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Disrupting the Neoliberal Capitalist Media Agenda in South Africa: Exploring Anti-Capitalist Alternative Media Playing a Developmental Role

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Abstract: Neoliberalism has been described as the most successful ideology in world history (Andersson 2000). This has, in turn, impacted the modern media by dumbing down its public interest role, through cultivating concentrated media ownership patterns, which has produced hyper-commercial and elitist-driven content. This paper has the broad aim of provoking discussions and debates both for the Global South and Global North geospatial locations grappling with these neoliberal consequences, by considering what systemic alternative(s) to capitalist media can be considered. It specifically explores the return of the anti-capitalist alternative media to South Africa's print media terrain to function in a developmental role. With the aim to dilute the neoliberal capitalist nature of its media that has effectively perpetuated the dominance of the elite class at the expense of citizen-oriented and public interest imperatives (Govenden 2022). It furthers this argument by also comparatively drawing on two BRICS country case studies from Asia i.e. China and India.

Keywords: neoliberal capitalist media, alternative media, public interest, developmental journalism, print media, democracy, Global South, BRICS, South Africa

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1. Introduction

The mass media is widely seen as significantly responsible for the implementation and promotion of the neo-liberal doctrine (Andersson 2012), which first emerged as an ideology and policy regime during the economic crisis of the 1970s. During this period, "the long post-Second World War economic boom came under increasing strain as capitalism faced a number of challenges which threatened its stability and profitability" (Berry 2019, 57). Fuchs (2021, 28) notes that capitalism's multidimensional crisis of the 1970s led to the rise of neoliberal capitalism marked by "a new round of political-economic globalisation". Sassen (2014, 12) aptly describes the phases of capitalism since then,

> We may have entered a new phase of advanced capitalism in the 1980s, one with reinvented mechanisms for primitive accumulation. Today's is a form of primitive accumulation executed through complex operations and much specialized innovation, ranging from the logistics of outsourcing to the algorithms of finance. After thirty years of these types of development, we face shrinking economies in much of the world, escalating destructions of the biosphere all

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> over the globe, and the reemergence of extreme forms of poverty and brutalization where we thought they had been eliminated or were on their way out.

Capitalism is now the reigning political economic system of the world (McChesney 2014, 13). Berry (2019) posits that the mass media is connected to the spread of neoliberalism in many interconnected ways, for fundamentally promoting free market beliefs and values. The modern media has thus become a key profit-making pillar of neoliberal capitalist societies through the market exchange of their content products as commodities. Hence the media now operates as a corporate profit-making machine with the bottom line as supreme, which dumbs down its public interest imperatives required for a well-informed citizenry and healthy democracy. The empirical effects of neoliberalism can be seen in South Africa where its onset changed the macro-context and micro-institutional functioning of its media. The country transitioned from apartheid's racial capitalism to an era of deracialised neoliberal capitalism since the advent of democracy in 1994. Notably, this meant that media structurally transitioned from operating according to white supremacism that was maintained by tight state regulation and control, such as 100 laws censoring the media (see Louw 2014) to that of a neoliberal ideology that prioritised the market's bottom line and therefore favoured richer media citizen consumers.

Much research has pointed to the negative effects of South Africa's neoliberal architecture on its democratic, media diversity, media transformation, and public interest roles. Govenden's (2022) study, *The Power of Neoliberalism: Transformation, Neo-Elitism, and Class Continuities in the Post-Apartheid Media,* found that the country's neoliberal economic edifice substantially informs the nature of its newspaper coverage in the first twenty years of democracy (1994 - 2014). Govenden (2022) notes that newspaper coverage is elite driven in a number of areas, hence marking the emergence of class continuities from apartheid. This is despite a broad affirmative action programme called Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), which envisaged to cultivate transformed and diverse media content through black ownership. Numerous other studies also point to the commercial logic and elitist driven nature of South Africa's print media, notably: in the 2013 service delivery protests newspapers mainly used elite sources and hardly protestor sources which was not advantageous to protestors (Pointer 2015); capitalist elite sources defined the nationalisation of mines discourse in the English corporate press in 2011 (Radebe 2017); the South African media (re)produced dominant discourses and ideologies that favoured elite interests in its representation of the 2013 Marikana massacre where police gunned down 34 miners (Chiumbu 2016). Media content has also been criticised by those with political and statutory authority, for being hyper-commercial and homogenised and as well as dominantly catering for an elite audience consisting of urban, white male, English, and Afrikaans speaking people (see African National Congress conferences 2007, 2011, 2012; South African Human Rights Commission 2000 report). This is the same audience demographic profile that was prioritised during the days of apartheid. Statistics of the newspaper market also show that despite the growth of black readership of newspapers, the sector is still elite driven (SA and SADC Media facts edition 2014). Scholars have noted that neo-liberalism is implicated in the perpetuation of the marginalisation of the world's poor and disadvantaged (Harvey 2005, cited in Dube 2013, 209). Indeed, this is evident in the South African media through the marginalisation of the less powerful societal voices in its newspapers. As Chiumbu (2011, 423) notes,

> The corporate media in South Africa, due to structural factors such as its location within market forces, funding model and continuation of the apartheid legacy, reproduces and reinforces neo-liberal ideology which privileges capitalism and marginalises alternative and counter-hegemonic voices…South African corporate media operates fully within the framework of commercial logic which inevitably favours elite discourse (cited in Radebe 2017, 51).

An intersectional perspective of media neoliberalism is necessary for the Global South, as it can perpetuate historical race inequalities through privileging the wealthier consumers of media and therefore neglecting the needs and wants of the poorer ones which in many countries like South Africa are still racialised. As Marmol (2018, 25) highlights, "[c]orporate media reproduce and reinforce the culture-ideology of neoliberalism and the class and racial divisions that allow this politico-economic system to flourish". Govenden's study (2022, 101) illustrates neoliberalism's part in perpetuating historical race inequalities and injustices. It concludes: "[A]ttempts to transform, diversify, de-westernise, and decolonise the media systems in post-colonial countries will be futile if the power of neoliberalism to perpetuate class inequalities and the race dynamics of the past remain underestimated and unaddressed". One significant way to challenge the power of neoliberalism is growing alternative media, conceptualised as the opposite of the neoliberal discourse. Marmol (2018) contends that alternative media is practically seen as in contrast and opposition to corporate media. Fuchs (2010, 178) unpacks its anti-capitalist compositions: "Alternative media are mass media that challenge the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception". According to Andersson (2012, 755), "[a]lternative media could be described as ways of organizing, producing and using media outside of the established system, motivated by different norms, goals and ambition than those commercial or public organizations that we generally meet in our everyday media use". Alternative media has a longitudinal existence that spans two centuries. As Marmol (2018) notes, there is a lesser-known history of alternative and radical as well as minority and working-class news media that spans 200 years to the present. Alternative media will no doubt continue to have a strong presence in the digital media present and future. Freudenthaler and Wessler (2022) note that the advent of online media offers media consumers a larger diversity of both mainstream and alternative sources. This context is the springboard of this paper, which aims to elicit discussions and debates both for Global South and the Global North geospatial locations by considering systemic alternatives to capitalist media, to dilute the power of neoliberalism and its hyper-commercialisation of media systems worldwide. As Curran (2000) notes, the media are no longer just compromised by their links to big business, but media *are* big business. This paper specifically explores the return of the anti-capitalist alternative media to the South African post-apartheid print media terrain to function in a developmental role, to dilute the neoliberal capitalist nature of its media. South Africa has a significant history of alternative press that played protest, counter-hegemonic, and anti-capitalist functions during its oppressive periods of colonialism and apartheid. In this regard, it also aims to de-westernise the study of alternative media and contribute a Global South perspective of the potential of anti-capitalist alternative media playing a developmental role and providing a counter-capitalist function. As Silvio Waisbord (2022) highlights in *Digital Journalism Special issue: Contesting the Mainstream: Understanding Alternative News Media*, "de-centring and de-westernizing alternative media studies continues to be an urgent matter" (Ihlebæk et al. 2022, 1268).

