Regulating Religion: The Mediatisation of Islam on Public Broadcast Television in South Africa

Lee-Shae Salma Scharnick-Udemans

Abstract

In this paper, Islam, as portrayed in the public broadcast television series, *An Nur*, *The Light* and as an object of broadcasting policy is conceptualised as a product of modern nationalism. Following Talal Asad's theory of the multiple formations of the secular, the republicisation of religion and the mediatisation of Islam along with its strategic value for the nation-building endeavours of the state in the post-apartheid South Africa, will be analysed in light of the preconditions set forth for religion within the parameters of the modern constitutional state and the institutional logic of the public broadcasting landscape. It will be argued that, as demonstrated by the case study of *An Nur*, *The Light*, the processes of mediatisation together with the nation-building endeavours of the constitutional state, play a pertinent role in facilitating the regulation of religious content on the public broadcast television.

Keywords: Religious regulation, public broadcast television, mediatisation, nation building

Introduction

> The South African Human Rights Commission is instrumental in protecting and safeguarding the human rights of all South Africans. It is proactive in rectifying any violations brought before it by way of investigations and public hearings. The Commission advocates awareness on

> human rights issues and ensures that the public is educated
> on what their human rights are. The Human Rights
> Commission is governed by seven commissioners
> appointed by the president and assigned to specific
> provinces and areas of focus specified in the Bill of Rights
> (SABC 1. 2017. *An Nur, The Light: Episode 19 in Season
> 10*).

The text above is taken from a voice-over narration from the television programme *An Nur*, *The Light*. *An Nur* is the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) only Islamic lifestyle television programme and represents the institution's continuous efforts in the mediatisation of Islam in the post-apartheid South Africa. As an example of the kind of content that is produced and circulated by the SABC, the aforementioned quote distils the broadcaster's endeavours to portray Islam and Muslims as exemplary products of the modern nation-state.

The multiple technological, conceptual, philosophical, material, and historical connections between the media and religion have been well researched and thoroughly documented (Becker & Cabrita 2018; Hackett 2014; Hackett & Soares 2015; De Vries 2008; Hirschkind 2006; Hoover 2006; Meyer & Moors 2006; Mitchell & Marriage 2003; Morgan 2008; Stolow 2005). In the past 15 years, the scholarship on religion and media has shifted tremendously from primarily instrumental and determinist technological studies of the ways media as technology is used within the religious life and by religious actors, to more discursive, critical studies of religion and mediation. This shift has resulted in a robust dialectic that has enhanced the study of religion and media and opened multiple new avenues for critical engagement. Arguably, the most productive result of this shift has come for scholars of religion, since in expanding and nuancing understandings of the media, we were compelled to negotiate anew our understandings of religion (Engelke 2010). According to Peter Horsfield (2008:114),

> [t]he strength of the discursive way of thinking about media and
> religion … is that it more realistically considers the complexity of
> religious practices and mediation processes within any social or
> cultural situation and how such media uses construct the character of
> religion, as religion adapts itself to them.

While the broad views of media and religion that have been generated from discursive approaches can provide rich substantive data, Horsfield warns that scholars approaching a study of religion and media discursively run the risk of producing studies that are too 'vague' to provide strategic utility. However, discursive approaches to the study of religion and media provide a level of flexibility that can enable the production of rich context-specific empirical data as well as valuable critical insights into the ways in which religion is defined, managed, mediated, and regulated within diverse media settings.

A scholar of religion, Matthew Engelke (2010:377) has noted that in light of the 'media turn' in the study of religion, 'media turners' have rejected the secularisation thesis and its implication of religious privatisation. These scholars have tended to agree that religion's heightened visibility can be attributed to the rise and subsequent ubiquity of media technology and services. Engelke argues that, to a large extent, critics of the secular modernity's version of privatised religion provide little to substantiate their claims, using this position as a 'rhetorical launching pad' instead of an argument. He urges scholars working in the field of religion and media to take serious stock of the ways in which religion's presence or lack thereof in the public sphere is contextually constituted.

David Herbert (2012) agrees that religion's 'republicisation', despite its anticipated disappearance as purported by theories of secularisation, has been produced by the multiple and varied interactions and transformations between media, culture, and politics that have occurred as a result of a 'combination of the rapid development and dissemination of media technologies, liberalization of national media economies and the growth of transnational media spheres' (Herbert 2012:90). Herbert has explored the 'republicisation of religion' in relation to post-colonial, post-communist, and Western contexts, arguing that 'linear paradigms of secularization and mediatisation are unable to narrate' the mutually altering, complex dialectical processes that constitute the relations between religion, media, and the public sphere (Herbert 2012:93).

