WATCHING OUT FOR MEDIA:
AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE FEMINIST
DEMOCRATIC MEDIA ACTIVISM OF “MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA”

A Dissertation in
Mass Communications

by

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the activism and impact of Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), a successful South African non-governmental organization (NGO) with the mission to promote media democracy, diversity, quality, and ethics. MMA is a media monitoring and advocacy NGO whose activism addresses both recurring (mis)representation in media content and inequitable structures in the political economy of the South African mediascape. Though scholars have referenced MMA for its successful media activism (Van Zyl & Kantor, 1999; Gallagher, 2001; Geertsema, 2010), MMA has never been the focus of an extensive study.

Through a six-week institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005) at MMA using participant-observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and textual analyses of organizational documents, I map MMA’s network of social relations, assess MMA’s social position, and understand MMA as a feminist democratic media organization. MMA’s activist strategies go beyond representational critiques in media content. Rather, the NGO recognizes the need for democratic intervention in the political economic structure of the South African mediascape. MMA’s content-based activism targets misrepresentation through media monitoring analysis, while MMA’s structure-based activism targets media regulation, policy, and media organizational politics. In most cases, MMA engages in both forms of activism simultaneously.

Through the institutional ethnographic method, I derive “reputation” and “impact” as two central conditions that shape MMA’s activist role in the South African mediascape. Via their stakeholder relationships and social position, MMA weaves into the organizational fabric of the South African mediascape through consistent intervention, activist innovation, and the curation of strategic relationships. Moreover, I use the institutional ethnographic analysis of MMA’s
organizational particularities to study the NGO’s commitment to feminism and democracy that guide their activism in South Africa.

By analyzing the role of feminism and democracy in MMA’s activism, I argue that MMA is not only a media activist organization but rather, that it is a feminist democratic media activist (FDMA) organization. MMA is a FDMA organization because of MMA members’ strong individual identifications with feminist and democratic ideals, MMA’s feminist and democratic organizational mission, and the feminist and democratic orientation of MMA’s activist work. Combined with MMA’s strategic stakeholder relationships and unique social position, it is this two-fold, simultaneous FDMA that creates MMA’s significant activist success in South Africa.

Keywords: feminist democratic media activism, media monitoring, South African mediascape, institutional ethnography, NGO relations, Media Monitoring Africa
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<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPFA</td>
<td>Beijing Platform for Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC</td>
<td>Communication Complaints Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Democratic Media Activism</td>
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<tr>
<td>EWN</td>
<td>Eyewitness News</td>
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<td>FDMA</td>
<td>Feminist Democratic Media Activism</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMA</td>
<td>Feminist Media Activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FXI</td>
<td>Freedom of Expression Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>GALA</td>
<td>Gay and Lesbian Archives</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAMAG</td>
<td>Global Alliance on Media and Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCIS</td>
<td>Government Communication and Information System</td>
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<tr>
<td>GMMP</td>
<td>Global Media Monitoring Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAJ</td>
<td>Institute for the Advancement of Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBA</td>
<td>Independent Broadcasting Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICASA</td>
<td>The Independent Communication Authority of South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IOL</td>
<td>Independent Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAZ</td>
<td>Media Alliance of Zimbabwe</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDDA</td>
<td>Media Diversity and Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>MISA</td>
<td>Media Institute of Southern Africa</td>
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<td>MMA</td>
<td>Media Monitoring Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMP</td>
<td>Media Monitoring Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMPZ</td>
<td>Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe</td>
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<tr>
<td>R2K</td>
<td>Right to Know Campaign</td>
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<tr>
<td>SABC</td>
<td>South African Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SADC</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARTA</td>
<td>South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAUJ</td>
<td>South African Union of Journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS</td>
<td>Save Our SABC Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMN</td>
<td>Women Make News</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZUJ</td>
<td>Zimbabwe Union of Journalists</td>
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PREFACE

If anyone had told me five years ago that I would complete my dissertation research in South Africa, I would have chuckled in disbelief. I have always been interested in media, social movements, and activism; however, I studied US social justice initiatives. My increasingly globalizing research and exposure to international communication theory prompted the desire to locate an organization that would allow me to combine my activist research agenda in a global context.

I found this organization on a ten-day embedded travel trip to South Africa in the spring of 2015. After a brief interaction with Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), a Johannesburg-based media monitoring and advocacy non-profit, I made a major decision—I inquired whether MMA would consider hosting me for my dissertation research. MMA greeted my inquiry with excitement (after all, they are a non-profit organization, chronically understaffed, and thankful for any help they can get).

On my first day back in South Africa during the summer of 2016, I was not sure what my role at MMA was going to be. Was I just a “visiting scholar,” there to complete my research? Would I be allowed to collaborate on projects? Would I be allowed to carry out my own activist projects? I always considered myself a scholar-activist but I was not sure how far MMA wanted—or tolerated—my involvement. Over the course of six weeks, I increasingly saw my “activist” role developing. I became part of MMA’s “Gender in the Media” and “Election Monitoring” special projects and was able to collaborate in a way that exceeded my own imaginations. This immersion into MMA’s organizational and activist culture provided me with a unique perspective on media activism in South Africa, which forms the basis for this project on MMA as a feminist democratic media activist organization.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My committee members have my gratitude for their guidance. I would like to thank Michelle Rodino-Colocino for our conversations about activism and social justice initiatives, Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor for her literature recommendations, and Matt McAllister for always having an open door. A special thanks is reserved for Anthony Olorunnisola, who gave me the opportunity to accompany an embedded-travel trip to South Africa. Without this opportunity, I would have never been introduced to MMA.

I would like to express my thanks to William Bird, Director at MMA, for allowing me access to the organization, encouraging my participation, and connecting me to editors, journalists, and other media activists. A special thanks also to Wellington, Thandi, Amanda, Aya, and Sarah for giving me rides, inviting me to lunch and dinner, and making me feel welcome during my stay in Johannesburg.

Most importantly, I would like to thank those who have traveled with me on this journey. Thank you to my wonderful partner Sara, who listened, believed in me, and encouraged me to “just keep writing.” Thank you to my parents, Anja and Paolo Sorce, who are arguably the most wonderful people on this planet and who have supported me in ways I cannot put into words. To Omi and Opi, and Giusi and Nonna, who never doubted once that I could do this. And to Nonno, for telling me that I could be a “dottoressa” one day. Danke für alles.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Inequality in media is a global issue. Around the world, patriarchal and capitalist media industry structures center the needs of the wealthy and powerful. Media messages perpetuate disadvantaging images and contribute to social marginalization based on gender, race, sexuality, class, and ability. Inequality in media denies participation, misrepresents identities, erases experiences, and silences voices. In order to combat issues of media misrepresentation and inequality in the political economy of media industries, activism is needed.

The activist reality is particularly complex in democratizing nations of the Global South. Postcolonial scholars lament a general unreceptiveness of governments to adopt feminist ideals and push back against social justice initiatives. Within the broader scope of the Global South (a postcolonial geographic term that replaced the much-contested rhetoric of “development”), and in the African context in particular, South Africa is often lauded as a very progressive nation. In 1994, South Africa enacted a progressive constitution that enshrines racial, cultural, and gender equality like none other in the world (Brand, 2011). Yet South Africa’s “mediascape” – in Appadurai’s (1990) terms – faces various challenges.

South Africa’s media emerged in the context of oppression. From 1923 to 1994, the South African media economy was dominated by white ownership that centered and protected the needs of the white population (Brand, 2011). This included the broadcast media with its public radio and television stations, as well as the newspaper industry. Through the legal protections of the South African Constitution of 1961 and support by the National Party, the segregational system of “apartheid” flourished. Created as a linguistic term to signify separation between Afrikaner (of Dutch descent) and other South Africans, apartheid developed into an
ideological and legal tool to keep the white supremacist hegemony in place. The media industry was an important factor in racial segregation and the public broadcaster in particular was used to manipulate the public.

After long-term activism and struggle brought an end to apartheid (1961-1994), the South African government began restructuring the local mediascape by creating democratic mandates about ownership and the mission of South African media. This included a new mandate for the state-funded South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) to be a public broadcaster for the people that should remain free from government control and intervention. At the same time, the government began its incongruous quest to “nation-build” and globalize (Duncan, 2000). To date, the South Africa mediascape continues to undergo complex changes in the very structure of the industry, while simultaneously becoming entrenched in neoliberal global dynamics (De Beer, Malila, Beckett & Wassermann, 2016).

South Africa’s identity relations remain branded by the colonial and apartheid experience. Scholars frequently note the intersectional oppressions faced by poor, black South Africans from ethnic minorities and point to the hardships for women within a highly patriarchal society (Moolman, 2013). Centuries of oppression during colonial rule and apartheid have left South Africa riddled with social issues, including violence against women, homosexuals, blacks, and ethnic minorities (Kehler, 2013).

In discussions around social justice and democracy, media are routinely offered as a vehicle to distribute pro-social ideals, foster democratization, and help overcome social divisiveness. A country with complex histories and competing identity politics, such as South Africa, needs equitable media content to grant representation to all audiences. Thus, it should be the role of the democratic media to help circulate democratic ideals, such as diversity and
inclusion. In the South African context, however, the democratic intent of the media and their actual structure continue to stand at odds. While making efforts to democratize and reform, South Africa’s media continue to operate within a struggling political economy that facilitates marginalization through content and industry structures.