2. Media Neoliberalism and the Dumbing Down of Democratic Imperatives

Fuchs (2021) conceptualises capitalism as the organisation of economic activity through private ownership that operates in a free market, by drawing from Milton Friedman (1962) whom he calls one of the most famous neoliberals. Neoliberalism is a free market ideological economic system that has dominated the global economic system to such an extent that it is even considered by many as, "the most successful ideology in world history" (Anderson 2000, cited in Venugopal 2015, 1). In fact, Margaret Thatcher's infamous statement articulated in the 1980s *There is no Alternative* captures its dominance (Andersson 2012). It has since gained traction to be used as a popular slogan in neoliberal economic and political discourse as a common point of reference to signify developments in capitalism, that the only way has become market-liberal capitalism (Andersson 2012).

Neoliberalism's reach and ripple effects on society have been both colossal and complex. This importantly includes that it has birthed a phenomenon called 'Media neoliberalism', a term I use to describe the profound tangible characteristics and effects associated with neoliberalism on the modern media such as ownership concentration; the inordinate power of self-serving media tycoons; hyper-commercialised content; and monopolisation on the marketplace of ideas. Political economy of the media theorists have extensively documented that neoliberal capitalism is largely responsible for contemporary ownership trends in media development, particularly: convergence, consolidation, cross ownership, cartels, cross border deals, mergers, as well as acquisitions at a global, continental, and national level (see Garnham 1995; McChesney 2001; Warf 2007; Harcourt and Picard 2009; Vizcarrondo 2013). Thus, neoliberalism's free market paradigm has birthed media markets characterised by concentrated ownership and therefore as Compaine and Hoag (2012, 28) note "market power of dominant media firms has only worsened". For the United Kingdom media scholars note that the national press endorses the key tenets of the capitalist system (Curran and Seaton 1997). The United States of America is a significant case in point, it has a small group of powerful owners of six to ten conglomerates that control 90% of the media in America (Lutz 2012). Nalbandian (2022) more recently captures that 90% of the media in the United States is now controlled by the following six corporations: AT&T, CBS, Comcast, Disney, Newscorp, and Viacom; when 37 years ago there were 50 companies that ran American media. Nalbandian (2022) further notes, "This means that just 232 media executives are calling the shots for the vast majority of the information we are presented with, controlling a total Big Six net worth of over $430 billion". The internet has presented great potential for subverting the mainstream media's oligopoly power and media access stronghold and barriers to entry, thus diversifying the public sphere. However concurrently, the advent of the internet has also birthed neo-forms of capitalist media ownership such as Big Tech companies and social media giants that are driven by profits over safety. As seen in the recent allegations brought against Facebook by a whistleblower – its data scientist Frances Haugen – who revealed internal documents showing Facebook allegedly deceived the public and investors regarding its ability to deal with hate speech and misinformation on its platform (Diaz 2021). Haugen also shared thousands of Facebook documents to *The Wall Street Journal* which showed how anti-COVID-19 vaccine information flourished on Facebook; separate rules applied to celebrities and politicians on the platform; Facebook allowed VIP users a time period to avoid penalties for bad behaviour; and how Facebook quickly disbanded its civic integrity team after the 2020 U.S election that was mandated to protect the democratic process and tackle misinformation (Diaz 2021). Many Facebook employees who were on this

team shared the view that this sent a clear message that “Facebook no longer wanted to concentrate power in a team whose priority was to put people ahead of profits” (Perrigo 2023). Significantly, *Time* magazine reported that five weeks after the disbanding, Donald Trump supporters stormed the U.S Capitol Hill and had organised on Facebook using the platform to spread the lie that the election had been stolen (Perrigo 2023). ‘Media neoliberalism’ is not a Global North phenomenon, it has also rapidly developed in similar ways in Global South countries. Notably, the print media in South Africa is highly concentrated with the Big Four companies dominating the market by controlling 90% of the market share (State of the Newsroom Report SA 2013).

As a result of these global trends, ownership of the means of communication has given rise to heated debates in the last few decades (Rasul and Proffitt 2013). The global rise of consolidation in media ownership continues to raise mixed reactions from scholars, thus theoretical discussions and debates about the monopoly of media ownership are multi-faceted. On one side public interest advocates are not in favour of the capitalist system of media based on the market system of supply and demand inevitably dictating media production and output. These theorists believe that core citizen and democratic values will be compromised by commercial values and profit-making imperatives (see Habermas 2006; Castells 1998; Chomsky and Herman 2002; Horwitz 2005). On the flip side, the free market theorists in favour of the free-flowing liberal market system and its corporate ownership argue that it results in greater diversity and choice (Doyle 2002).

In this neoliberal context, the untamed power of media owners has also been criticised by many media scholars (see Castells 1998; Habermas 2006; Chomsky and Herman 2002), stating that the growth of giant multi-national media corporations has been accompanied by a growth of tycoons possessing inordinate amounts of power. Significantly, Schiller (1996) notes that amongst the greatest threats to freedom of expression is the monopolisation of the market by media moguls as this leads to the monopolisation of the marketplace of ideas. Freedom of expression is especially important in the South African context. It is a foundational human right needed for a healthy democracy and is enshrined in section 16 of the South African Constitution which is the supreme law of the country. Citizens require access to a diverse range of information from a media that is free to report in the public interest and not just in the interests of profits.