In his seminal book, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), Casanova argues that what has generally been a single theory of secularisation, should be separated into three composite parts. Casanova suggests that three conditions denote the process of secularisation in the modern world: Firstly, he theorises secularisation as the delineation of secular spheres from religious institutions and norms; secondly, he identifies the decline of religious beliefs

and practices in modern societies as another composite of secularisation; and finally, he defines secularisation as the 'the marginalisation of religion to a privatised sphere' (Casanova 1994:7).

Casanova identifies the differentiation proposition as the core of the secularisation theory and maintains that the thesis of differentiation is still defensible despite arguments to the contrary. Furthermore, he argues that modern differentiation does not necessarily lead to the marginalisation or privatisation of religion, and that 'public religions [do not] necessarily endanger the differentiated structured of modernity' (Casanova 1994:8). He suggests that, despite the heightened global visibility of religion, which directly undermines the third premise of secularisation, religion can be a part of the secularisation project if it conforms to the operating standards of modern democratic societies. A distinction is made between religions that promote democratic values and norms and those that undermine these processes.

On the basis of this discrepancy, Talal Asad launches his concern about which kinds and aspects of religion are considered attuned with democratic principles and which are not, and how various actors within the public sphere negotiate this tension. He problematises the secularisation thesis as presented by Casanova (1994) and raises a number of crucial questions that are vital for understanding the role of religion in the modern nation-state, particularly when thinking about the formation of modern nationalism. Whereas Asad accepts the utility of Casanova's disaggregation of the secularisation thesis, he takes issue with Casanova's insistence that the core of the secularisation thesis is still salvageable. Asad suggests that in making this claim, Casanova is equating secularisation with modernity, and dismisses the 'different kinds of secular and the political reasoning on which they are based' (Asad 2006:208).

Asad explores the conditions under which religion can become public in the modern nation-state. In considering the compatibility of religion with the requirements of the modern state, Asad proposes that,

> the public sphere is a space necessarily (not contingently) articulated by power. And everyone who enters it must address power's disposition of people and things, the dependence of some on the goodwill of others (Asad 2003:184).

Only religions that accept the preconditions of modernity within the context of

the modern state are allowed to enter the public sphere. However, they are not allowed to do so on their own terms. In addressing 'power's disposition of people and things', religion in the public sphere is expected to play a 'positive political role in modern society' (Asad 2003:183-184). Furthermore, according to Asad, new definitions and discourses of not only the secular, but also religion, politics, as well as notions of modernity, are manifested materially through institutions. Within these institutions, which have been framed by a secular assessment of people and things, religion is assigned a junior position, a scripted supporting role in the nation-building narrative.

The representation and role of Islam within the context of the SABC has been shaped by both the historical role of religion in the public broadcast media and the dramatic political changes that facilitated the transition from apartheid to democracy. Subsequently, the particularity of the constitutionalism that has coloured the character of the 'new' democratic South African state has given rise to a regulated public representation of religion. The guidelines of the 2003 Religious Broadcasting Policy decree that all religious programming on public broadcast television be undergirded by the constitutional values of 'national development, unity, diversity, non-racialism, non-sexism, democracy, and human rights' (SABC Editorial Policy on Religious Broadcasting 2003:54). It is under the auspices of this general injunction that Islamic content has been developed and transmitted by the SABC.

The following section of this article sketches the historical and institutional conditions that birthed the production of *An Nur*, *The Light*. Thereafter an episode description and brief content analysis of *An Nur* will be provided. In the section that follows, an overview of Asad's approach to the place of religion in the modern nation-state with a distinct emphasis on its applicability to the context of the SABC as a nation-building resource, will be explored. Finally, an analysis of the relationship between Islam, the media, and religious regulation in light of Asad's assessment of religion's place in the modern nation-state and the secular's special relationship with Christianity will be provided.

Background and Content of the Religious Broadcasting Policy

The history of *An Nur* and its role in the nation-building project of the South African state can be traced back to the early days of public broadcasting's democratic reorganisation. In 1991, a range of South African organisations

gathered in the Netherlands to discuss the future of public broadcasting at the *Jabulani!: Freedom of the Airwaves Conference*. With reference to the future role of religious broadcasting in the anticipated democratic context, the following key recommendation was made: '[G]iven the Christian National nature of broadcasting in South Africa under the National Party rule, it is essential that steps be taken in the reconstruction of public broadcasting to remove this bias. This is not to deny the importance of the religious/spiritual dimension in society, but instead to insist that "Christian Nationalism" has been (and still is) a profoundly ideological rather than religious orientation' (African-European Institute; Omroep voor Radio Freedom 1991:XX).