Given the often contradictory pressures facing media such as commercialization, nationalism, and democratic ideals, and to combat resulting problematic issues in media coverage, newsroom politics, and media policy, democratizing societies need media activist organizations. Across South Africa, various groups and organizations have dedicated themselves to social activism and many of them advocate for changes in the local media. Media activism in South Africa seeks to increase citizen’s participation, improve media content, and democratize the industry. Among the various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) and the Save Our SABC (SOS) Coalition that focus primarily on industry-based activism critiquing inequitable structures in private and public broadcasting. GenderLinks, another media activism group, has a special project dedicated to how media cover women.

However, there is only one organization that offers intersectional activism around media content and that is the only NGO in South Africa that engages in both content-based and structure-based media activism. This organization is Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), a Johannesburg-based media monitoring non-profit NGO and arguably the most influential media activist organization in South Africa. According to its website, MMA “aims to promote the development of a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture in South Africa and the rest of the continent. To achieve MMA’s vision, the three key areas that MMA seeks to address through a human rights-based approach are: Media Ethics; Media Quality; Media Freedom.” Clearly, then,
MMA does not promote government perspectives and profitability; instead, the organization focuses on traditional journalistic criteria (a free press, fairness, ethics in journalism), as well as more social justice-based perspectives (such as human rights). To fulfill its mission, MMA employs media monitoring as an activist strategy.

One way to address issues in the political economy of the mediascape and actual media content is through media monitoring. As Hoynes (2005) explains: “Rather than media criticism of a single article or news report, media monitoring gave activists a tool for analyzing the broader patterns of media discourse” (p. 105). Gender activism through media monitoring has been recognized as a central way to counter media misrepresentation, discriminatory industry practices, and inequitable governance since the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA). Generated during the Fourth World Conference on Women—an event organized by the UN Commission on the Status of Women, a sub-charter of UNESCO—the BPFA sought to improve both women’s portrayals in media and overall participation in media industries. According to the platform and to tackle these goals, NGOs, activists, and educators should “establish media watch groups that can monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women’s needs and concerns are properly reflected” (BPFA, 1998, sec J. para 242a).

**Why Media Monitoring Africa?**

In South Africa, MMA has been monitoring South African media since 1994. MMA’s mission to advance media quality, lobby for media freedom, and hold the powerful accountable could not be described other than feminist. MMA as an organization is invested in the feminist principles of equality, social justice, and democracy, all pillars of the feminist project. Some of MMA’s special projects concern election news media coverage, gender and children’s representations in media, and public broadcasting policy. These special project are a few
examples of MMA’s commitment to focus their activism on both media content, as well as the political economy of the South African media industry.

MMA’s impact and reputation transcends the South African borders. The NGO has helped establish similar organizations in Zimbabwe and frequently monitors media in Southern African nations that do not have the same technological resources or activist opportunities. MMA has also been the NGO behind the 2010 and 2015 reports of the largest global initiative to monitor the state of women in media organizations and content—the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). The GMMP is internationally recognized project for its work on monitoring, analyzing, and thus raising awareness on the global gender parity in media (Gallagher 1995; 2001).

Through its unique activist success and transnational rapport, MMA has also generated some scholarly interest from the international academic community. Van Zyl and Kantor (1999) provide an overview of the role of media activism during the apartheid transition in South Africa and draw on the work of MMA, then called the “Media Monitoring Project” (MMP). The authors suggest that MMA’s election monitoring was pivotal in underscoring the importance of media monitoring in democratizing societies. In particular, they laud MMA’s ability to advocate for media that center the needs of the diverse South African people.

Other scholars have focused on the feminist implications of MMA. Margaret Gallagher, in her 2010 book Gender Setting: New Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy, discusses MMA’s (again, at that time MMP) research that highlights gender misrepresentation and the missing involvement by women in the news media right after the apartheid-era. She uses MMA’s work to make her case for the continuing need for media monitoring and media activism.

Another feminist global media scholar, Margaretha Geertsema, includes testimony from MMA
Director William Bird in her 2010 study of the South African NGO *GenderLinks*. Given MMA’s activist success, Geertsema uses Bird’s experience as the Director of MMA as expert testimony. Geertsema ultimately argues that *GenderLink’s* current antagonistic activist strategy will not facilitate the much-needed change in South African media coverage of gender.

MMA has thus attracted scholarly attention because of its unique or authoritative impact in South Africa’s democratizing mediascape. Scholars interested in media monitoring and activism need to draw on “success stories” to support their arguments, including the advocating for media monitoring as an important global accountability mechanism (van Zyl & Kanton, 1999), illuminating the status of gender misrepresentation via media monitoring (Gallagher, 2001), and comparing the impact of gender activism to a successful activist project (Geertsema, 2010).

In the end, the above academic work on and about MMA by global media scholars points to the salience of the South African NGO. However, MMA has not been the focus of an entire academic study and the particular dynamics of the organization as a media monitor in the South African context and as a feminist-informed organization has yet to be fully explored. In this work, therefore, I engage MMA as an activist organization in South Africa and chose the NGO as a study site to investigate feminist democratic media activism.

In the summer of 2016, I spent six weeks as a scholar-activist with MMA. While I did not know how far MMA would allow me to be involved in their activism, I later realized that my role in the NGO shifted from scholar to scholar-activist once I began participating in media monitoring and project-based activist work (I discuss some ethnographic lessons about scholar-activism in the conclusion). During my time in Johannesburg, I observed day-to-day operations, analyzed organizational and promotional materials, interviewed every MMA member working at
the NGO at the time, and spoke with many media professionals who work with MMA. I selected Dorothy Smith’s (1974) institutional ethnography as my method for this project because it would allow me to map how MMA, as an organization, relates to the larger system of the South African mediascape, while allowing me to assess the NGO’s mission, activist strategies, and ideological grounding.

In this project I take up MMA’s particular activist case in South Africa to investigate three research questions:

RQ₁: What role does MMA play in the South African mediascape, and how might we understand its reputation and impact in this mediascape?

RQ₂: How does MMA mitigate stakeholder relationships, and how do these affect MMA’s social position in the South African mediascape?

RQ₃: What makes MMA a feminist democratic media activist (FDMA) organization?

RQ₃a: How does MMA facilitate content-based and structure-based feminist democratic media activism?

I study MMA’s role in the South African mediascape through an institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005; 2006) that maps MMA’s network of social relations, assesses MMA’s social position, and understands MMA as a feminist democratic media organization. Through the institutional ethnographic method, I examine the concepts of “reputation” and “impact” as two central conditions that shape MMA’s activist role in the South African mediascape. Moreover, I use the institutional ethnographic analysis of MMA’s organizational particularities to study the NGO’s commitment to feminism and democracy that guide their activism in South Africa.

I argue that MMA weaves into the organizational fabric of the South African mediascape through consistent intervention, activist innovation, and the curation of strategic relationships. In
conversations with MMA members and stakeholders, interviewees continually point to MMA’s existence as “part” of the South African mediascape, a status that moves beyond the often strictly interventionist role of activist NGOs. Editor of South Africa’s most-read tabloid, *The Daily Sun*, Reggy Moalusi, explains: “The MMA’s views and concerns are taken seriously by media organizations. The MMA does play a key role and their relationships with the media is very cordial and there is the reciprocation on both sides.”

MMA asserts this space in the South African mediascape by employing activist strategies that go beyond representational critiques in media content. The NGO critically recognizes the need for democratic intervention in the political economic structure of the South African mediascape. MMA’s content-based activism targets misrepresentation through media monitoring analysis, while MMA’s structure-based activism targets media regulation, policy, and media organizational politics. In most cases, MMA engages in both forms of activism simultaneously.

A second goal of this project is to situate MMA’s organizational relationships to “feminism” and “democracy.” The institutional ethnographic method allowed me to study the internal organizational dynamics as well as the external communications patterns of the organization, allowing to move beyond the often employed “activist assessment” analyses. By studying the various levels of engagement at MMA, it becomes clear that MMA is not strictly a “media activist” organization, but rather, that MMA can be studied as a feminist democratic media activist (FDMA) organization. MMA is a FDMA organizations because of MMA members’ strong individual identifications with feminist and democratic ideals, MMA’s feminist and democratic organizational mission, and the feminist and democratic orientation of MMA’s activist work. Combined with MMA’s strategic stakeholder relationships and unique social
position, it is this two-fold, simultaneous FDMA that creates MMA’s significant activist success in South Africa.

As with any organization, there are shortcomings of MMA’s activism that must not be overlooked. For MMA, they center around funding and an overall lack of feminist language in their promotional materials. As a non-profit NGO, MMA is reliant on donor funding to sustain the organization, its members, and activist efforts. As Reith (2010) notes, power manifests through money in NGO-donor relationships. Some institutions donate to civil society organizations as a way to boost their own reputation, while others expect their funds to be allocated in such ways that may forestall an NGO’s goals and project needs. At MMA, donors direct projects through specific monetary allocations thereby often constraining activist areas that might be most needed.

Additionally, I observed a tendency at MMA to consider moving into a more commercially-based model. Since donations for projects such as “gender in media” are decreasing, MMA sees an increasing need to commercialize and sell monitoring evaluations and training, putting their interest at odds as these services are sold to the very same media organizations they monitor as part of their democratization agenda. This represents both a conflict of interests as well as an important insight into the material limitations of media NGO work across the Global South.