This rapid emergence of commercialised ownership systems has been the subject of much criticism for its so-called “anti-democratic” nature, with reference to its impact on the public sphere and content. The main argument is rooted in the belief that profit driven, oligopolistic media systems pose negative consequences for the healthy functioning of democracy and the preservation of an open, inclusive, and diverse public sphere (Garnham 1995). A global trend, for instance, is that the rise of mass media ownership concentration has birthed uniform content and world views (Harcourt and Picard 2009). It is important to note that the content effects of media neoliberalism have a classist and racialised ideological aspect. As Marmol (2018, 25) aptly posits citing the work of Herman and Chomsky (2002); McChesney (2003); Parenti (1993, 2011),

> It is through corporate news media in particular that the political and economic project of neoliberalism and related oppressive ideologies gain legitimacy as these sources of news more often than not project the interests of ruling elites. Corporate media reproduce and reinforce the culture-ideology of neoliberalism

> and the class and racial divisions that allow this politico-economic system to flourish.

Thus, corporate media has been identified as an enabler of the project of neo-liberalism through oppressive ideologies and elitism in its content, which perpetuates society's longstanding class and race divisions. The alarming rise of neo-liberalism globally and its negative consequences for the public interest and the democratic role of the media make a study of this nature important. It is proposed that interventions of anti-capitalist alternative media forms are needed to dilute the power of neoliberalism.

3. Disrupting Through the Counter-Hegemonic: Theorising Alternative Media as a Critical Intervention for Neoliberalism

Kidd (1999) notes that alternative media first grew up during the counter-culture movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Bousalis (2021, 1) describes this period as

> [t]he 1960s to mid-1970s counterculture generation was an era of change in identity, family unit, sexuality, dress, and the arts. It was a time when youth rejected social norms and exhibited their disapproval of racial, ethnic, and political injustices through resistance, and for some subgroups, revolt. The term hippie was coined by 1960s mass media who tried to label youth who believed they were acting hip by rejecting societal norms.

Since its inception, alternative media has taken various forms and roles. As Freudenthaler and Wessler (2022, 1) note about its development: "Alternative outlets can differ in their degree of partisanship, activism, and their opposition to a perceived news 'mainstream'". The mainstream media tends to think of alternative media as "the other" (Kidd 1999, 1). However, alternative media's self-described position is as a counter-voice (Ihlebæk et al. 2022). Hence, alternative media journalists "use the term to mean the opposite, the counter to mainstream corporate and state media" (Kidd 1999).

Alternative media has been theorised by scholars in a few ways such as: community-oriented, progressive, radical, and democratic (see Kidd 1999). Coyer et al. (2007) understand alternative media as being produced by the socially, culturally, and politically excluded. Therefore, alternative media are independently produced and can range from pirate radio, activist publications, and radical work on the internet. Notably, Fuchs (2010) contributes to the theoretical foundations of alternative media by conceptualising it as critical media. In effect, Fuchs (2010) theorises alternative media as a counter-public sphere by drawing from Negt and Kluge's ideas of critical media. Thereby, viewing alternative media as critical media content that is critical of domination and communicates on behalf of the oppressed and dominated,

> [c]ritical media product content shows the suppressed possibilities of existence, antagonisms of reality, and potentials for change. It questions domination, expresses the standpoints of the oppressed and dominated groups and individuals and argues for the advancement of a co-operative society.

Fuchs's (2010) theoretical contribution of alternative media as critical media is especially useful for the post-apartheid South Africa media context. Notably, its print media content has been empirically found to marginalise counter-hegemonic voices such as the working class and economically marginalised (Govenden 2022).

In the face of rising commercialism, alternative media has also been conceptualised by many scholars as a possible challenger for 'media neoliberalism' through critical and counter-hegemonic content. Kidd (1999, 2) highlights the critical importance of alternative media in the face of rising corporatism and commercialism of the media, "[p]roviding alternative messages and points of view is becoming even more crucial as the global commercial media falls into fewer and fewer corporate hands". Andersson's (2012, 752) study, for instance, asks "what role alternative media could play in challenging neoliberal discourse in an age where capitalism have become immune to criticism" and considers how "the alternative" can be conceptualised and approached in the context of the media in the possibility of challenging neoliberal discourse and the possibility of radical imagination. Thus, Andersson (2012, 752) views alternative media as having the potential for "a critical discourse, challenging neoliberalism". This dovetails Fuchs's (2010) perspective of alternative media as critical media that advances the imagination through for instance rupture and the unexpected. Alternative media has also been identified by Marmol (2018, 24) as a critical intervention against neoliberalism and racism through counter-hegemonic content that disrupts commercialism:

> The corporate news media serves as the primary instrument by which the ideologies of neoliberalism and racism are transmitted and solidified in the public mind. In contrast, alternative news media provides counter-hegemonic content that disrupts corporate media messages.

Fuchs (2010, 179) similarly positions alternative media as a disruptor of dominant oppressive paradigms such as capitalism and racism,

> There is oppositional content that provides alternatives to dominant repressive heteronomous perspectives that reflect the rule of capital, patriarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, etc. Such content expresses oppositional standpoints that question all forms of heteronomy and domination. So there is counter-information and counter-hegemony that includes the voices of the excluded, the oppressed, the dominated, the enslaved, the estranged, the exploited, and the dominated. One aim is to give voices to the voiceless, media power to the powerless as well as to transcend the filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies, state monopolies, or cultural monopolies in public information and communication.

Hence according to Fuchs (2010), what makes critical media unique is that it gives a platform to oppositional standpoints and gives a voice to the voiceless, which dilutes the rule of various monopolies. Alternative media has taken many forms since its early inception in the 1960s and 1970s. A noteworthy case in point is the rise of citizen journalism as a form of significant alternative media, enabled by the advent of the internet and rapid technological innovation. As Nuswantari and Alyasuci (2023) highlight, "[c]itizen journalism serves as an alternative medium to address the rights and priorities of the marginalized" (as cited in Nigussie and Kiflu 2024, 3). This concept of alternative media as it relates to citizen participation and grassroots journalism has played a prominent role in disrupting neoliberal capitalist media. Significantly, this has been the case in African and Asian countries which this paper uses as continental case studies where Fuchs's (2010) theorisation of alternative media as giving a voice to the voiceless can be empirically seen. The concept of citizen journalism as a form of alternative media has amplified marginalised voices in both African and Asian

countries: giving the “subaltern” a voice in Zimbabwe’s Gukurahundi genocide (Mpofu 2015); In Ethiopia, provided a platform for the grassroots Tigray people’s perspectives and experience of war crimes and human rights violations (Nigussie and Kiflu (2024); In China, it has provided citizen voices regarding social injustices (Xin 2010), and grassroots citizen reports of the Blank Paper protests (BBP) and incumbent suffering because of the country’s zero-COVID policy (Cheng and Zheng 2024).