Notoriously referred to as the 'mouthpiece of the state' during apartheid, the SABC was central in exemplifying both explicit and implicit modes of censorship. Ideologically undesirable (usually, though, not exclusively imported) material was banned outright and programming was produced with an innate censorship mechanism ensuring that the apartheid ideology was reproduced and proliferated through the public broadcast media (Merrett 1994:90).

With regard to religious broadcasting, the Dutch Reformed version of Christianity featured dominantly on the public broadcast television. In its opening paragraph, the 1983 Constitution states that South Africa 'upholds Christian values and civilized norms, with recognition and protection of freedom of faith and worship' (Republic of South Africa 1983:110). In line with this arrangement, religions other than Christianity were virtually ignored and silenced in matters related to and on public broadcasting. Although a few other Christian Churches were permitted some airtime, they were allowed so only under heavy surveillance and were not allowed to comment on socio-political matters in general, or to speak against the National Party in particular. The reformation of the broadcasting landscape at the onset of democracy required a material change from the previous broadcast culture of authoritarianism to one based on and safeguarded by democratic values. In this process, the public media was reconfigured to be in the service of the greater good as opposed to serving government interests. According to Ruth Teer-Tomaselli (2008:73),

> [t]he SABC became the locus for national struggles over questions of control, racial composition, news, content, language policy, ideology, and the whole gamut of what would constitute a new South Africa. What happened in the 'transformation' of the SABC became a litmus

test of what occurred in the 'transformation' of the wider society.

In light of the legacy of the apartheid broadcasting, the SABC was cast as a site of restitution for the historical and deliberate omissions of non-White identities in terms of racial, linguistic, cultural, and religious representation. This mandate determined the role of the SABC in generating a national identity for South Africans that became central to the broadcaster's institutional and programming agendas.

The SABC's existing editorial policies attempt to codify, for the purposes of clarity and compliance, the various legislative injunctions that dictate the 'powers, functions, rights and obligations' of the public broadcaster and subsequently the contours and substance of content (SABC Editorial Policy 2003:1). These policies are guidelines for the production of broadcast content and act as interpretive devices for understanding the ways in which national policies regarding broadcasting are mediated within the material context of broadcast production. Given the nature of television production as an industry and technological project, the policies are left open to SABC staff and a production crew to interpret. Since the SABC is a signatory of the Broadcasting Code of Conduct and can be subjected to sanctions and penalties, should content be found to be in contravention, the incentive is high to ensure that the broadcast content reflects the values of the editorial policies.

The Broadcasting Code of Conduct is underwritten by the same constitutional provisions and nation-building mandate to which the SABC adheres. Therefore, between editorial policies and the Code of Conduct, the production and transmission of content are regulated both internally and externally. According to the SABC mandate, which underwrites the editorial policy, the institution conforms to general universal public broadcasting norms and procedures but has interpreted these within the historical and current context of South Africa, describing South Africa as a 'young democracy and society in transition' (SABC Editorial Policy 2003:4). The SABC mandate aligns itself with the objectives set out in the preamble to the 1996 Constitution. In this way, the SABC establishes that its core business is 'to play a part in healing divisions of the past, to promote respect for democratic values and human rights, to supply information that allows citizens to exercise their rights and to reflect the rich diversity of a united South Africa' (SABC Editorial Policy 2003:5).

The SABC mandate acknowledges the lingering acrimony caused by apartheid's legal, political, cultural, racial, and religious separation, suggesting

that the antidote to the divisiveness caused by legislation be found both in the human rights that the new democratic state provides and the provision of programming that represents a novel approach to understanding the meaning of diversity in the South African society. During apartheid, the presence of diversity served as a basis for discrimination. However, the new democratic state affirmed the desirability of the presence of diversity and redefined its meaning. Consequently, the SABC was enlisted as a national pedagogical platform for disseminating this new national vision.

Throughout the editorial policy documents, the role of public broadcasting and SABC programming in national reconciliation and reparation are made explicit. This is demonstrated through detailed policies outlining commitments to universal access, language representation, local content production, the representation of religious diversity, and educational provisions for adults and children. The *Republic of South Africa Broadcasting Act no. 4 of 1999*, dictates to the public broadcaster that a range of editorial policies be developed and submitted to the Department of Communications as part of the licensing conditions of the broadcaster. According to the Act, every area of programming must have dedicated policies specifying the operational and production procedures with respect to news, programming, local content, education, universal service and access, language, and religion (Broadcasting Act 1999:17).