Moreover, there is a critique to be made around MMA’s lack of feminist terminology in their mission statements and promotional materials. While MMA does promote many documents and monitoring reports around feminist issues of gender, race, and xenophobia, to name a few, feminism is not an explicitly goal. The language of feminism is absent in MMA’s “Theory of Change,” a formulation that could benefit from a more explicit integration of feminist language
around identity politics and representational equality. While MMA members personally identify the organization as feminist and see its four goals—media democracy, ethics, quality and diversity—as feminist goals, a more explicit inclusion of feminism in their mission statement, reports, and activist goals would strengthen MMA’s organizational relationship to feminism and democracy.

Despite the limitations of funding and lack of explicit feminist language in promotional materials, MMA represents a unique media NGO of the Global South, with substantial activist success, and with unusually productive stakeholder relationships. Scholars and activist alike can benefit to learn from MMA’s case in South Africa, and this project seeks to establish how to interpret MMA as a FDMA organization, and what factors contribute to their social position as part of the South African mediascape.

**Chapter Breakdown**

I begin my project on MMA’s functionality as a FDMA through an introduction of the media issues that contextualize the need for media activism in South Africa. In Chapter 2, I chart the dominant issues of media content misrepresentation and undemocratic structuring, starting with a focus on key debates in feminist media scholarship on representation in media. Through a discussion of Anglo-American media representation critiques and South African media representation critiques I illustrate how media content neglects diversity. Grounding this study in academic feminist media literature allows me to situate MMA’s FDMA as necessary to improve South African media content and coverage toward more diverse and inclusionary practices.

I then provide an overview of the issues in the political economic of the South African mediascape. I explain the South African mediascape according to media systems theory and explain the current structure as a three-tier media model. Moreover, I introduce the major
commercial conglomerates and the public broadcaster SABC in detail as these entities are important stakeholders in the South African mediascape. This overview is central to this project because MMA’s monitoring and media activism targets commercial and public media. This chapter also provides an overview of the regulatory bodies that oversee the licensing and mandates of South African media. I do this because MMA brings cases for litigation to these regulatory bodies and often has members serve as experts on media-related cases. I proceed by explaining the contemporary public broadcasting “crisis” surrounding undemocratic practices by the SABC and the government.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the explication of theory and method of this project. I begin by reviewing existing media and feminist activism theories and articulate how they fail to capture MMA’s unique function in South Africa. Using an inductive research process pioneered by feminist activist scholars who argue that theories must reflect activist realities, I establish feminist democratic media activism, or FDMA, as the theory that best grounds MMA’s media activism in South Africa. FDMA combines the existing frameworks of feminist media activism (Byerly & Ross, 2006) and democratic media activism (Hackett & Carroll, 2006) in order to ground MMA’s two-fold media activism geared at content and structure.

Chapter 3 also details the central method for this project, institutional ethnography (Smith 1974; 1987; 2005; 2006). I provide an overview of Smith’s institutional ethnography and explain its main goal is to map an entity’s network of “social relations.” According to Smith, an analysis of social relations reveals the factors that develop or forestall an entity’s role and function. This method is best-suited for MMA’s FDMA as it allowed me to map how the NGO relates to stakeholders, how it asserts their social position, and thus, how I might assess their activist success. In this study, I employed three data gathering techniques: participant-observation, semi-
structured in-depth interviewing, and textual analysis of field notes and organizational
documents. I close this chapter by explaining the data analysis procedures in NVivo.

Chapter 4 opens the analysis portion of this project. According to Graheme’s (1998)
institutional ethnography of a feminist activist organizing, similar institutional ethnographies
must begin with a thorough overview of the organization’s missions, goals, and organizational
structure. In this chapter, I detail MMA’s history, “organigram” (or organizational make-up), and
“Theory of Change.” I proceed with an in-depth discussion of MMA’s main method of data
gathering: media monitoring to situate the impact of MMA’s monitoring reports and monitoring-
based complaints to regulatory bodies and media stakeholders. I close by discussing some of the
additional activist services and tools MMA offers. The NGO has expanded its initial monitoring
focus to include journalism training and the creation of digital resources for media professionals,
both of which contribute to MMA’s reputation and impact.

In Chapter 5, I map MMA’s “social relations” through an analysis of the NGO’s
organization’s relationships to “ruling” entities and organizational networks. This mapping is the
second step in the overall institutional ethnographic process for organizational analyses. MMA’s
social relationships can be summarized around four central groups: media stakeholders,
regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public.

I then analyze how MMA organizes their social activities in order to assess the NGO’s
social position in the South African mediascape. Since organizational relationships affect activist
strategies and activist success, I argue that MMA’s reputation and impact maintain the NGO’s
social standing in the organizational fabric of the South African mediascape. I close this chapter
by addressing how MMA frames its interactions and relationships with South African media
stakeholders around the rhetoric of “partnership,” which enables MMA’s integrative activism less prone to stakeholder rejection.

Chapter 6 argues that MMA is a feminist democratic media activist (FDMA) organization. The first section of this chapter explores the role of activism, democracy, and feminism as they apply to MMA. I draw on interview data that reveals MMA members’ individual identifications with “media activism,” “media democracy,” and “feminist activism.” I further analyze how MMA as an organization employs feminist and democracy-oriented missions and goals. This section of the chapter argues for an understanding of MMA’s FDMA as uniting both feminist and democratic media activism. To support this argument, I illustrate how MMA puts FDMA into practice by offering a case study of news media coverage around gender interests in the 2016 South African National Municipal Elections. This case study describes the specific activist strategies employed by MMA and explains how these strategies demonstrate MMA’s FDMA identity and work.

In Chapter 7, the conclusion chapter of this project, I explore the potentialities of the FDMA framework for other activist efforts around the globe and in particular, for democratizing mediascapes of the Global South. I discuss the shortcomings of the FDMA framework due to the limitations of feminist agendas in the Global South. I also discuss the dimensions of this institutional ethnography that I was unable to address in this project—including MMA’s transnationalization efforts—which may serve as starting points for future research. I conclude this project on MMA’s FDMA with some ethnographic lessons about scholar-activism that illustrates how scholars “take” and “give” to their study sites.

The following chapter begins by situating the context for MMA’s activism in South Africa around critiques of media representation and structural regulation of media industries.
CHAPTER 2

Situating the Necessity for Feminist Democratic Media Activism:
The Problematics of Media Content and Media Structure in the South African Mediascape

We’re dealing with the under-representation of women and—or rather over-representation of men—if you’re looking at gender dynamics in [South African] media content . . . Much of that is because we have a public broadcaster that isn’t run in the interest of the people. (Thandi Smith, Head of Policy at MMA, personal interview).

As MMA’s Head of Policy, Thandi Smith, suggests in this opening quotation, South African media underrepresent women while the larger industry structure remains undemocratic. The purpose of this chapter is to argue for the necessity of feminist democratic media activism (FDMA) in South Africa. Two major problematics in the South African mediascape demonstrate this need: misrepresentation in media content and inequitable political economic industry structures. In order to explicate issues in media content and structure in South Africa, and to contextualize MMA’s FDMA, this chapter is split into two parts: feminist critiques of media representation and issues in the political economy of the South African mediascape. This context is important as issues in media content and structure drive MMA’s FDMA. MMA explicitly points to content misrepresentation and structural inequity as two important reasons that forestall the democratization process in South Africa.

I begin this chapter with an overview of the major critiques of media misrepresentations by Western feminist media scholars. As women’s trivialization, condemnation, and omission in
media dominate content all over the world, this discussion is useful to the South African case as well. I proceed with an overview of the major critiques by South African feminist scholars, who lament the gender misrepresentations in media and the gender disadvantaging in the newsrooms. Both arguments situate the need for intervention through media activism in the local mediascapes.

Next, I introduce the political economic dimensions of the South African mediascape. I explain South Africa’s three-tier broadcasting model in order to introduce the most important stakeholders in the public and private media sector. By “stakeholders” I refer to the major media outlets in South Africa’s television, print, and online media that are responsible for the mediation of salient issues. This section is important to the project as it introduces the very media organizations MMA engages with in their monitoring and activism.

A central political economic concern lies with the public broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (hereafter SABC). The SABC shares the largest television viewership, making its role in mediating opinions and perceptions in South African civil society pivotal. MMA recognizes that the SABC must uphold its mandate as a public broadcaster in the interest of the South African people. In this chapter, I explore the contemporary SABC “crisis,” which makes apparent the chasm between the SABC’s intent as a public service entity, and its actual governance that disadvantages its viewers. The December 2015 public broadcaster crisis spurred activism by MMA and other media activist organizations.

Along with the SABC, the print tabloids hold the widest readership and circulation in South Africa. As South African media scholars point out, tabloid coverage is notoriously known for re-inscribing patriarchal gender norms and other problematic identity politics. MMA
frequently interacts with *The Daily Sun*, South Africa’s widest-read daily tabloid on issues of exploitative reporting that puts victims at risk.

I combine this review of the stakeholders in the South African mediascape with the eminent critiques by local media scholars. In the literature on public and private broadcasting of the South African media system, scholars continuously point to the inequitable political economic structures in the mediascape. A key debate here illustrates that disregard for media policy and constitutional mandates hinder the developments of a free and citizen-oriented mediascape in South Africa.