Mpofu’s (2015, 97) study about Zimbabwe showed how digital platforms, i.e. newzimbabwe.com, reader comments and an email list consisting of mostly Ndebele participants have revolutionised “subaltern” participation in mainstream debates regarding the 1980s Gukurahundi genocide. Mpofu (2015, 83) defines the “subaltern” as people who consider themselves excluded from mainstream power and economic activities, and that their participation in the debates was silenced by the ruling elites. Hence, to take Mpofu’s (2015) observations further and in line with the beliefs of the paper, the modern mainstream media’s power includes the power of neoliberalism and its privilege of elitist voices (Govenden 2022). Mpofu (2015, 97) found that “alternative digital public spheres are not only fora for discussing trauma and its effects, but are spaces which give the subaltern a voice, and archive and memorialise events, consolidating collective identities in the process”. The interactivity, user-generated content, and sharing features of these digital platforms allowed the subaltern, i.e. Ndebele, victims to raise issues usually considered taboo and criminalised in the authoritarian context of the 1980s Gukurahundi genocide (Mpofu 2015). Significantly, these issues were raised without fear because these platforms were considered safe from government monitoring and control (Mpofu 2015). Notably, newzimbabwe.com’s funding model is not only commercial, but according to Mpofu (2015) it is funded by both donors and advertising.

Nigussie and Kiflu’s (2024) study found that during the war in Ethiopia, citizen journalism in Tigray—primarily through the use of mobile phones—played a crucial role in social mobilisation. This form of journalism was essential in informing both the people of Tigray and the international community about the genocide. This amidst a context where the Abiy government declared war against the people of Tigray in November 2020 under the guise of a ‘Law Enforcement Operation’, to convince Ethiopians to stand against the people of Tigray and legitimise government actions (Nigussie and Kiflu 2024). The state media coverage was one-sided and relied exclusively on the views of the government, therefore defying realities on the ground and overlooking the crimes and atrocities in Tigray (Nigussie and Kiflu 2024). The allied forces committed mass killings and human rights violations against its civilians which were not covered by the Ethiopian media, because of a state-declared information blackout intended to camouflage the genocide (Nigussie and Kiflu 2024). Citizen journalists sent videos/news stories to Tigray Media House (TMH), a Washington-based private media that was the only media that covered the war. Hence, it was found that “mobile phones were not just alternative communication channels but the main sources of information for the people of Tigray and beyond” (Nigussie and Kiflu 2024, 14). Importantly, they conclude: “This shows that citizen journalists were the only sources that witnessed the war on Tigray, predominantly focused on social issues and relied on local residents as eyewitnesses, rather than official or military sources” (Nigussie and Kiflu 2024, 15). Like Zimbabwe, there is mainstream media polarisation in Ethiopia along ethnic lines which played out in the coverage of war-torn Tigray:

> In Ethiopia, media polarization results from an unstable political landscape, creating the 'we' and 'they' dichotomy. Ethnically affiliated and regional media tend to nurture themselves alongside the ethnic groups they presume to represent (Nigussie and Kiflu 2024,15).

In China, citizen journalism has been playing a significant alternative media role to its mainstream authoritarian agenda and tight control. As early as 2010, Xin's (2010, 3) study identified the political and social implications of the rise of citizen journalism in China because of Web 2.0, in particular web blogging. Using four case studies, Xin (2010) notably found that citizen journalism "serves as a complementary news source for mainstream media as well as an alternative channel for releasing 'politically sensitive' news", where mainstream media use citizen journalism and alternative media channels to distribute politically sensitive information. More recently, Cheng and Zheng (2024) explored diasporic citizen journalism on Twitter (now X) during the 2022 Blank Paper protests (BPP) in China. The BBP were peaceful demonstrations that took place in November 2022 across several cities in China (Cheng and Zheng 2024). They were led by mostly young adults and university students against the government's stringent Zero-COVID policy that relied on vigorous testing, strict lockdowns, and quarantine rules. Symbolically, protestors displayed black A4-sized paper to decry policy decisions and media censorship of COVID-19 (Cheng and Zheng 2024). Cheng and Zheng (2024) empirically uncovered that it started off playing an information-sharing role via phone-recorded photos and videos, which transformed into transnational activism against the Zero-COVID policy, and then more broadly calling for a regime change:

> During the events of the BPP, as shown in the study, the Chinese Twittersphere became an anchor point for diasporic communities to share information, providing a space for collective sensemaking. Updates about the unfolding of the BPP, which were not allowed on Chinese media, were widely disseminated and preserved on Twitter. In addition to informing, diasporic citizen journalism related to the BPP became closely intertwined with transnational activism. The advocacy evolved in both scope and nature. What began as calls for a change in the Zero-COVID policy of the country was later coopted by more radical political activist groups advocating for regime change (Cheng and Zheng 2014, 16).

The BBP protests marked a turning point in the country's COVID-19 measures, and their scale was unprecedented in Chinese history (Cheng and Zheng 2024).

Despite these excellent empirical alternative media experiences from Africa and Asia, theoretical conceptualisations of alternative media mostly emanate from the Global North. Fuchs (2010) and many other scholars have theoretically conceptualised alternative media from geospatial Global North locations. Interestingly from a Global South perspective, i.e. African scholar positionality, Mano and Mukhango (2016, 27) endorse Fuchs's (2010) theorisation of alternative media as critical media as suitable for Africa in their paper *Towards alternative media as critical media in Africa stating*. Mano and Mukhango (2016) posit: "We seek to align alternative media in Africa more with the trajectory of critical media". Mano and Mukhango (2016, 27) further posit that Fuchs's (2010) approach to alternative media as critical media that challenges dominant forms of media, production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception "goes beyond alternative media activism to encompass media literacy and other elements of media democratisation as a way to build cooperation

rather than exploitation in Africa". Therefore, they believe media encompasses various dimensions like difference, independence, opposition, and representation.

Fuchs (2010, 189) describes alternative media as the neglected research area in Media Studies that is: "under-resourced, under-represented, and under-researched field – the neglected spot in communication and media studies". Africa is no different. Mano and Mukhango (2016) note that there is scarce literature on Africa's alternative media and their role in the political changes of post-independent African nations. Even despite several books and journals that have been published about African media since the departure of colonial powers. The history of alternative media on the African continent can only be understood in relation to its colonial regimes and its discriminatory politics, as well as economic inequalities in post-independent states, and a lack of press freedom amidst a capitalist exploitation context. Mano and Mukhango (2016, 28) therefore recommend that

> [t]he notion of alternative media can also be situated in an informed understanding of African public life, the relations between elites and the generality of the masses. Given the widespread poverty that exists in Africa, and the growing negative effects of global capitalism on the continent, research on alternative media and communication ought to be approached from a combination of critical theory and critical political economy.