Cleary, as a site for social transformation, the SABC shares in the responsibility of nation building. The Religious Broadcasting Policy declares South Africa 'a multicultural and multiple faith society' (SABC Editorial Policy on Religious Broadcasting 2003: 44). In recognising the diverse cultures and faith of the country, the broadcaster qualifies this affirmation of diversity by claiming that the South African culture and religions share common values that promulgate 'social harmony, national healing, reconciliation, social reconstruction and nation building' (SABC Editorial Policy on Religious Broadcasting 2003: 44). With this statement, the SABC configures a definition and function for religion that is clearly inspired by the 1996 Constitution. According to the editorial policy, the SABC considers the main religions of South Africa to be Christianity, African Religion, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism, but programming airtime is not allocated on an equal basis. A system of parity of esteem is employed. In principle, all religions are considered equal and worthy of representation. However, through the SABC editorial policy, time allocations are calculated according to census informa-

tion and rudimentary demographic information.

The policy does not provide numerical data on the amount of total airtime that is allocated to each religious group. Instead it claims that every three years in consultation with a Religious Broadcasting Panel, airtime for religious groups is allocated and revised. Until 2006, it was relatively simple to identify the members of the Religious Broadcasting Panel as its activities were regularly reported on through SABC annual reports and in-house media. However, there is no recent evidence to support the continued existence of the panel. This situation is unsurprising given that for the last 15 years the SABC has been mired in controversy around issues of funding, corruptions, political intervention, and programmatic interference. To this researcher's knowledge, the last time the SABC published figures of the amount of religious broadcasting airtime that each 'major religion' was given, was in the 1997-1998 Annual Report (SABC Annual Report 1997/1998; Hackett 2006). According to the Report, Christianity is provided 70% of the overall time allocated to religious broadcasting, Hinduism and Islam each gets a 7.5% share, while African Religion is allocated 10%, and Judaism 5%. While these figures are quite dated and there have been reports of unexpected and slight increases for major religions other than Christianity, in this case the researcher suggests that the latest SABC television guides demonstrate that Christian programming still dominates the religious broadcasting genre.

The SABC enlists religion as a site and sources for its nation-building endeavours. In providing religions with airtime on its platforms, the SABC provides a managing framework for the kind of programming that will be produced and transmitted. The religious broadcasting genre is therefore established as a space for the representation of 'the distinctive identities of religious traditions' (SABC Editorial Policy 2003:45). This space is regulated by the injunction that the religious broadcast material conforms to standards that portray 'the religious and moral objectives of justice, social harmony, and the common good' (SABC Editorial Policy 2003:45).

The background and content of the religious broadcasting policy makes a convincing case for the conceptualisation of religion on the public broadcast television as an object of policy and a product of modern nationalism. The mediatisation of Islam as portrayed through the example of *An Nur* demonstrates how, as a result of the constitutionally sanctioned institutional logic of the public broadcaster, the SABC produces and disseminates a regulated version of Islam.

An Nur, The Light

Islam is regularly featured on other multi-faith programmes, however, *An Nur, The Light* falls under the genre of faith-specific programming, and this sub-genre of religious broadcast programming consists of meditational and devotional programmes. Airtime for this purpose is provided for the major religions of South Africa in order to afford these groups a space for self-expression and celebration of their religious beliefs. Since 2000, *An Nur*, *The Light* has screened on South African television on a weekly basis. Although the programme has undergone a number of time-slot changes and variations in terms of structure, it is generally composed of a series of inserts which incorporate profiles of Muslims in South Africa doing interesting things in various spheres of social and civil life.

Included are a cooking insert, an Islamic fashion segment, book and technology reviews, a wellness insert with a doctor, travel inserts, Quranic recitations, and music videos based on Islamic songs. Furthermore, the show features a question-and-answer session anchored by religious leaders who are generally well known to the South African Muslim community. More recently the show has introduced a 'topic' segment. In one episode, the topic of sunnah beards is discussed in great detail, while in another, the rise of Muslim operated home-based businesses is explored (SABC 1. 2017a. *An Nur, The Light: Episode 19 in Season 10.*). The programme also periodically presents inserts on a range of 'issues' pertaining to Islam and Muslims in South Africa, which include drug abuse, crime, poverty, and plural marriage.

The executive producer of *An Nur,* Munier Parker, reflects on the history of the programme and conceptualizes *An Nur* within the framework of the SABC's religious broadcasting mandate. He asserts that the mandate of the show is to primarily tell the 'good' story of Islam in South Africa (Parker 2016). Although the show engages with more controversial issues, it always ends on an ultimately positive note. This is usually achieved through the provision of commentary by a respected Muslim community member, leader, or through voice-over narration and presenter commentary.