I close this chapter with an overview of the legal mechanisms built into the local broadcasting laws for the airing of grievances and complaints, including the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA) and the Broadcasting Monitoring and Complaints Committee (CCC). I introduce these major regulatory bodies and explain the complaints and litigation processes. These regulatory bodies accept submissions by media and human rights NGOs, such as MMA, on matters of media content and media policy. With respect to media policy, South African scholars reiterate the importance of NGOs as important arbitrators in matters of media freedom and fair representation. The critiques in the literature dovetail with my argument around MMA’s unique activist success—activists must challenge both media content and structure to productively alter discourses and democratize mediascapes.

**Feminist Critiques of Media Misrepresentation**

Western feminist scholars have long been addressing the troubling state of women’s and minorities’ media representation (consider Dow, 1996; Geertsema, 2008; Gill, 2007; Modleski, 2008; Radway, 1991; Spigel, 1992; Tuchman, 1978). Media cultivate recurring problematic assumptions about gender, race, class, ability, and power. From the neoliberal West to nations
trapped in neocolonial relationships, marginalization in media forestalls equality and diversity through both inequitable political economy and stereotypical media messages. This trend is observable across all media (print, radio, television, film, online), across all genres (fiction and reality), and across all geopolitical and cultural contexts.

Gallagher (2015) attributes the beginning of feminist media representation studies to Gerbner (1972), who asserted that “representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation” (p. 3). By coining the term “symbolic annihilation,” Gerbner gave voice to the critique that women are completely missing from certain media arenas and roles. Shortly after, Gerbner and Gross (1976) developed this concept further and explained that media have the power to provide scripts that bestow viewers with ideas about what men and women ought to do and how they ought to behave. Tuchman (1978) takes up this notion and adds dimension to the annihilation critique, arguing that condemnation (portraying characters primarily negatively) and trivialization (rendering characters banal) are just as problematic and harmful as omission. By problematizing the “symbolic annihilation,” Tuchman argues that representations of women in media privilege moral and good women, while implying that unruly women need the protection and guidance of men.

Though rejecting a simplistic direct-effect theory of media content on consumers, Western feminist media scholars raise concerns that media create, mediate, and disseminate images of individuals to large audiences. These images shape dominant assumptions about gender and power. Particularly problematic are heavily gendered, racialized, sexualized, and class-oriented depictions of individuals. Here, media are not, by any means, the sole agents, but rather operate in complicity with patriarchal ideologies that marginalize. As noted by Carter,
Steiner, and McLaughlin (2015), “many of the arguments connected to gender and media turn on issues about the representations of women and men, and of masculinity and femininity” (p. 10).

While critiques of women’s representations have a long tradition in feminist media scholarship, most of them came from white feminists who critically omitted questions of race. Black feminist analyses have provided a vital corrective to media representation studies. For example, hooks (1992) explains that black women in media—if featured at all—become hypersexualized and depicted as primitive sex objects. Collins (2000) draws on hook’s important work and asserts that media content features black women through sexualization or class disenfranchisement. Thus, Collins argues, the continuous mediation of those problematic images and identities sells a particular black woman who is inferior and at the mercy of male dominance.

A related stream of feminist scholarship draws on the importance of intersectionality. As noted by Crenshaw (1991), scholars must pay attention to the intersectional nature of individuals’ identities, particularly as media depictions of women work in tandem with other identity politics. Heavily influenced by intersectionality and a recognition that identities become oppressed from multiple axes, black feminist scholars point to the ways in which real-life identity politics intersect with their representations in media. Collins (2000) thus argues that stereotypical media depictions provide “powerful ideological justifications [for] oppression of race, class, gender and sexuality” (p. 69).

The aforementioned instances of media’s condemnation, trivialization, and omission of women and women’s experiences contribute to dominant gender perceptions. For women of color, media representations continuously cast them into racialized stereotypes through “exoticization” (hooks, 1992). For men, media perpetuate ideals of masculinity and patriarchy that very few can actually live up to (Consalvo, 2003).
Beyond Western accounts of femininity and women’s roles in media, scholarship from transnational feminist researchers provide insights into discourses of modernization and globalization (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Ferree & Tripp, 2006). In particular, postcolonial critiques of media production, access, and representation furnish nuance in contexts that previously remained obscured. For example, Geertsema’s (2009) analysis of Jan Nederveen-Pieterse’s globalization paradigms reveals the connections to transnational feminist critiques in local and global media flows. She argues that media stories in ex-colonial (or, as I would argue, neo-colonial) African nations center patriarchal ideologies that only reflect male experience, often dismissing or omitting women’s voices altogether.

The Problem with Media Representation in South Africa

Within the feminist literature on the Global South, South Africa exists in a complex space. The nation and its mediascape become simultaneous signifiers for development and modernity—South Africa is not quite Western but also neither entirely African. Though the rhetoric of development and modernity positions South Africa in an interesting transitional space, the dominant messages surrounding gender and sexuality in local media content continue to be traditional. For South Africa in particular, Geertsema (2008) argues that many print publications continue to center the male audience, while magazines and articles targeted at women re-emphasize both femininity and a general detachment from public life.

Evidence for gender misrepresentation in South African media content comes from scholars who study women’s roles in television. In their content analysis of South African television advertisements, Furnham and Spencer-Bowdage (2002) found concerning evidence that only 2.5% of females were actually provided speaking roles. In most cases, women in television advertisements were represented only visually and given a male voice-over for
credibility. The study also found that women rarely served in expert roles, but rather, were depicted more as passive users of products, while predominantly shown in domestic contexts. Luyt (2001) also studied gender representations in South African public television and found that women’s sexualization served as justification to subordinate their character.

In addition to sexualization and trivialization, scholars argue that media depictions of gender issues often center women’s victimization. In a recent report by the Southern African Development Community (hereafter: SADC; an inter-governmental organization operating out of Botswana) in conjunction with the South African NGO GenderLinks, the authors found that gender issues in media often highlight crime and violence and sensationalize rape cases (Lowe Morna, Dube & Makamure, 2015). This is particularly problematic as this trend in news coverage carries over to fictional entertainment programming as well.

Specifically rape and traditional gender norms provide popular tropes in fictional television programming. In her study of the SABC miniseries Society (2007), Bradfield (2015) points to the postfeminist representation of the main characters. Comparing it to Sex and the City and drawing on Gill’s (2007) noteworthy piece on the eminence of post-feminist discourses in Western media, Bradfield argues that Society reinscribes South African women’s cultural and economic limitations based on gender performance and sexuality. Bradfield posits that Society, while offering more diverse and previously unseen lesbian femininities in its characters, returns the viewer to traditional gender norms by ending the character’s explorative journey through corrective rape.

South African women continue to experience difficulty identifying and relating to media characters. Malila and Garman’s (2016) focus-group discussions with South African youth reveals that many feel misrepresented through media. According to the study’s findings, this
sentiment emerges strongly in all “Born Frees” (those born after 1994; i.e., after the end of apartheid) who believe media coverage of young individuals portrays them as individuals who do not care about politics as they were born into a “democratic” society. The authors point to the intersectionality of experiences and note that black youth of the South African middle class (particularly young women) cannot identify with the mainstream media messages surrounding their generation.

As these various analyses demonstrate, visual representations of women in South African media center on tropes that dismiss their credibility, voice, and participation in public life by instead emphasizing sexualization, trivialization, and victimization. Dibetso (2013) underscores that these representations directly stem from the dominant socio-cultural stereotypes; hence, the aforementioned examples aptly illustrate the circuitous relationship between media and culture, where culture frames media and media shape culture.

While the South African mediascape struggles with diverse media messages, its political economy also displays gender parity. In their SADC/GenderLinks report, Lowe Morna, Dube and Makamure (2015) found an overwhelming majority of male media executives and male-oriented programming. Similarly, Dibetso’s (2013) findings on gender in the newsroom alarmingly illustrates that 78% of media professionals confirm that gender discrimination is an issue. In that same report, female journalists lamented that they were often assigned the “softer stories” and felt like they had to perform hypermasculine in board meetings to have their ideas heard.

Rodny-Gumede’s (2016) study of black journalists illustrates how race and gender work together to marginalize South African media professionals. Similar to Dibetso’s (2013) findings, Rodny-Gumede found that black journalists are predominantly assigned township and crime
stories. In her study, informants report to being perceived as more suited for crime stories since they “dare access areas often labelled as too dangerous, and as no-go zones for white reporters” (p. 169). With respect to the gender dimension of reporting, female black journalists also complained about being typecast for certain stories, particularly rape cases.

Patriarchy and white supremacy emerge as prevalent issues in the South African’s political economy of the media. This brief review of the feminist media literature, both in the Western and South African context, points to the prevailing problematics in media content and the structure of the industry at large. Feminist scholars from around the globe lament marginalizing representation in media content, gender parity in the newsroom, a lack of female editorial executives, and inequitable access of women to cover the stories they want. It is important to note here that these sets of issues operate in tandem but often become amplified in the African context under cultural conditions that privilege the male perspective.

Aware of these problematic images in media, Gill (2007) points to the changing dynamics of the industry including growing conglomeration, globalization, and neoliberalism. Scholarly critiques of the media system include issues of capitalism, consumer culture, ideological power, representation, and access—to name a few. The political economists critique media conglomeration, audience commodification, and ideological brainwashing (Smythe, 1981; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1999); the feminists point to the gender dimensions of media production, dissemination, access, and representation (Carter, Branston, & Stuart, 1998; Meehan & Riordan, 2002); and the global media scholars scrutinize transnational flows of capital and cultural goods (Appadurai, 1990; Thussu, 2002). Collectively, these critical voices lament the imbalances created through concentrated ownership, the entrenchment of news media in
global neoliberal capitalism, and the inequitable representation of individuals, opinions, and values in both fictional and reality content.