This paper adds to the paucity of research on alternative media (Fuchs 2010), by exploring the importance of alternative media playing a developmental role in disrupting the power of neoliberalism in the post-apartheid South African press (Govenden 2022). Developmental journalism is prescribed for journalists in a Global South context, based on the recognition that the context of post-colonial realities is unique and the norms of Western media systems are not suitable. Musa and Domatob (2007) capture the departure point of developmental journalism:

> The phenomenon of development journalism or development media philosophy arises from the belief that journalists in Third World, anticolonial, and post-colonial societies operate with unique sets of realities and are expected to play certain roles that are alien to the norms of Western media systems (Rao and Lee 2005, cited in Musa and Domatob 2007, 326).

However, it is important to note that on the African continent, the concept of development journalism has been demonised, triggering great fears for media freedom from the government. It was first introduced on the African continent in 1963 by Kwame Nkrumah (first president and prime minister of Ghana), espousing the revolutionary theory of the press. Julius Nyerere (former Prime Minister and President of Tanzania) and Kenneth Kaunda (first President of Zambia) also espoused this "revolutionary theory" of the press, which invoked more state control of the media and a departure from the private ownership of media (Banda 2007, 156-157). Banda (2007) highlights the demonisation of development journalism:

> The concept of 'development journalism' has, over time, become possessed by demons of all sorts of confusion. If we want to wrest any useful principles from the concept, it is important that we exorcise the demons it has come to be associated with, not least the demon of the post-colonial state's blatant interference in the practising of journalism (Wong 2004, cited in Banda 2007: 154).

Indeed, developmental journalism has been demonised and was initially misused in the African continent for selfish political interests. Early concepts of developmental journalism however were linked to independent journalism and deep-seated developmental news.

> In the early 1960s the idea of development journalism was associated with 'independent journalism that provided constructive criticism of government and its agencies, informed readers how the development process was affecting them, and highlighted local self-help projects' (Shah 1996, cited in Banda 2007, 157).

Banda (2007, 154) believes that developmental journalism needs to be reconceptualised because "deliberations about its validity and usefulness have been bogged down in arguments structured by Western notions of press freedom". Banda (2007, 154) further notes that this debate has "diverted attention from important questions about how journalism can contribute to participatory democracy, security, peace and other humanistic values" (Shah 1996, cited in Banda 200, 154). Hence, much of the criticism and discomfort regarding developmental journalism is based on Western vantage points of journalism and press freedom. It is worth rehashing the benefits of developmental journalism for the purposes of this paper.

This paper also aims to broadly fill a major gap in critical research regarding alternative media in Africa, called for by Mano and Mukhango (2016). It is important that alternative media be researched and theorised more and within nuanced approaches and geospatial locations.

4. Two Comparative BRICS Countries: The Recent Rise and Counter-Hegemonic Roles of Alternative Media

BRICS[1] is an alliance of major developing countries that are also major world powers and influential on their continent (BBC 2024). Originally coined BRIC in 2001 by then Goldman Sachs chief economist Jim O'Neill, in a research paper which outlined the growth potential of Brazil, Russia, India, and China (Reuters 2023). Hence, the group only included South Africa in 2010. According to the BBC (2024), "[t]he group was designed to bring together the world's most important developing countries, to challenge the political and economic power of the wealthier nations of North America and Western Europe". Officially according to BRICS (2023),

> BRICS is a partnership of five leading emerging markets and developing countries, founded on historical bonds of friendship, solidarity and shared interests. Together, the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa represent over 42% of the global population, 30% of the world's territory, 23% of GDP and 18% of global trade.

Observers from Europe and the United States however argued that there were stark differences in the BRICS block countries, for example from a political perspective Brazil, India, and South Africa's vibrant democracies stand in contrast to China and

[1] It should be noted that Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were invited to become members effective from January 1, 2024 (BBC 2024).

Russia's authoritarian governments (Stuenkel 2020). Nevertheless, their common developing nation statuses as well as economic potential and investment opportunities present a useful line of comparison for this study about diluting the power of neoliberalism in the South African press. Notably in China and India, alternative media has recently played powerful counter-hegemonic roles to their corporate's mainstream media. This is comparatively informative and instructive for the South African context and this paper's thesis which argues that growing alternative media can dilute the power of neoliberalism.

4.1. China's Online Alternative Media: Mainstreaming the Marginalised Through Positive Tones in Protest Coverage

Xu's (2022) empirical study on post-colonial Macau, China, looked at the social-media-driven "[a]nti-retirement package bill" protest that took place in 2014, mobilised by social organisations through Facebook. Activists specifically posted appeals on a Facebook fan page and created an 'Activity' page which led to two offline protests (Xu 2022). The study conducted framing and content analysis of 243 news coverage articles, reports, and posts published during the protests to compare coverage of mainstream media (5 in total: Macau N=3, Hong Kong =2) vs. alternative media (Facebook Fan page of Macau Conscience). The protest legitimised public opinion and persuaded the government to improve the policy decision after an initial appeal to withdraw the bill was rejected. The study notably found that

> [c]ompared with mainstream media, alternative media adopted a more positive tone in reporting the protests, including quotations from news sources and the framing devices of the protest paradigm (show, goals, public attitude, impact) in favorable terms. The result suggests the activists' alternative media counteracted the mainstream media's marginalization by using a form of "legitimization paradigm" (Xu 2022, 453).

Hence, the alternative media during these 2014 Macau protests is an apt example of the "oppositional content" that Fuchs (2010, 179) envisions regarding alternative media. It transcended the corporate information monopolies by expressing the oppositional standpoints of its pro-democracy people and it represented the protest as positive (Fuchs 2010). Macau has two political forces, namely the pro-establishment camp and the pro-democracy camp. The Macau traditional mainstream media has extensive self-censorship and provides little space for the pro-democracy sample which promotes democracy and freedom (Xu 2022). Therefore, protests are usually framed as irrational and aggressive (Xu 2022). Xu (2022, 466) also significantly found that the alternative media in Macau used "legitimization paradigm" devices, namely: (1) "Thematic frame", (2) "Source from protest group", (3) "Spectacle", (4) "Effective goals", (5) "Public approval" and (6) "Positive impact". This contrasted with the mainstream media's "protest paradigm" devices – "Episodic frame", "Source from target group", "Freak show", "Ineffective goals", "Public Disapproval", and "Negative impact". Significantly, from Xu's (2000) empirical study, it can be seen that alternative media helped activists legitimise their actions and obtain wider public support through a positive tone.

Xu (2022) notes that since the 2000s, protests have considerably increased in Macau as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan, where protestors use it as a tool to influence government policymaking. This is similar to South Africa's frequency of protests since democracy in 1994, which are mostly used to hold the government accounta-

ble. This has led to the country being dubbed the protest capital of the world (Chiumbu et al. 2016). The most common reasons for protests in South Africa are labour-related demands for salaries or wages, as well as service delivery protests (Alexander 2010). The study concluded: "In Macau's sociopolitical context, alternative media can have a potential impact on political change" (Xu 2022, 466). It is important to note that Macau has a high penetration of new media (Xu 2022).