By way of an episode synopsis, the researcher offers a glimpse at the structure and content of an episode of *An Nur* aired on 21 July 2017. The episode begins with a female presenter dressed in a brightly coloured dress with a matching headscarf, introducing the first segment of the show, which is a profile on human rights advocate Muhammad Ameermia. The voice-over

narration that follows, expounds on the many virtues of constitutionalism in general and of the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in particular. The rest of this segment is dedicated to discovering the good work that Ameermia is doing under the auspices of his position as commissioner for the SAHRC. The insert features an interview with the chief operating officer of the SAHRC who provides more insight into the kind of work that Ameermia does and the kind of individual that he is. As the insert progresses, the voice-over narration continues to exalt the virtues of Ameermia's character, explaining the significance of his appointment as a commissioner for the continued security of housing and justice for the downtrodden of the South African society, and generally tells the story of his work in human rights activism. The episode ends with a closing voice-over that foregrounds Ameermia's professional and personal vision 'to galvanise the bill of rights from a word document to practical action and lived reality for all South African citizens' (SABC 1. 2017a. *An Nur, The Light: Episode 19 in Season 10*). At no point during this insert, any reference is made to Islam, nor is Ameermia beyond the reasonable assumptions based on his name, identified as a Muslim. Thereafter, the insert cuts straight to a subdued discussion between the presenter and a life coach who engages in a conversation about dealing with the loss of a loved one. The life coach uses both conventional counselling techniques and draws on Islamic examples to provide answers to the presenter's questions. In the next segment, the topic of sleep apnea is addressed. Included are a visit to a sleep clinic and an interview with a Muslim sleep specialist. In the same insert, a religious leader is asked to elaborate on the Islamic thought regarding sleep. The voice-over narration concludes the segment by citing a Quranic verse on the topic of sleep. The segment that follows is captioned travel. In this episode, the North West Province of South Africa is advertised to Muslim viewers who are presumably seeking halaal food and halaal forms of entertainment. Zip lining and a visit to a game farm are featured as two such activities. The final segment is a music video featuring a Canadian-Muslim vocal artist. The episode ends with the presenter bidding viewers good-bye first in the local Sotho language and then with the Islamic greeting of Assamlamulaikum.

An Nur, Islam and Public Broadcasting
While programmes situated within the faith-specific genre are intended to provide theological, meditational programming, *An Nur* is more about

Muslims than Islam. It is not a theological programme, but a magazine lifestyle show that displays through each segment that Muslims, and by association Islam, are an integral part of South African society. Although Islam is featured, sometimes explicitly and at other times implicitly in almost every segment, and sacred texts are regularly quoted, the focus of the programme is not to provide religious or spiritual support to viewers. According to the religious broadcasting policy, the programme is meant as a platform for Muslim self-expression and a celebration of religious identity. However, the theological or meditational aspect of the faith-specific genre of programming is subsumed by the broader objectives of the SABC policy.

The reality is that members of the Muslim community of South Africa are only involved in the production of *An Nur* to the extent that they are visible on the screen. The programme is commissioned by SABC-appointed commissioning editors who work with an independent producer to ensure that the mandate of the SABC is met through the production of content for the programme. This is the standard operating process for religious broadcasting, and an episode of the programme is never broadcasted unless the commissioning editor in charge has approved it. Therefore, while the independent producer has some creative control over the content and presentation of the programme, this content can only be developed within predetermined institutional parameters that are set out by the broadcasting policy and practice.

To the outsider watching *An Nur,* Muslims, specifically those from and living in South Africa, bear little to no resemblance to their sensationalised media counterparts. Muslim men and women are lawyers, architects, artists, cable car operators, musicians, and chefs. They are fashion-forward, adrenalin junkies, avid travellers, and foodies. They are concerned about national issues such as water shortages, farming techniques, the rights of the disabled, high cholesterol and the work of sporting associations. They assist in disaster relief, raise funds for noble causes, feed the hungry, and clothe the destitute. In short, Islam and the Muslims, portrayed on *An Nur*, are exemplary products of the modern nation-state. Through *An Nur*, the 'objectives of justice, social harmony, and the common good' that the SABC policy claims, which is present in all religions, are shown to be found in Islam (SABC Editorial Policy 2003:45). This does not imply that the version of Islam and Muslim life in South Africa presented on *An Nur* is untrue, but rather that this precise narrative that meets the nation-building requirements of the public broadcast is achieved through the stylised production of the programme and as a result is

the authorised and favoured representation of Islam on the public broadcast television.