**South Africa’s Mediascape**

The global mediascape comprises a complex entanglement of institutions, actors, and symbols related to the system and the power dimensions that guide it. I prefer the term “mediascape” over media system, as the simplistic denotation of a media system as “media landscape” omits the socio-cultural and hegemonic underpinnings of cultural production, commodification, and flow. By mediascape I employ Appadurai’s (1990) notion of the media system as a complex, fragmented, and fluid global construct that involves technology, culture, finance, and ideologies. Collectively, these entities constantly (re)shape one another. They become parts of transnational cultural productions and global flows that fundamentally affect how audiences relate to themselves and one another through the available cultural imaginaries.

Thus, by employing the term mediascape, I seek to highlight the interlocking of capital, information communications technologies, politics, and culture that exist at the crux of how we perceive the mediated messages about the world around us. These factors are difficult to pull apart and Appadurai underscores the disjuncture of these scapes by pointing to their “fluid and uncertain interplay” (p. 306). One area of academic research that employs mediascape analysis is in comparative studies that explain the foundation of a nation’s media system. The following section explains South Africa’s mediascape as transitional with elements of authoritarianism, liberalism, and social responsibility.
South Africa’s Mediascape According to Media Systems Theory

Utilizing the classic framework of the “four theories of the press” (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956), South Africa’s previous apartheid mediascape fell into the “authoritarian” theory. Authoritarianism permits the press only to operate in a totalitarian top-down system; i.e., the ruler(s) allow either no privatization of the press or allow partial privatization but impose the threat of direct censorship. For South Africa during this time, the Afrikaner-led National Party controlled all media. With the main objective to serve the state and fortify existing ideological landscape, the press became an active agent in maintaining the status quo. In an effort to regulate the press system, authoritarian leadership often makes offenses by press houses or individual journalists punishable by law. As articulated by Siebert (1956), the authoritarian system “has been most pervasive both historically and geographically” and continues to influence media and information around the world (p. 9). Since all press systems derive from certain attitudes toward notions of truth, freedom, and natural rights, Africa’s totalitarian political landscape gave way to the dominating authoritarian press paradigm. During the apartheid-era in South Africa, press reporting emphasized depoliticized current events, never offered regime-opposing events, and was generally racist (Tomaselli, 2002).

During the period from 1994-1999, South Africa underwent important changes in politics and media. After a long period of activism by the African National Congress (ANC) party and struggle for equality during much of the latter part of the 20th century, the Republic of South Africa voted to abolish the apartheid regime in 1994. This granted legal rights to all citizens, which included a recognition of voting rights, property rights, employment equality, and other privileges of “full citizenship” to non-white South Africans. In this time of change, the South African government also restructured the broadcasting regulations to account for the newly
forged mandates of equality. Specified in the Broadcasting Act of 1999 (which repealed the discriminatory Broadcasting Act of 1976), the South African public and private broadcasting industry shall “provide, through its programming, a public service necessary for the maintenance of a South African identity, universal access, equality, unity and diversity” (South African Broadcasting Act, 1999, p. 1).

Contrary to many other legal frameworks for public, commercial, and community media, the South African Broadcasting Act highlights diversity, development, and democracy. South Africa’s Broadcasting Act is the first to specifically enshrine the pursuit of gender equality through media—in fact, the European Union did not adopt this specific statute until the early 2000s (Ross & Padovani, 2016). The Broadcasting Act reflects the political commitment to diversity by enshrining the provision of heterogeneous broadcasting ownership, programming, and control by diverse individuals who are able to reflect the myriad of South African cultures and languages.

According to media systems theory, this media regulation would push the South African mediascape into the “libertarian” paradigm, where the press becomes a “partner in search for truth” (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956, p. 3). Within the scope of normative theory, post-apartheid South African media ought to exist to inform citizens, endorse privatization, and remain free from government control. In essence, the press becomes part of society and has a pivotal role in maintaining a critical political and cultural environment.

While the democratized Broadcasting Act paved the way for more equitable media ownership and participation by diverse individuals, South Africa never quite made the transition from authoritarianism to libertarianism. In fact, Hadlan (2012) states that the contemporary system shares more characteristics with the “polarized pluralist” paradigm, though this match is
not perfect either. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the characteristics of polarized pluralism are ties between media outlets and political parties (political parallelism) and an interventionist role by the state in print and broadcasting—in spite of freedom of expression clauses.

In South Africa, Section 16 of the Bill of Rights provides guidelines for freedom of expression, both of the press and other media: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of the press and other media; freedom to receive or impart information or ideas; freedom of artistic creativity; and academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.” In the 2016 survey, South Africa scored among the “free” nations of the world but received some critique on its “deteriorating” status of freedom of expression (Freedomhouse, 2016). According to the 2016 map of press freedom, South Africa ranks among the “partly free” nations with a score of 32 (0=free, 100=least free), a lower score than the years before.

Under the leadership of the ANC and President Zuma, the public broadcaster SABC allegedly supported cover-ups and provided partial news coverage. Additionally, “political allies of the government own a growing share of independent media” and the government remains “highly sensitive to media criticism and has increasingly encroached on the editorial policy of the SABC” (Freedomhouse, 2016). According to De Beer, Malila, Beckett, and Wassermann (2016), the ANC increasingly “clamped down more and more on freedom of speech” because the print media were “largely adversarial and overly critical” (p. 36). Along with these critiques for freedom of expression, the mediascape currently experiences additional legal and cultural problematics that merit activism.
I use this exploration of media systems theory to illustrate why media activism is needed at the political-economic level. As an NGO, MMA draws on the provisions of the Broadcasting Act to ground its activism and litigation. To strengthen the case for MMA’s FDMA and contextualize contemporary civil society organizing, I proceed with an explication of South Africa’s three-tier broadcasting model. The following section serves two purposes: first, to introduce the main media organizations MMA engages with and second, to demonstrate why South Africa’s mediascape needs MMA’s FDMA to democratize its political economy.

**South Africa’s Three-Tier Mediascape**

The current organization of the South African mediascape is a three-tier model, which includes public, private/commercial, and community media (Fourie, 2007). MMA engages with media organizations across these three categories, though a major focus remains the public broadcaster and the print tabloids as they share the majority of overall media consumption and become critical entities for the mediation of social and political opinions. The SABC functions as the constitutionally mandated public broadcaster. The three major conglomerates that dominate the private for-profit media sector are Naspers, Times Media, and Independent News & Media. Between these three conglomerates, Naspers holds the largest market and consumer share. The community media sector flourishes mainly in the radio sector, though there are a variety of community print publications that offer alternative content. Overall, community media remain critically underfunded and many struggle to maintain their operations.

The public broadcaster SABC produces the majority of South Africa’s news and media content, both educational and entertainment. As the sole provider of public broadcasting, the SABC is tasked to provide “significant news and public affairs programming which meets the highest standards of journalism, as well as fair and unbiased coverage, impartiality, balance and
independence from government, commercial and other interests” (Part 3: Public Service, Broadcasting Act of 1999). As such, the SABC ideally should be led by a diverse board of directors who provide programming that reflects the myriad of cultures and languages indigenous to the nation. With a 60% government-enforced quota for local, culturally relevant television content, and a recent increase to 90% for local music in radio in 2016, the SABC is a key player in the industry and has strong viewer impact. Because of the largest viewership among South Africans (SAARF, 2015), the SABC influences the salience of issues viewer opinions, including social attitudes toward race, class, gender, and sexuality.

In the commercial media sector, there are three conglomerates that dominate the television, newspaper, magazine, radio, and internet industries: Independent News & Media, Times Media Group, and Naspers. MMA monitors media titles across those three conglomerates and frequently engages with various media professionals, editors, and journalists who work for Independent, Times, and Naspers. I give an overview of each of these conglomerates to make apparent the structural issues in their political economy, which frequently becomes the basis for MMA’s activist engagements with them.

Independent News & Media was established by a Dublin-based Irish parent company. In 2013, the South African firm Sekunjalo Investment Holdings purchased a majority share, now run by the subsidiary African Equity Empowerment Investments firm. The sale drew attention because Sekunjalo initially purchased its majority share with a loan by the Public Investment Corporation, which—as a quasi-public entity—shares strong ties with the South African government. Investigative reports criticized the potential for government intervention and censoring of media and news content by the conglomerate (Mail & Guardian, 2015). MMA has raised awareness on government censorship among Independent News & Media publications,
urging for stronger media regulation to prevent purchases by government-associated corporations. Consider for example *The Media Online* (2014) online report where MMA Director discusses MMA’s assessment of editorial practices at the Cape Times, a Independent News & Media publication.

Independent News & Media owns 14 newspapers, among them the widely read legacy morning newspapers *The Star* and *Cape Times*, as well as the tabloid *Daily Voice*. The conglomerate also publishes three Conde Nast international magazines, including *GQ* and *Glamour*. In the online space, Independent News & Media runs Independent Online, or IOL, an aggregation-based news and media platform that “churns” stories written for the print newspapers and magazines. IOL also offers links to an online store called Loot and a realty website, called IOL Property.