Hence, in the case of the "Anti-retirement package bill" 2014 protest in Macau, alternative media i.e. Facebook, the marginalised, i.e. pro-democracy people, were mainstreamed through its counter-hegemonic content of positive protest coverage and perspectives. This was enabled by the social media platform not being subject to the neo-liberal pressures of mainstream media. Thus in Macau, China, digital media, i.e. Facebook, has risen to become a form of alternative media not subject to mainstream media's profit-making and political dictates. As Xu (2022, 457) notes, citing the work of Kenix (2009), "blogs and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter [now X], are also important forms of alternative media that are not constrained by advertising or bureaucratic institutions". This gives credence to Kidd's (1999, 2) argument that "[p]roviding alternative messages and points of view is becoming even more crucial as the global commercial media falls into fewer and fewer corporate hands".

4.2. India's NewsClick: "Independent, Critical Media" From Government

Shortly after India's NewsClick[2] was founded in 2009 by a group of senior journalists, it was described as "alternative to corporate media" (Mohan 2011). NewsClick is now a popular online news outlet. Notably, it was raided on the 3 October 2023 where its editor was arrested and technological devices seized. Al Jazeera's Sharma (2023) reported that, "This week's raid on the offices and homes of NewsClick employees is the latest in a string of attacks on independent news outlets critical of the Indian government" (see Figures 1 and 2 below). NewsClick is accused of allegedly receiving funds from China, a *New York Times* article[3] in August 2023 alleged it was funded by American tech mogul Neville Roy Singham and was involved in the spreading of Chinese propaganda (Sharma 2023). However, critics have described this as an attack on one of the few independent news outlets in India (Sharma 2023). Even earlier, in 2021 NewsClick had been targeted by various Government agencies including: Enforcement Directorate, the Economic Offences Wing of Delhi Police, and the Income Tax Department (Sharma 2023).

[2] https://www.newsclick.in/politics, accessed 25 October 2024
[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/05/world/europe/neville-roy-singham-china-propaganda.html, accessed 25 October 2024

Figure 1: On 5 October 2023, Journalists in Mumbai India protested against raids targeting independent media outlets. Two days prior, police in New Delhi arrested the editor of NewsClick and one of its administrators. This after raiding the homes and offices of journalists working for the site, that have been critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Hindu nationalist-led government

(Source Al Jazeera 2023: https://institute.aljazeera.net/en/ajr/article/2368)

Al Jazeera reported more details of the raid with first-hand accounts from journalists present at the raids, reporting: “They came at 6:30 in the morning. We were fully awake.” The speaker is an editor at the popular Indian online news outlet, NewsClick, whose offices were raided by government officials earlier this week. “There were around eight men who asked me only about our coverage on the farmers’ protests, COVID-19 and the Delhi riots,” he explains. NewsClick is an independent newsroom which has been critical of the government of India. It was raided by officers of the Enforcement Directorate, a government agency which investigates financial frauds, on Tuesday early morning. The raids ended with the arrest of NewsClick’s founder, Prabir Purkayastha, and administration head, Amit Chakraborty, on Tuesday evening, under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).[4]

[4] https://institute.aljazeera.net/en/ajr/article/2368, accessed 25 October 2024

Figure 2: Security officers carry boxes confiscated during a raid at the office of NewsClick in New Delhi, India, on 3 October 2023.

(Source Al Jazeera 2023: https://institute.aljazeera.net/en/ajr/article/2368)

NewsClick is an excellent example of alternative media that is "a critical discourse, challenges neoliberalism" (Andersson 2012, 752). In this case through being critical of the Indian government, which also conforms to Fuchs's (2010) conceptualisation of alternative media as "critical media". NewsClick's counter hegemonic and critical coverage of government is such a "radical work on the internet" (Kidd 1999; Coyer et al. 2007), that government is seemingly threatened to such an extent that it triggers raids on its offices and other intimidation tactics. In this instance, NewsClick has become a critical intervention against neoliberalism through counter-hegemonic content that disrupts commercialism (Marmol 2018).

This section has highlighted the recent counter-hegemonic roles of corporate media that alternative online media platforms have been playing in two BRICS countries from Asia: China and India. Online alternative media have become democratisers and diversifiers of traditional mainstream media spaces, which typically privileged elitist issues and voices because of the rise of 'media-neoliberalism' and its incumbent market ideologies and commercialisation. Interestingly, in both case studies, although market ideologies rule the mainstream media systems, the government's official perspectives were privileged by the mainstream media in both the Macau 2014 protests as well as generally in India's media agenda. This is not surprising since one of the effects of neoliberalism is that the government joins hands with neoliberalism. Birch (2016) posits that the transformation of the state from a provider of public welfare to a promoter of markets and competition helps to enable the shift to neoliberalism. Hence, neoliberalism has also become a cultivator for government positions and perspectives. In both case studies, online alternative media provided a counter-hegemonic public sphere and voice (Fuchs 2010), from neoliberal and government hegemonic narratives. However, despite the global uptake of new media as counter-hegemonic alternative media spaces, it should be noted that online media is still negatively impacted by this present age of media neoliberalism. As Freudenthaler and Wessler (2022) note, despite the advent of online media, legacy news media still guides the news agenda however faces increased commercial pressure that negatively affects news diversity.

5. A Case for the Return of the Anti-Capitalist Alternative Media to the South African Media Terrain

This paper adopts Fuchs's (2010) conceptualisation of alternative media as critical media. It also argues that alternative media playing a developmental role can be explored to disrupt the neo-liberal capitalist agenda in the South African press. Drawing from Downing's (2001) concept of radical media, Mano and Mukhango (2016) note that alternative media not only takes different forms but also expresses an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives. Kidd (1999, 1-2) also aptly describes the role of alternative media as an "unofficial opposition to mainstream media", which has "been crucial to the extension of public discussion and debate about a wide range of concerns and issues. If alternative media are not the first to break stories, we are usually the first to provide any depth of analysis". This depth of analysis component of alternative media is the premise of this paper. It argues that for South Africa to dilute the power of its neoliberal capitalist agenda, anti-capitalist alternative media needs to provide a depth of developmental analysis. Kidd (1999, 2-3) highlights the critical and contemporary importance of alternative media playing a developmental role in the face of corporate market dominance:

> Instead, the television and Internet screens are full of another set of messages. Disney and Fox, Viacom and Conrad Black, are all telling us that there is no alternative. You don't need to worry about any of your daily crises, your country's national development priorities, or international food and security. Those kinds of decisions are best left to the capitalist market. Just sit back, get your credit card out, and choose from the commercial options on the screen. Don't worry about the cuts in your social service safety net or the privatization of your schools and hospitals. All will be efficiently run if you'd just let your state leaders arrange a new credit rating with the bankers in New York, or a loan with the International Monetary Fund. In Europe, this message that there is no alternative to the corporate market has become so commonplace that they've shortened it to "Tina." In this context facing us, alternative media have an even more important role to play.