Stig Hjarvard (2011) supports this assessment when he suggests that the mediatisation of religion, as a result of secularisation and the power and pervasiveness of the media, has been achieved through the exploitation of religion's modern vulnerability. Hjarvard (2011:126) claims that media logic, that is the policies and practices of media sites, have modelled 'religious information and experiences' to be in line with 'the institutional, aesthetic, and technological modus operandi of the media'. He suggests that media institutions reorganise the internal content of religion in accordance with its own organising principles and, as a result, determine the framing of the production and transmission of content about religion.

Hjarvard theorises the process of 'mediatisation', and the notion of 'the media as agents of religious change' within the context of Western societies wherein the media are generally independent of the state. Consequently, the religious context to which Hjarvard refers, hosts a visible 'secularisation of society' (Hjarvard 2011:126). However, since Hjarvard claims that mediatisation is a variable process and that media and religion are historically, geographically, and culturally constituted, the pliability of this theory for understanding the relationship between religion and media within the context of the state-dominated media in South Africa should not be discounted.

In the South African context, mediatised religion as transmitted by the SABC is imbued with a positivist nationalistic tone. Patricia van Heerden, a one-time commissioning editor for the SABC, provided a searing criticism of the SABC's nation-building agenda by referring to the local programming on the public broadcasting channels as a case of 'myopic narcissistic nationalism' (Contributor 2013:n.p.). Assessing precisely the kind of programming that *An Nur* represents, Van Heerden (Contributor 2013:n.p.) goes on to problematise the 'positive nationalism' that underscores all the SABC editorial policy and has resulted in programming that merely tells South Africans pleasant things about other South Africans with the hope to generate a sense of national unity and belonging. The positive nationalism that is perpetuated through editorial control is reflected in the Religious Broadcasting Policy. In the case of *An Nur*, the broadcaster has come to develop and transmit a mediatised depiction of Islam and Muslims which is consistent with the values of modernity in general, and nation-building in particular.

Religious broadcasting on the public broadcast media in South Africa

is the most underfunded genre of programming, unable to generate the revenue necessary to support its own activities, and is reliant on the goodwill of the broadcaster and more specifically other more well-resourced programming genres for the funding necessary to continue transmission. The deregulation and subsequent re-regulation of the public broadcast media in South Africa, in the context of the massive democratic transition that began in the early 1990s, as well the impact of the worldwide global economic recession, have resulted in a public service model of broadcasting that has become predominantly dependent on commercial funding through advertising revenue. In spite of it's limited airtime and resources *An Nur,* as the only Islamic television programme on the SABC remains popular. According to the producers of the programme, '[o]ur viewers unfailingly want to see more of what *An Nur* has to offer' (Parker 2016:n.p.). Therefore, the version of Islam and the story of Muslims that are offered by the SABC, appear to meet the consumptive needs and expectations of Muslims viewers and to some extent satisfies the SABC's need to generate income from broadcasting material...

In contrast, Christian programming is ubiquitous in presence and has a variety of forms on the SABC. These include meditational programmes, gospels music shows, and lifestyle programmes with a faith-specific focus. Additionally, Christianity is also regularly included as a part of multi-faith programmatic offerings. As previously stated, within the SABC mediascape, equity does not mean equal airtime. Working from a system of parity of esteem and given the numerical strength of Christianity, programming for the Christian population dominates the religious broadcasting genre. However, this official institutional position does not account for how the historical dominance and contemporary pervasiveness of Christian broadcast content have necessarily shaped the ways in which other religions are represented.

It has been shown that the dominance of Christianity in mediascapes around the world 'compels others to conform to the media practices, genres, and forms of representations they favour' (Eisenlohr 2012:41; cf. Derrida 2001; Hackett 2009). The shape and form of the religious diversity in public spheres as circulated by the media technology is, therefore, constituted, not only by local legislation, policy, and institutional practices, but also by global histories of Christian hegemony. In the case of religion and the SABC, this illustrates not only the deeply rooted Christian past of South Africa in particular, and the Western Christian orientation of democracy in general, but also shows how the meaning of its enduring presence within the specific socio-

political and mediological conditions of the post-apartheid South Africa have affected the way that Islam is represented within the context of the public broadcaster (cf. Asad 2008; Zabala 2005).