Times Media Group is unique in that it owns stakes in the South African music industry, a sector that Independent News & Media and Naspers have not invested in. Times Media Group manages Gallo Record Company, South Africa’s largest record label. The multinational media conglomerate Warner Music Group owns the majority share of Gallo, which also means that the music revenues flow to the US and do not remain in South Africa. Times Media Group is known for its 12 newspapers, including the *The Sowetan*—now a tabloid—but which used to be an independent alternative black newspaper during the apartheid struggle (Tomaselli, 2002). Times Media Group also owns the *Sunday Times*, South Africa’s biggest Sunday newspaper. MMA frequently engages with Times editors on issues of gender and children’s coverage.

Naspers is the largest of the three conglomerates and boasts the largest market shares in newspaper, payTV, and online services. Naspers owns the very profitable Media24, a print media group with over 60 newspaper and magazine titles and a large share in online journalism.
Media24 owns the most widely read and tabloid circulated newspaper, *The Daily Sun*. It also houses *The Beeld*, the largest Afrikaans newspaper in the country, which used to be considered the mouthpiece of the National Party during the apartheid era (Tomaselli, 2002). Across the three South African conglomerates, MMA most frequently engages with Naspers media houses, particularly *The Daily Sun*. MMA has also been engaging with structural issues of how South Africans access technology, including how they watch television.

Naspers is the only one of the three conglomerates that owns an internet provider service, Mweb, that is currently South Africa’s second largest. Naspers also owns and operates the Digital Satellite Television (DST) payTV platform MultiChoice, which offers premium television content and imported media titles. With respect to broadcasting, there are two ways South Africans currently watch television—via digital terrestrial television (DTT) or analogue. Analogue television transmits the free networks, including the SABC channels and eTV.

With gender and racial gaps in education, and television as the medium of choice for news, access to this technology is important to bridge information scarcity. According to the 2016 Community Survey by the South African Statistics Bureau, three million households do not have access to television, five million households pay for their service, and seven million households can only afford the free analogue service (Statistics South Africa, 2016). DTT frees up spectrum, offers better quality picture and more channels to consumers, but to receive the signal, consumers need a new set top box, which costs between ZAR 600-800 ZAR (USD 42-56/EUR 38-51).

Of the seven million South Africans who can only afford analogue television, the majority only makes between ZAR 800 and 3,000 per month (“Income & Expenditure Survey,” StatsSA, 2016). Upgrading to DTT would, in fact, cost some South Africans between 25-100%
of their monthly income. MMA’s media access campaign raises awareness on the DTT transition and works with other civil society NGOs to make a policy submission that would decrease the cost and make news access more affordable. The switch to DST/DTT also has important implications for newscast consumption and the general information-seeking pattern of South Africans.

Currently, there are three main networks that offer newscasts on television: SABC, eTV, and African News Network (ANN7). According to the 2015 television viewership survey by the SAARF, SABC 1, SABC 2, and SABC 3 lead national viewership by over 30% (SAARF, 2015). SABC News airs in various languages, including English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xkosa, Sesotho, and Tswana. eTV recently launched three news channels: the English ENCA (eNews Channel Africa), Zulu News, and eNuus in Afrikaans. The 24-hour ANN7 is only available as a paid subscription through MultiChoice’s digital network. As evident through viewership statistics, the SABC continues to command the majority share of news consumption, which raises important questions about the content that viewers can choose. MMA monitors all television and online news media in South Africa, with a particular focus on the SABC.

The radio industry is split into a similar three-tier sub-model: commercial radio and paid subscription, community radio, and public radio under the SABC. The SABC furnishes the most radio stations, at least one in each of the eleven official languages. In an effort to foster internal identification in South Africans, the official quota for locally produced content increased to 90% in the summer of 2016 (Mail & Guardian, 2016). MMA servers auto-record all radio newscasts in the Johannesburg region. Community radio continues as an important pillar for the dissemination of information and offers a space for critical dialogue. For example, JoziFM, an urban-contemporary radio station in Soweto (a poor, mainly black area just outside of
Johannesburg), serves as a community medium for music and news, but also fulfills many other social needs. JoziFM collects money for school uniforms and supplies, organizes food drives for the ill and poor, and serves as a copy shop/internet café for those who do not have access to technology. This instance illustrates that community radio becomes much more than an information source, which is why Teer-Tomaselli (2015) asserts that radio will remain Africa’s broadcast medium of choice, and why MMA supports community media.

Though Wasserman (2014) argues that the print media industry in Africa does not see the same decline as the “media saturated North,” the issue of affordability and access prevail in South Africa’s newspaper industry. During the apartheid era, newspapers centered the educational, business, and intellectual needs of the white population. In the course of democratization efforts in politics and media, newspaper content and structures shifted to accommodate the previously marginalized readership. The South African newspaper industry received international attention during the early 2000s, when the market was turned upside down by the “tabloid revolution.” Previously established newspapers such as The Star saw declines in readership, while the circulation and popularity of tabloid newspapers stabilized print news distribution (Wasserman, 2006). MMA recognizes the importance of print tabloids in South Africa and monitors all of them on a daily basis. Additionally, MMA engages with the tabloid editors more frequently than any other commercial media.

The Sowetan, which began as a free newspaper during the apartheid struggle, was relaunched by the Times Media Group, turning it into a tabloid. The Daily Sun, with the subheading “our lives, our people,” launched in 2002 and is now also part of Media24 under Naspers. The Daily Sun is the widest read daily newspaper in South Africa with an average of 200,000 daily sales (Media24.com, 2016). In a more collectivist culture with large income gaps,
many purchased copies of *The Daily Sun* are passed on to an additional three to five people, boasting a larger readership of 5 million (Media24.com, 2016). MMA argues that the average South African receives information through tabloids, thus receiving low-credibility information that perpetuates gender and racial discrimination through its focus on sensationalism.

Arguably the most quality journalism that lives up to the “social responsibility” press paradigm articulated by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956) is *The Mail & Guardian*, which has a separate funding and printing model from any of the other media conglomerates and a reputation for investigative journalism. *The Daily Maverick* is another example of an independent news source with no ties to the other conglomerates, though this particular news medium runs completely online. In their study of traditional print journalists in South Africa, De Beer, Malila, Beckett, and Wassermann (2016) found that the print media industry “ostensibly still [sees] its role as that of a monitor and watchdog [for] keeping government in check” (p. 36). Wassermann (2010) argues South African journalists see themselves primarily as watchdogs for political opposition, despite pressures of government interference. However, this critical reporting appears to have become further narrowed down to the independent media sector.

MMA promotes readership for independently owned and alternative news sources and uses *The Mail & Guardian* and *The Daily Maverick* as an outlet for their own alternative media coverage. MMA Director William Bird is frequently asked to provide expert testimony for news articles on the state of South African media and has a recurring op-ed column in *The Daily Maverick*. *The Daily Maverick* offers traditional news pieces but also makes use of the capacities of online platforms with blogs and video content. The digitalization of the newspaper industry has been largely termed “networked journalism” (consider Deuze, 2004), though Wasserman
(2013) notes that within the African context, “digital technologies are often used in combination with other ways of interactivity, for instance, radio phone-ins and SMS” (p. 157).

Through several of their online games and tools, MMA tries to teach South Africans good news consumption habits. MMA recognizes the increasing pressure to monitor the vastly growing online news space and tries to intervene through consumer training. In the context of online news sources, Berger (2011) cautions against the increasing commercialization of citizen journalism as Nasper “also owns the largest local blog site[s], including MyNews24/Blogs.” (p. 709). Thus, Naspers uses the term “citizen journalism” in order to attract readers, censor blog entries, and re-inscribe singular viewpoints on issues of public interest (see also Milan, 2013, p. 41).

What becomes evident through this brief overview of the South African mediascape is that the three-tier model affords opportunity for abuse by the government and corporations. While partisan news and capitalistic motivations have been of continuous concern, the period between winter 2014 and winter 2016 is particularly noteworthy because it has been termed the “period of crisis” in South Africa’s public broadcasting. I include a description of the crisis below since MMA has been at the forefront of complaints submissions to ICASA and has been actively involved in protesting and litigation.

**Public Broadcasting “Crisis” (2014-2017)**

Upon numerous leadership changes in the SABC board of directors over the past eight years, the SABC’s ability to fulfil its mandate had continuously been called into question. As a media activist organization, MMA has been a leader in litigation cases against the SABC, with the expectation that the public broadcaster should re-focus on its role to serve in the interest of the people. In the winter of 2014, then newly appointed South Africa Communications Minister
Faith Muthambi began her investigation into the SABC’s leadership structure and legal mandate. Upon presenting her proposed amendment in the National Assembly in the summer of 2015, the Broadcasting Act of 1999 was officially amended on November 13th 2015. The rationale for the amendment includes the following language: “The instability in the SABC Board . . . has over the years served as a hindrance for the SABC to fulfil its public broadcasting service mandate. The fulfilment of this mandate is dependent on the ability of the Board to provide strategic direction to the SABC.” This move was critiqued by many as a politically based maneuver (see also media coverage in *Foreign Policy*, 2016.

In essence, Muthambi’s amendment reduces the number of non-executive SABC board members from twelve to nine; gives control over nomination, appointment, and removal of non-executive board members to the Communications Minister; removes the advice of the National Assembly entirely; and places the task of appointing executive board members into the hand of the President (in consultation with the Communications Minister). Thus, President Jacob Zuma and Communications Minister Muthambi hold direct control over the leadership of the SABC and have the power to intervene in programming decisions.

