interchangeably are naturalistic inquiry, interpretative research and inductive research (Merriam, 1998; Erickson, 1986: Du Plooy, 2002).

A number of key philosophical assumptions underpin qualitative studies. Firstly, it is assumed that "reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998:6). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed i.e. how they make sense of their world and their experiences of it (Merriam, 1998:6). Secondly, it is assumed that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Thirdly, it is assumed that qualitative studies involve fieldwork. Fourthly, it is assumed that an inductive research strategy will be employed. "Qualitative researchers build towards theory from observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field" (Merriam, 1998:7). Finally, the product of a qualitative study is "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 1998:8). "Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learnt about a phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998:8).

There are also a number of assumptions that underpin most qualitative research. Merriam (1998) argues that the design is generally emergent and flexible, and responsive to the changing conditions of the study in progress. Further, sample selection is usually non-random, purposeful and small. (Merriam, 1998).

A qualitative research framework was seen as appropriate for this policy study. Firstly, key to the research were the "meanings" different stakeholders constructed. It was important to "unpack" how negotiators interpreted decisions taken and their implications.

Secondly, given the nature of the study an “inductive research” strategy was most appropriate. Theories were not tested - they were tentatively created. Abstractions, concepts, hypotheses and theories were being built from the “bottom up”. Thirdly, in line with qualitative research methods, it made sense for a small, purposeful, non-random sample to be the focus. Certain key people were involved in the policy process - these were the ones that needed to be interviewed. Fourthly, given the nature of the study “rich description” was the most appropriate research product. Words and pictures (rather than numbers, statistics etc.) best conveyed the researcher’s learnings. Finally, it was critical for the study design to be emergent, flexible and responsive to changing conditions. Questions and explanations built on one another as the tentative hypotheses and theories emerged.

3.2 Designing the Study and Selecting a Sample

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two, the theoretical framework selected was a critical political economy of the media approach. This perspective carefully assesses both market and state interventions in the media, and their impact. It is a perspective that looks at power and the impact of the asymmetries of power on media production. Further, it is an approach that not only analyses the way the media operates now, but also looks at how best to transform it. It is in terms of this framework that the study’s overarching question and sub-questions were derived. To reiterate, the overarching question was constructed as follows:

> Why and in what ways did the ANC government shift its position regarding the promotion of media development and diversity in South Africa, and what were the implications?

In terms of the study’s sub-questions, there were two sets. One focused on the MDDA's vision and mandate, and the second focused on funding issues. (See Chapter One for a list of the questions.)

As discussed a small, non-probability, purposive sample was selected for the study. Probability sampling (i.e. simple random sampling) was not selected. Probability sampling, allows the investigator to generalise the results of the study from the sample to the population from which it was drawn. However as Merriam (1998:61) argues, “Since generalisation in a statistical sense is not a goal of qualitative research, probabilistic

sampling is not necessary or even justifiable." As Merriam argues the most common form of non-probability sampling is purposive sampling: "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most must be learned". (Merriam, 1998:61; Also see Du Plooy, 2002) Purposeful sampling includes typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience, snowball, chain, and network sampling (Merriam, 1998:62). Maximum variation sampling was selected for this study. The latter involves identifying and seeking out those who represent the widest possible range of characteristics of interest for the study (Merriam, 1998:63). In line with this methodology the following criteria were selected. Interviewees needed to be involved in the hands-on, day-to-day MDDA policy negotiation process. They needed to operate at a decision-making level. Finally, they needed to represent each of the main stakeholder groupings involved – that is, business, government, donors and the community media sector.

Why these criteria? The reason for choosing people involved in the hands-on negotiation process was that they would best be able to explain some of the complexities of the process as it unfolded. Further, it was important that interviewees played a decision-making role. (Some people were involved in the day-to-day negotiation process but were not senior enough to take decisions.) Finally, it was important to look at the broad range of stakeholder perspectives. The different perspectives of different stakeholders and the power of these perspectives were central to the study's analysis. So in line with these criteria the following people were selected for the study:

- Government perspective:
  - Devan Pillay: Director Policy, Government Communication and Information Service (now Professor of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand). Prof Pillay was government's chief MDDA policy negotiator.
  - Joe Mjwara: Senior General Manager, Multimedia Unit, Department of Communications (DoC). Mr Mjwara was the key Department of Communications negotiator during the MDDA policy process.
  - Andrew Donaldson: Acting Deputy Director General: Budget Office (now Deputy Director General: Public Finance). Mr Donaldson was the key Department of Finance negotiator during the MDDA policy process.

- Business perspective:

- Brian Pottinger: Publisher of the *Sunday Times* and Chair of the Print Development Unit Working Group in Print Media South Africa (PMSA)[13] (now MD Johncom Africa). Mr Pottinger played a senior decision-making role.
- Natasha Stretton (now Volans): Director, Print Development Unit (now General Manager of Print Media South Africa). Ms Stretton played a hands-on, day-to-day decision-making role.
- Lara Kantor: Executive Director, National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) (now General Manager: Policy and Regulatory Affairs, SABC). Ms. Kantor played a senior decision-making role.