In the case of the SABC, there were overt accusations of Christian favouritism from both viewers and those involved in the production of religious programming. Although the producers of *An Nur* have not spoken out on this exact issue, producers of the African Religions content have specifically probed the broadcaster on its Christian bias approach (cf. Hackett 2006; Baker 2000; Mndende 1999). Although the SABC has identified the historical neglect of African culture in the media and has somewhat noncommittally promised to provide African Traditional Religions (ATRs) with more visibility on the public media, the enactment of these promises has not materialised. Consequently, the ATRs remain largely marginalised in the public broadcasting sector in general, and specifically on the public broadcast television. According to an ATR expert and practitioner, Dr. Nokuzola Mndende, the SABC has systematically marginalised the ATRs with regard to airtime proportioning and regulatory measures. Citing examples from her personal experience, working on religious broadcast programming, Mndende accuses the SABC of the outright favouritism of Christianity and the denigration of the ATRs. Referring to an in-house memo on the programming for the ATRs that forbids the 'mere mention of missionaries', Mndende claims that Christian programming is allowed to go relatively unrestricted, even when comments made therein explicitly denigrate the ATRs (Mndende 1999:95). Furthermore, Mndende's laments against the broadcaster shed light on the marginalisation of indigenous religions and the privileging of Christian normativity. Mndende attributes this condition to what she calls, the 'false pretence of theoretical democracy'. According to Mndende, 'The Bill of Rights proclaims freedom of religion in theory, yet its implementation only refers to the religions that were shipped into the country. The indigenous religion must still accept the colonial labels of "primitive" and "out-dated" unless under the cloak of Christianity' (Mndende 1999:95). Her accusation of favouritism, although directed at Christianity, implicitly involves Islam and shows how state-authorised mediatisation of religion in South Africa has resulted in a distinct hierarchy of religion. Christianity resides at the top, the other major religions in the middle and, according to Mndende, the ATRs are at the bottom.

Through state-authorised mediatisation, religion is regulated beyond the provision of airtime and more significantly in matters related to content.

Whereas Mndende's complaint is essentially an accusation of censorship, as explained above, the producers of *An Nur* report positively on viewer satisfaction with the content. The status quo remained and even today, the amount of airtime allocated to ATRs remains limited and marginal. Viewed in this light, *An Nur* as a policy-regulated representation by Islam, as a result of its close adherence to broadcasting, is able to thrive within the Christian dominated public broadcasting landscape.

'Formations of the Secular' in the South African Mediascape

In acknowledging its hazy pervasiveness, Asad pursues the multiple formations of the secular 'through its shadows' and in doing so, forcefully critiques the superficial universalism it embodies (Asad 2003:16). According to Asad, 'the secular' for which he is subversively searching is,

> neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred). I take the secular to be a concept that brings together certain behaviours, knowledges, and sensibilities in modern life (Asad 2003:25).

Asad disagrees with the proposition of nationalism as a secularised version of religion. This easy enfolding of two complex sets of practices and discourses takes for granted the messy business of defining religion and fails to question the underlying assumptions and formations of power that allow for certain elements of religion to be considered 'definitive' or essential. While certain national practices can surely be imbued with a sacred aura, Asad advises that we look beyond guises of corresponding forms, as is the case with conventional comparisons, and towards the issues raised through differential results, when exploring the way in which religion is enlisted in the project of the modern nation-state. Along with this Asadean line of analysis, the claim in this paper is not made that the democratic South African state is attempting through the public broadcaster to replace normative forms of religion with that of nationalism or a national religion, but instead that the SABC as a formation of the secular, is enlisted by the state to produce and disseminate representations of Islam and other religions that support its constitutionally ordained nation-building endeavours.

The Marxist undertones of Asad's work are patent, especially in relation to how he conceives of the capacity of the media to operate as essentially an ideological state apparatus imbued with the authority to extend an 'authorising [discursive]' paradigm to which religion, in the context of this public platform, is expected to submit (Asad 2003:20). The South African public broadcasting sector almost presents a textbook example of the supposedly benevolent state power at play. Established as a public company, the SABC is owned by the state. This arrangement is set out in the Broadcasting Act that ensures that the state remains the sole shareholder of the public broadcaster. The Minister of Communication, as appointed by the President of the country, acts on behalf of the state in determining the memorandum and articles of association that regulate the relationship between the SABC and the state. There is no legislative injunction to involve the public in this procedure, nor is it stipulated that the state holds the SABC shares on behalf on the public (OSISA 2010).

Broadcasting, along with all other electronic media and telecommunications, is regulated by the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa. Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution provides that '[n]ational legislation must establish an independent authority to regulate broadcasting in the public interest, and to ensure fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing South African society' (Republic of South Africa 1996:102). Since this chapter of the Constitution is dedicated to the establish-ment of state institutions that support constitutional democracy, it seems that the broadcasting regulator should fall under the auspices of this chapter. Furthermore, Section 181 of the Constitution provides details for the conditions under which the Chapter 9 institutions must operate, but fails to specifically mention the broadcasting regulator when it names the other state institutions which include the Public Protector, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Cultural, Linguistic, and Religious Communities, the Auditor-General, and the Electoral Commission.