Muthambi’s structural changes to the leadership protocol of the SABC and appointment of the governing board began to directly affect content. Through the support of the newly appointed Chief Operating Officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng, who MMA had been criticizing for enabling ANC politics in the newsrooms, the SABC implemented a censorship policy. On May 26th 2016, the SABC inaugurated a policy that bars public broadcasting content to display visual images of public protests. These include any peaceful or violent public protest that lead to the damage of property, any peaceful or violent protest against service delivery, or any peaceful or violent protest against the government, its statements, policy, or officials.
The protest policy mediates the success of the ANC government in the public’s eye by keeping citizens from receiving complete information on current events. In the official media statement, Muthambi justifies this policy in the name of national identity, patriotism, and cultural stability. Muthambi writes:

“We unequivocally condemn the destruction of public and private infrastructure. It is our belief that the decision by the public broadcaster not to show footage of people burning public institutions, such as schools and libraries, in any of its news bulletins, will go a long way to discourage attention seeking anarchists” (Department of Communications, 30 May 2016).

Muthambi further notes “I believe the decision not to air footage of burning public institutions was taken in the spirit of social cohesion and nation building, not censorship as purported” (Department of Communications, 30 May 2016).

A few weeks later, on July 18th and 19th 2016, SABC COO Motsoeneng signed off on the abrupt dismissal of eight SABC journalists (hereafter: SABC8). Seven long-term journalists and editors at the SABC—Thandeka Gqubule, Foeta Krige, Lukhanyo Calata, Suna Venter, Busisiwe Ntuli, Krivani Pillay, and Jacques Steenkamp—were dismissed. One freelance journalist named Vuyo Mvoko, had his contract terminated effective immediately. The official press release reads that “they were fired because they did not conform to the company’s policies and directives” (South African Broadcasting Corporation, 19 July 2016). Multiple press reports later clarified that this unruly conduct referred to the editors and freelancer speaking out against editorial gatekeeping and censorship. Upon a legal investigation by the South African Constitutional Court, the SABC8 were reinstated.
MMA has played an active role in criticizing these reaction actions. It publicly condemned the amendment and began strategic planning on activism and litigation. MMA argues that this amendment is unconstitutional as it enables partisan news and government-congruent media messages that pose a direct threat to South Africa’s pursuit of democracy and social justice in media. MMA immediately launched an anti-censorship campaign and investigation into Muthambi’s anti-constitutional policy-making. Under the leadership of MMA, and as part of a coalitional effort by several media activist groups, the change in protest coverage policy has been under investigation at ICASA since June 2016.

MMA also has been actively involved in organizing protests for the SABC8 reinstatement and against SABC censorship. MMA is a co-signee of the ICASA court case that seeks to establish democratic elections for the SABC Board. MMA facilitates this litigation as the NGO believes that trusted media experts ought to comprise the Board that determines news, educational, and entertainment content from a public broadcaster. This demand is to ensure that the SABC operates in the interest of the people and does not become a mouthpiece of the government.

As South Africa’s mediascape continues to struggle with issues of corruption, government intervention, and ownership concentration across the media industry, regulatory bodies have been established to manage licensing and enforce broadcasting norms through litigation processes. MMA frequently submits to regulatory bodies such ICASA and makes use of those mechanisms that afford intervention in the interest of equality and democracy.
Media Freedom and Regulation in South Africa

Built into the South African media system are mechanisms for feedback to and criticism of the media. In South Africa, complaints must be submitted to the Broadcasting Monitoring and Complaints Committee (CCC), which is responsible for the enforcement of the committee’s 2003 Code of Conduct. Chiefly, the Code of Conduct specifies that broadcasters violate the law when broadcasting violent, hateful, discriminatory, or sexually explicit contents. Additionally, the Code of Conduct accounts for standards in news coverage and forbids partial coverage on topics of public importance, such as election coverage. The Code of Conduct not only sets the law and gives power to the committee to enforce licensees’ compliance with the Broadcasting Act of 1999, but it also provides stature for the forwarding of complaints to the committee through NGOs, such as MMA.

MMA has a close relationship with South Africa’s independent media regulatory body, called ICASA. ICASA fulfils the duty of Parliament to “establish an independent regulatory institution which is required to provide for the regulation of broadcasting in the public interest and to ensure fairness and a diversity of views broadly representing South African society” (South African Constitution, section 192). Hence, ICASA is a “Chapter 9” institution—designed to support democratic efforts in the country as listed in Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution—and is registered as a “portfolio organization” under the South African Department of Communications. ICASA’s role is threefold: to ensure that broadcasting is available to all citizens at an affordable price, to act as a watchdog and process complaints received by the public about broadcasting (in conjunction with the CCC), and to promote competition among broadcasting and telecommunications providers to encourage fair pricing and access. As such, the Constitution enshrines ICASA as a “licensing body, a regulatory and a
quasi-judicial body . . . to license, regulate, adjudicate, and issue sanctions” (South African Constitution, section 34).

I foreground these various regulatory bodies because of MMA’s close relationship with them—the NGO frequently brings complaints to the CCC and ICASA that concern the access, policy, regulation, structure and content of South African media. Leading up to the spring of 2017, ICASA facilitated three complaints requests filed by MMA—two concerning the SABC. Due to the timing of this study, statements around the SABC “crisis” become a dominant theme in the analysis chapters of this project.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In order to move towards an analysis of MMA’s feminist democratic media activism, it is important to introduce the major strands of critiques surrounding the problems in South African media. This chapter sought to provide the context for my institutional ethnography with MMA by introducing the dominating issues of media content misrepresentation and undemocratic structuring of the South African mediascape. Beginning with a focus on key debates in feminist media scholarship on representation in media, I discussed Western and South African feminist media scholars’ research on the omission, trivialization, and condemnation of women in media. I explained the overarching lack of diversity in media content and introduced persisting issues that women and minorities experience when working in the newsroom. Grounding misrepresentation critiques in academic literature connects to MMA’s specific activist goals around the improvement in media content and coverage toward more diverse and inclusionary practices.

I then transitioned to introducing the political economic issues in the South African mediascape. I situated the South African mediascape according to media systems theory and explained the current structure of the South African mediascape by discussing the three-tier
media model. I introduced the major commercial conglomerates, the public broadcaster SABC, and some independent news media. The entities in this section are the major stakeholders in the South African mediascape. Their introduction is central to this project precisely because MMA’s monitoring and media activism centers the structural organization and content production of the three commercial conglomerates and the SABC.

Next, I provided an overview of the legal mandates and regulatory bodies that have been established to guide the media industry and ensure that it operates constitutionally and democratically. I also explained the current issues facing the industry, in particular the SABC, by discussing three ways in which the government and the Communications Minister have been obstructing media freedom. Through the introduction of the recurring problems in media content and media structure, I am making a case for media intervention and the need for NGOs such as MMA.

Particularly in the African context, NGOs are known for their abilities to raise awareness on issues of interest to civil society. This includes issues ranging from politics and governance, to service delivery, and media. MMA engages with stakeholders and the public in order to make the industry more democratic and media messages more inclusionary. This commitment is feminist because it privileges democratic media structures and equitable media content. Though MMA exists under the umbrella concept of media activism, existing theories fall short to capture the two-folded integrative dimensions of their feminist activist work.

To address this, the following chapter introduces a series of concepts in global media studies that relate to notions of media democratization and activism. The exploration of these terms is necessary in order to ground MMA’s work specifically to the South African mediascape. In the following chapter, I propose a theoretical extension of the Feminist Media Activism and
Democratic Media Activism frameworks, which I term “Feminist Democratic Media Activism,” or FDMA. The following chapter also details the methodology and method of this project by introducing Smith’s (1974; 1987; 2005; 2006) “institutional ethnography” and details the processes of data gathering and analysis.
CHAPTER 3

Studying Feminist Democratic Media Activism Through Institutional Ethnography

The purpose of this chapter is to ground the theoretical framework of feminist democratic media activism (FDMA), discuss why MMA qualifies as such, and justify my choices surrounding Smith’s institutional ethnography as the main method. In order to argue for MMA as an FDMA organization, this chapter begins with a review of existing activist theories that fall short to capture MMA’s activist work in South Africa. This review will showcase that most scholars imagine media activism seeking equitable political-economic and representational aspects as separate or sequential, while, in fact, MMA’s FDMA demonstrates the urgent need for both.

To argue for FDMA as the theoretical model for MMA’s activism, I detail the two theories that ground it: Feminist Media Activism (Byerly & Ross, 2006; Gallagher, 2001), which argues for more equitable representation of gender in media content; and Democratic Media Activism (Hackett & Carroll, 2006), which focuses on the structural reform of the media industry so democratic ideals can flourish. I combine these theoretical approaches to FDMA in order place MMA into theory that accounts for the NGO’s real-life, two-fold activism. As actions and initiatives of MMA demonstrate, in order to become a successful media activism organization in the context of the Global South, organizations and groups must organize to challenge both anti-democratic industry structures and misrepresentational media messages.