Historically, the alternative press in South Africa played an advocacy and change-agent role during apartheid, which significantly contributed to the eventual demise of the system. It brought local and international attention to the violent and inhumane violations of apartheid. The emergence of the country's alternative press however can be traced much earlier than apartheid, to its period of colonialism, where it played a protest function. The print media in South Africa was born during its period of early European expansion via British colonialism, which began in 1652, that comprised a commercial mainstream press and an alternative press. In John Mattison's (2015) book *God, Spies and Lies: Finding South Africa's future through its past*, he notes that the country's first newspaper was conceived in sin and published by a pair of Scottish slave traders, Alexander Walker and John Robertson, in Cape Town in the 1800's. A corrupt British Governor, Sir George Yonge, granted the firm of Walker and Robertson the monopoly in both printing and newspaper publishing at the Cape. The Governor and the firm did business together and the newspaper was one of the early innovations of British colonial rule. Hence, the early role of the mainstream print media in South Africa was a tool for colonialists to further their business interests, including regular feature adverts for the sale of slaves. In addition, Cape Colony Prime Minister Cecil John Rhodes secretly funded the first newspaper group, the Ar-

gus Group (now Independent Media) and other newspaper companies. However, Rhodes cut off funding from many of the newspapers he secretly funded when they clashed with his imperial dream of a united Southern Africa under the British flag. The alternative press in South Africa also emerged in this period of colonialism. Switzer (1997) notes that publications intended for Africans were produced at the beginning of the European mission expansion and were controlled by missionaries but later written and edited by African converts (Switzer 1997). From the early 1900s, publications by other population groups – Asian, mainly Indian and Coloured – were produced (Switzer 1997). These publications were targeted at different population groups but collectively were known as "South Africa's pioneer black protest press" (Switzer 1997, 1).

During apartheid that was legalised in 1949, the mainstream media in South Africa played a key role in spreading and sustaining Afrikaner nationalists' racist ideas and ideologies in society and was dominantly owned and funded by the mining sector. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), for example, was the main propaganda tool of the apartheid government. The alternative press of the apartheid period featured an early resistance press of the 1930s to 1960s that was eventually bought out, closed down, or depoliticised and merged with a new captive black commercial press controlled by white entrepreneurs (Switzer 1997), as well as a later resistance press of the 1970s to 1980s that represented the Black Consciousness movement and the progressive community press (Switzer 1997). On the sidelines was also the 1980s anti-capitalist, anti-apartheid alternative press which comprised a group of independent newspapers with vague socialist aspirations funded by NGO's and foreign funding (Tomaselli and Teer Tomaselli 2008). The alternative press in this period significantly provided a counter narrative to apartheid propaganda and white minority news in the mainstream media. Lloyd (2013, 6) notes the following about the anti-apartheid alternative newspapers:

> In the 1980s, independent anti-apartheid newspapers launched with the assistance of international donors contributed toward exposing the brutality of apartheid and to the eventual demise of the system. They played a critical role in informing South Africans and the international community about the government's violent crackdown on any resistance to its racist policies. However, while these papers successfully defied attempts by the apartheid government to silence them under successive states of emergency, only one of them has survived the cuts in donor funding that accompanied the transition to democracy. South Africa's anti-capitalist alternative press thus played a counter-hegemonic role to the apartheid government's racist propaganda that became the dominant discourse in the mainstream media.

Hence, the alternative press during these periods played a seminal counter-hegemonic role in catering for a diversity of South African ethnic groups, and its donor funding undergirded its anti-capitalist nature. As Lloyd (2013) highlights, significantly the only alternative press to survive the transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994 was the *Weekly Mail* – now *Mail & Guardian* – newspaper. For the purposes of this paper, the *Mail & Guardian* has been selected as a source to explore the return of the anti-capitalist alternative media to the South African press landscape to dilute the power of neoliberalism (Govenden 2022). This is for three specific reasons: (1) Despite a flourishing anti-capitalist alternative press during apartheid, the *Mail & Guardian* is the only alternative newspaper to survive into democracy; (2) The *Mail &*

Guardian has been producing high quality journalism, notably including award winning developmental news through its Bhekisisa health journalism centre. This in many ways can be regarded as "counter-hegemonic" (Fuchs 2010), to the rest of the South African mainstream press commercialised agenda that results in the sameness of content as well as superficial and sensational coverage (see Govenden 2022); and (3) The *Mail & Guardian* can be regarded as being alternative in some form because its contemporary funding model includes donor funding.

The *Mail & Guardian* is majority owned by the New York-based Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) and derives most of its funding from commercial activities (90%) as well as some donor funding[5]. The newspaper has since received a number of awards and recognitions for its high-quality journalism. According to its website:

> Over the years, the *Mail & Guardian* has received numerous accolades, reinforcing our position as a respected media outlet. We have been honoured with awards such as the CNN African Journalism Award, the Standard Bank Sikuvile Journalism Award, the Vodacom Journalist of the Year Award, and the Bookmark Awards, among others. These awards highlight our dedication to delivering high-quality journalism that makes a difference.[6]

Notably, the *Mail & Guardian's* Bhekisisa health journalism centre was established to provide in-depth coverage of health issues facing South Africa such as HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, etc, and has produced award winning investigative journalism[7]. Notably, Bhekisisa journalist Pontsho Pilane won multiple awards at the 2017 Discovery Health Journalist of the Year Awards[8] for two articles. The first article entitled "Free to Bleed",[9] "[lays] bare the daily struggle countless young women face across South Africa to get access to sanitary pads"[10] (see Figure 3 below) and secondly, "ABC's of Autism", [11] which was described as "offering an intimate look inside the world of autistic children"[12] (see Figure 4 below).