While there are ongoing disputes around this very supposition, it is worth noting that the final word on this issue came from a parliamentary committee set up to determine the appropriateness of the broadcasting regulator as a Chapter 9 entity. It found that the constitutional protection of the regulator is appropriate, and that constitutional protection does not affect its independence (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2007).

It is clear that there remains an inherent tension within the broadcasting

sector. On the one hand, there is the issue of the broadcaster's independence, while on the other, there is the implicit influence of constitutional protection and support. This scenario illustrates how the Constitution is considered as a neutral, normative, and almost natural regulatory feature that not only constructs the right to independence, but also provides the content for that independence. This is, of course, an acceptable operating system within the modern nation-state, where the Constitution, as another formation of the secular, grants authorisation and authority to other ideological sites in the spirit of reproducing and enforcing state power (Asad 2003).

The way that the media industry and its regulatory bodies engage with religion, whether through production, dissemination, or regulation, is expected to be underlined in the policy and practice by the constitutional mandate, in order to balance freedom of expression against other rights that might be violated in the mediasphere. Whereas freedom of expression is considered the defining framework for the broadcast media, religion is forced to yield to the predisposition of the media. The prohibitions placed on the freedom of expression reflect what Asad refers to as 'the shape of free speech' (Asad 2009:27).

Asad veers away from the 'banal argument that free speech is never totally free because in a liberal society freedom is balanced by responsibility' (Asad 2009:30). The knowledge of this arrangement is already common sense, according to Asad, and does not provide much-needed insight into formalised 'patterns of restrictions' and the 'inarticulate powers coursing through liberal orders' that work to define, manage, and regulate the expression or speech of the free human being (Asad 2009:30).

The SABC, in propagating a specific national image of religion(s) and religious diversity for the production of broadcast material, has developed a discourse for regulating religion in the post-apartheid South Africa. Placed within the framework of modern secular politics, religious regulation, although analogous to censorship, is not regarded as such by the SABC. Democratic regulatory policies and procedures go beyond the silencing of certain broadcast material, but subtly authorise discourses that allow for the production and circulation of the material that is broadcasted. Since the approach that is taken to regulating religion and religious diversity is generated from constitutional provisions about religion and freedom of expression, censorship as religious regulation does not become the antithesis of free speech; it becomes a part of the conditions that make freedom of expression possible. *An Nur* is a clear example of this subtle regulation.

The broadcasting regulator as the constitutional custodian for the SABC ensures, through the enforcement of policy development and implementation, that the broadcaster produces and transmits programming that adheres to its configuration of constitutionally sound and essentially state-approved broadcast material. What does this then mean for religion's admittance to the sphere of public broadcasting? In plain terms, public broadcasting is an invitation-only public site. Therefore, although they are South African political figures, members of government are well-known for both strategically and spontaneously appealing to the religious sensibilities of the general public, through public statements, appearances, and prayer, while religious broadcasting as a genre of programming is carefully regulated. The SABC as a site of state power with the ability to legitimise religions through the provision of airtime and production, plays a crucial role in deciding not only which religious groups are included, but also which aspects of religion are allowed to be broadcasted.

The public sphere of the SABC is heavily guarded by the regulator, through policy and production oversight, ensuring that when religion is allowed into the space, it leaves that space and its dominant discourse intact. Asad (2003:185) makes the following comment: 'Far from having to prove to existing authority that it is no threat to dominant values, a religion that enters political debate on its own terms may, on the contrary, have to threaten the authority of existing assumptions'. Therefore, although religions may find outlets for exerting agency, the SABC policy and practice provide adequate countermeasures for neutralising the agency of religious actors on the public broadcast television. The version of Islam that the SABC produces and disseminates, must conform to the nation-building mandate with which the institution has been tasked.

Conclusion

In this paper, the SABC's 2003 Religious Broadcasting Policy in general, and the programme *An Nur*, *The Light* in particular, have been conceptualised as products of the modern nation-state that also function as sites for the proliferation of the national building project of the state. It has been argued that the SABC as a formation of the secular is enlisted by the state to produce and disseminate representations of Islam and other religions that support its constitutionally sanctioned nation-building endeavours. Although religion has

always been public in South Africa, the regulation of religion during the apartheid era rendered many religious formations invisible, while others, such as the Christianity of the Afrikaner churches, were given the privilege of favoured visibility, especially on state platforms such as the public broadcasting sector. In the post-apartheid South Africa, religion has been conditionally freed by the constitutional provision of freedom of religion and then regulated through the precepts of freedom of expression and the internal regulatory mechanisms of the public broadcaster.

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Lee-Shae S. Scharnick-Udemans
Senior researcher
Faculty of Arts
Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice
University of the Western Cape
lscharnickudemans@uwc.ac.za