- Community perspective:
  - Jane Duncan: Head of Policy, Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) (now Executive Director, FXI). Ms Duncan, together with Mr. Mfundisi, co-ordinated the official community media input.
  - Mabalane Mfundisi: Head, National Community Radio Forum (NCRF) (now Manager, South African NGO Coalition [SANGOCO]).

- Donor perspective:
  - Jean Fairburn: Director, Open Society Foundation South Africa (OSF-SA) (now studying in the UK). The Open Society Foundation was the largest community media donor in the country at the time of the MDDA policy process.

- MDDA
  - Libby Lloyd Chief Executive Officer, MDDA. Ms Lloyd brought an interesting early ICASA perspective to her input, as she had co-ordinated MDDA policy inputs. Further, she had important insights regarding the final outcomes of the MDDA policy process.
  - Khanyi Mkonza: Chairperson, MDDA. Ms. Mkonza had important insights as regards the outcomes of the MDDA policy process.

3.3 Collecting Qualitative Data

3.3.1 Interviews

[13] PMSA is an umbrella body representing large commercial print media companies in South Africa.

With qualitative research there are generally three types of data produced: interviews, documents and field observations (Merriam, 1998; Du Plooy, 2002). The focus of this study was on interview data and data gathered through document analysis.

Interview data was a key component. As Weiss (1994:9-10) claims, there are number of important reasons to conduct qualitative interviews. These include: to develop detailed description, to integrate multiple perspectives, and to bridge inter-subjectivities. (See also Seidman, 1998) In terms of developing detailed descriptions, Weiss (1994:9) claims that interviews are the perfect tool with which to "learn as much as we can about an event or development that we weren't there to see". In terms of integrating multiple perspectives, qualitative interviews allow us to effectively "describe an organisation, development or event that no single person could have observed in its totality" (Weiss, 1994:9). Finally, in terms of bridging inter-subjectivities, qualitative interviews make it possible for readers to "grasp a situation from the inside, as a participant might" (Weiss, 1994:10). Developing detailed description, integrating multiple perspectives and bridging inter-subjectivities were all critical components of the research.

The most common way of deciding which type of interview to select is to determine the amount of structure desired. (Merriam, 1998) "At the one end of the continuum fall highly structured, questionnaire driven interviews; at the other end are unstructured, open-ended, conversational formats" (Merriam, 1998:74). Interviewing in qualitative investigations is generally more open-ended and less structured (Weiss, 1994; Merriam, 1998). For this study a mid-point on the continuum was selected –– a semi-structured interview. The researcher asked all interviewees a set of similar questions. However, the questions were open-ended. Further, the sequence was often shifted to allow interviewees to focus on the issues they had particular insights into. Also, interviewees' insights were followed up on, and in certain circumstances follow-up interviews were conducted. On average each interviewee was interviewed for a three hour period.

Core questions included the following:

- Context:
  - What is the media's role in society? (Does it have any responsibilities to anyone?)
  - How would you define media development and diversity?

- Why is media development and diversity important?
- What do you think aids (and restricts) media development and diversity?

- The policy process:
  - From your perspective, how did the policy process leading up to the formation of the MDDA unfold?
  - What perspective did your particular constituency bring to the policy process?
  - How influential was your constituency in the policy process vis-à-vis other constituencies?
  - In what ways did your constituency seek to influence the policy process?
  - How would you assess the final outcome of the policy process?
  - From a policy perspective, what improvements/adjustments do you think could be made at this stage?

3.3.2 Documentary evidence

The second set of qualitative data utilised was derived by mining data from documents. A number of core government documents – including position papers, legislation and regulations – were analysed. Core documents included the following:

- Task Group on Government Communications, 1996
- Media Development Agency: Draft Discussion Document, 25 November 1999.
- Media Development Agency: Discussion Document, 8 March 2000.
- Media Development and Diversity Agency Draft Position Paper, November 2000.
- Media Development and Diversity Agency Final Position Paper, November 2001.
- Media Development and Diversity Agency Bill (B2A - 2001) and (B2B - 2002).
- Media Development and Diversity Agency Act No.14 of 2002.
- Proposed Regulations in Terms of Section 22 of the MDDA Act (Act 14 of 2002) July 2003.
- Regulations in Terms of Section 22 of the MDDA Act (Act 14 of 2002) October 2003.

These documents were supplement with workshop documents, position papers, newspaper articles, publications and so forth. Documents were produced by the MDDA itself (once it had been established). They were produced by business and community media groupings. However, unfortunately no documentation was available from the

donor side. The researcher was directed to relevant documentation by interviewees.

3.4 Analysing and Reporting the Data

A number of qualitative data analysis strategies exist. These include ethnographic analysis, narrative analysis, phenomenological analysis, and the constant comparative method. (Merriam, 1998:156). After careful consideration the constant comparative method was selected. The approach entails the following:

> The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualisation until a theory can be formulated (Merriam, 1998:159).

Generally there are three levels of analysis. (Merriam 1998:178-87) The most basic presentation of a study's findings is a descriptive account. One level deeper is to construct categories of themes that capture recurring patterns. These categories are abstractions derived from the data, not the data themselves. The third level of analysis involves “making inferences, developing models, or generating theory” (Merriam, 1998:187). This study attempted to move beyond description into conceptual analysis and further to tentative theory generation.