[5] https://mg.co.za/about/#:~:text=Its%20shareholders%20are%20the%20Media,original%20founders%20of%20the%20Publication.&text=Over%20the%20years%2C%20the%20Mail,as%20a%20respected%20media%20outlet, accessed 25 October 2024

[6] https://mg.co.za/about/#:~:text=Its%20shareholders%20are%20the%20Media,original%20founders%20of%20the%20Publication.&text=Over%20the%20years%2C%20the%20Mail,as%20a%20respected%20media%20outlet, accessed 25 October 2024

[7] https://bhekisisa.org/page/about-us/, accessed 25 October 2024

[8] https://mg.co.za/article/2018-05-31-mg-bags-top-prize-at-discovery-health-awards/

[9] https://bhekisisa.org/article/2017-03-03-00-freetobleed-the-struggle-of-being-too-poor-to-afford-pads, accessed 25 October 2024

[10] https://mg.co.za/article/2018-05-31-mg-bags-top-prize-at-discovery-health-awards/

[11] https://bhekisisa.org/article/2017-10-05-00-the-abcs-of-autism-in-the-classroom-he-only-wants-to-eat-sandwiches-with-cheese, accessed 25 October 2024

[12] https://mg.co.za/article/2018-05-31-mg-bags-top-prize-at-discovery-health-awards/, accessed 25 October 2024

Figure 3: Mail & Guardian's Bhekisisa award winning health journalism

(Source: *Mail & Guardian* March 3, 2017: https://bhekisisa.org/article/2017-03-03-00-freetobleed-the-struggle-of-being-too-poor-to-afford-pads/)

Figure 4: Mail & Guardian's Bhekisisa award winning health journalism

(Source: Mail & Guardian October 5, 2017: https://bhekisisa.org/article/2017-10-05-00-the-abcs-of-autism-in-the-classroom-he-only-wants-to-eat-sandwiches-with-cheese/)

The case of *Mail & Guardian* speaks to the importance of bringing back and growing the alternative press funded by donors. It presents a possible solution to dilute the power of neoliberalism and foster critical content (Fuchs 2010), with public interest driven imperatives such as that of the recent award-winning coverage by the *Mail & Guardian.*

The *Mail & Guardian* is also an apt example of developmental journalism i.e. health news. In fact, there are numerous other examples of excellent and award-winning developmental journalism on the African continent. In the words of Banda (2007, 157), about the early distorted emergence of development journalism on the African continent and the general demonisation of the concept, "one cannot throw the baby out with the bath water". Anti-capitalist alternative media such as the kind that thrived during apartheid could also diversify the present concentrated ownership pat-

terns in South Africa because new ownership players independent of the Big Four would enter the print media market. Marmol (2018, 27), citing the work of Furness (2007, 189), describes alternative news as "a vibrant spectrum of dissent against consolidated media power" that is non-corporate and "driven by content, as opposed to profit". In this regard, an important case in point of anti-capitalist media playing a critical developmental role is that of GroundUp[13], a popular award winning[14] news agency in South Africa that, according to its website, "publishes news that matters. South Africa's Constitution gives people the rights to housing, education, health, safety, a decent environment, justice, food and dignity. Our stories show what these rights mean in daily life". Furthermore, its funding model is anti-capitalist and non-profit: "We are non-profit. We rely on donations to do our work. We don't run ads and our articles are always free to read". GroundUp also became recently popularised for publishing an investigative piece that erupted into one of the biggest scandals in South African prison history that was a matter of public safety and interest[15]. "Facebook rapist" Thabo Bester was declared dead by Correctional Services after a fire broke out at a Correctional Centre in Bloemfontein. Ground Up published the first article[16] on November 8, 2022[17] that raised questions about Bester's death, citing post-mortem results and claiming that the body in Bester's cell was dead before the fire broke out (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: GroundUp's first story casting doubt and exposing Thabo Bester faking his own death and escaping prison

[13] https://groundup.org.za/about/, accessed 25 October 2024
[14] https://sanef.org.za/nat-nakasa-award-winners-2021-announced-celebrating-23-years-of-courageous-and-brave-journalism/, accessed 25 October 2024
[15] https://groundup.org.za/article/why-we-investigated-thabo-bester-story/, accessed 25 October 2024
[16] https://groundup.org.za/article/many-mysteries-surround-death-facebook-rapist-thabo-bester/, accessed 25 October 2024
[17] See here for a summary of GroundUp reporting: https://groundup.org.za/article/why-we-investigated-thabo-bester-story/, accessed 25 October 2024

(Source Mail & Guardian November 8, 2022: https://groundup.org.za/article/many-mysteries-surround-death-facebook-rapist-thabo-bester/)

6. Conclusion: Possibilities of an Alternative Media Model for the Post-Apartheid Media

In 2015, a national protest movement – #FeesMustFall – erupted in South Africa. It advocated for free decolonised education and spread to universities across the globe (see Govenden 2023). Alternative media, specifically social media, played a seminal informal organisation and activist role. More broadly, Mano and Mukhango (2016, 27) note how "Social media have enhanced and reshaped alternative media in Africa", with reference to the cover of the *New African* magazine February 2016 edition. The headline "The #ashtag generation: Inside the new protest movements" refers to the hashtags #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, and #ZumaMustFall from South Africa which played a crucial role in shaping struggles from below. Mano and Mukhango (2016) also importantly note that courts tried to ban students from using the #Fees-MustFall hashtag; hence using Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp for alternative communication has been met with much opposition to stifle the use of new media technologies as a platform for oppositional voices. Mano and Mukhango (2016) however caution that it would be reductive to only speak of Africa's alternative media and communication as social media. Its underground and opposition communication is expanded and amplified online (Mano and Mukhango 2016).

There are other small-scale oriented communication and media used by the marginalised have-nots which are usually independent of the state and market (Mano and Mukhango 2016). Operating in spaces that are regarded as horizontal and counter-hegemonic is important for self-representation (Mano and Mukhango 2016). In this regard, the official return of the anti-capitalist alternative press to the South African media terrain that would function in a developmental role, would significantly facilitate the diversification of ownership as well as cultivate more public interest content. However, this systemic proposal requires further examination and critical investigations. Such as how to practically implement developmental journalism in a neoliberal economic context and, for instance, attract donor funding to launch more alternative media titles like GroundUp that are counter-hegemonic in content and funding model. Development journalism is risky because it is not commercially attractive and thus viable for the market. It is recommended that a market review be conducted to consider the complexities of incorporating developmental journalism principles into the print media system in post-apartheid South Africa. The model of developmental journalism I put forward for South Africa is not the kind suggested by the African National Conference (ANC). Daniels (2011) notes that the ANC government "has often asked that the news media take a more developmental stance on journalism, urging journalists to be more supportive of the ruling party's policy agenda and achievements" (cited in Rodny-Gumede 2014, 55). Developmental journalists are committed to political independence and not the kind of patriotic journalism alluded to by the ANC. Musa and Domatob (2007, 319) underscore the independence ascribed by developmental journalism,

> Political leaders and citizens alike will respect development journalists if they are seen as credible. They must have the moral courage required to pursue truth and the discernment to tell it in way that serves the common good. They must differentiate between partnering with political leaders to promote national

development and becoming praise singers and instruments of political manipulation.

In order for developmental journalism to succeed in the South African press context, it must fundamentally serve the common good, whilst maintaining its political independence.

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