The second portion of this chapter, entitled “Feminist Institutional Ethnography,” clarifies the epistemological anchoring of this project in feminist theory and methodology, discusses institutional ethnography as a method, and details the data gathering and analysis
techniques. Three feminist methodological stances on researcher credibility, objectivity, and researcher-participant relationships both guided how I approached this research and how I interacted with MMA as “informants” in a “scholar-activist” capacity. Next, I illustrate the differences between traditional ethnography and Smith’s institutional ethnography by arguing that institutional ethnography allows researchers to map an organization’s network of social relations, assess its social position, and thus determine its specific social roles. This section also introduces this study’s three data gathering techniques (participant-observation, semi-structured in-depth interviewing, textual analysis of field notes and organizational documents) and explains the data analysis process through NVivo.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the major theoretical stances in media studies and feminist literature on fostering democracy in the media industry and in media content. I review a set of theoretical conceptualizations of media activism and feminist media activism that were not able to account for MMA’s activist reality, thereby arguing for FDMA as the theoretical model for MMA.

**Theoretical Frameworks for Media Activism**

Scholars theorize media activism from various perspectives and with various emphases. The sheer plethora of terms associated with democratizing the mediascape—both in terms of content and industry structures—merits its own exhaustive treatise. Some of the key theories in media activism, NGO activism, and media systems literature are: *media activism, media advocacy, media democratization, media liberalization, media reform, media intervention, media transformation, media justice,* and *communication rights.* Collectively, these terms advocate for “democracy” as their overarching narrative by underscoring the importance of an accessible
mediascape that centers the interests of the people, reflects a plurality of voices, and remains free from government control.

The *media intervention* framework is especially relevant for media effects scholars who seek to harness media’s influence on consumers. In this line of research, scholars design specific programs with the goal of getting participants to perform an action, or change their behavior. While the language of “intervention” appears ideal for social justice media initiatives, media intervention is a framework using primarily social psychology, and not activism. *Feminist intervention*, on the other hand, is a term that captures concerns for gender interests in policy, for example in Johnson’s (2009) study of feminist interventions around gender violence in Russia. Johnson suggests that media monitoring and NGO involvement have contributed to some moderate success in raising awareness and financing support systems for women facing violence. While partially addressing the dimensions of activism and interventionist culture at MMA, neither framework particularly suits the full range of the organization’s activities. Media intervention and feminist intervention operate in mutually exclusive spaces that focus on either the use of media messages to change behavior, or grassroots activism that challenges gender violence.

Particularly in the context of the Global South, alternative media often facilitate interventions. Willems (2015) and Teer-Tomaselli (2015) discuss alternative media, in particular community radio, as a tool to intervene in regime-affirming messages disseminated through public broadcasting. Drawing on a dialectical mediascape framework—where producers and audiences are removed from institutions—Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) articulate that *alternative critical media* enable critical, non-commercial content production, in which consumers can become prosumers. This framework, however, does not necessarily offer provisions as to how
specific activism may lead to the outcomes the authors articulate—Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) do not offer concrete strategies to tackle issues in media, for example. A lack of situated strategic recommendations and focus on utopian outcomes is a widespread issue with academic media critiques as they remove the material and ideological structures of the mediascape, including forces such as capitalism and neoliberal globalization. The alternative media framework focuses on citizen-made, community-oriented programming that diverges from mainstream production and offers alternative viewpoints. This type of media activism is based in the alternate provision of media content to consumers but does not always address the institutional and systemic issues that foreground their necessity. While MMA offers alternative content in independent media, this activity alone does not suffice to challenge the widespread dissemination and influence of dominant media messages. Hence, alternative critical media account for consumer-oriented content and independent production, but does not have the capacity to reform the mediascape at large.

A similar shortcoming emerges in Hind’s (2010) conceptualization of media reform as “becom[ing] a matter of journalists doing their job better” (p. 38). This seems to denote that media can facilitate equity and democracy by the hands of those covering news and events, with no regard of how the larger structure of the industry influences journalistic praxis. In their edited volume on global media democratization efforts, Price, Rozumilowicz, and Velhurst (2002) also employ the term media reform. Diverging from Hind (2010), the authors situate media reform as a term that encompasses the complexities of production, access, dissemination, consumption, and control.
The media reform theory refers back to the importance of democracy in media and points to the desired outcomes of an equitable media system. This comprises both balanced reporting by journalists as well as a diversity of ownership. For example, Price, Rozumilowicz, and Velhurst’s (2002) comparative framework features case studies from around the globe that repeatedly signal to similar sets of issues that prevent true media reform, including state ownership, censorship, and undermining of activism. The authors explain that media achieve reform once they “progress even nearer to an ideal of freedom and independence and away from dependency and control” (p. 12). Unlike Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) and Hind (2010), Price, Rozumilowicz, and Velhurst (2002) formulate a concrete transition model that unfolds in four stages: First, in the pre-transition stage, media actors attempt to persuade the regime; second, in the primary transition, reformers create a “viable legal and institutional framework in which free and independent media can begin to develop” (p. 24); third, in the secondary transition, reformers focus on fine-tuning their activism; and lastly, in the mature transition stage, media reformers involve society through relationships with journalism, facilitation of international exchange with other professionals, setting up funds for ethical media projects, offering training, and awarding honors for good media reporting.

The shortcoming of Price, Rozumilowicz, and Velhurst’s (2002) four-stage transition model is that it imagines media reform in a rather linear fashion, with no provisions as to how reformists might have to regroup after failed attempts to persuade regimes or journalists. The model blatantly disregards the sociopolitical constraints that so often truncate and forestall activism and media reform in many contexts, including South Africa where MMA is active.

Key components in many theoretical formulations are the notions of media participation and communication rights, both of which advocate for access and involvement in the production
of media. With a strong relationship to the alternative critical media framework (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010), media participation offers structural participation in organizational decision-making, and also content participation of media production as a way of “democratization” (Carpentier, Dahlgren & Pasquali, 2013). Perhaps one of the richest literatures of media activism involve the concept of media democratization.

*Media democratization* is a formulation that promotes grassroots activism and policy litigation to democratize public communication through public consciousness-raising and structural intervention. Lamenting that digital media and the Internet are routinely offered as the solution to media participation, Carpentier, Dahlgren, and Pasquali (2013) argue that media democratization must happen both “in and through the media” (p. 292; emphasis in the original). Specifically with respect to the activism component of media democratization, Hackett and Carroll (2006) offer one of the most comprehensive book-length projects on what they termed democratic media activism, or DMA. Among the reviewed activism theories in media studies, DMA most closely describes a core mission of MMA.

**Democratic Media Activism (DMA)**

In their influential monograph, Hackett and Carroll (2006) call the efforts of media activists in the UK, US, and Canada democratic media activism (DMA). Hackett and Carroll explain that media activists utilize various strategies and sites of intervention for media activism. The authors provisionally describe the institutional setup of media organizations, the production process, the content, the audiences, and the cultural environment (pp. 85-86). All five of these larger categories help conceptualize how media activists interact with the mediascape. The authors arrive at their typology for DMA by expanding on the Habermasian terms “system” and “lifeworld.”
For Habermas (1981) “system” denotes the large-scale institutional structures that configure society (p. 153), while “lifeworld” marks the construction of a shared reality through communication and relationships between members in a social interaction (p. 120). Ultimately, Habermas argues that the system colonizes the lifeworld. Building on Habermas, Hackett and Carroll (2006) expand the terminology of “system” and “lifeworld” to activism in the mediascape and provide two foci for DMA: one focused on lifeworld change and one focused on system change.

Further, Hackett and Carroll (2006) provide three strategies for DMA through collective action. The first is to “reform or revamp the media field internally,” which would involve media professionals taking collective action through unionization and a self-determined focus on ethical critical investigation (p. 52). A second strategy is to “create new and parallel fields,” which involves the creation and financial support of alternative media. Finally, a third strategy is implemented to “change the media field’s environing conditions,” which involves policy change, media literacy education, and media advocacy groups (p. 52).

Hackett and Carroll (2006) position media monitoring within DMA as focused on system change, but situate it as emerging from the experiences of the lifeworld. Though closely relating to the political economic work of MMA, casting media monitoring in the systemic activism paradigm alone ignores the ways in which many NGOs straddle institutional and representational activism. For MMA, representational activism is just as important as their stakeholder training and media policy work. As Hackett and Carroll (2006) acknowledge, groups such as MMA often exist in the “border zones, at the seams between system and lifeworld,” in sites can become catalysts for “social movement formation and challenges to system logic” (p. 55).
I utilize the DMA framework primarily for its ability to situate media activism aimed at reforming and democratizing the political economy of the mediascape. Though useful for structure-based media activisms, DMA in and of itself does not have the capacity by itself to address the phenomenon of MMA’s activism with all nuance and complexities. As Hackett and Carroll (2006) admit, the specific work of media NGOs often falls in between systemic and cultural critiques. In particular with respect to activism of representation and systemic inclusion, DMA does not suffice. Next, I offer activist theories of feminist media activism, or FMA. DMA must be supplemented with FMA in order to arrive at FDMA as a theory that can capture MMA’s particular activist case.

**Feminist Media Activism (FMA)**

The genealogy of FMA is deeply rooted in women’s liberation and social movement literature that acknowledges the power of media. Among a plethora of scholarship, FMA most often encompasses critiques of the lack of women’s involvement in the production of media, the trivialization, omission, and condemnation of women in media texts, and the perpetual cultural marginalization that arises from misrepresentation. I do not wish to situate FMA as a “women’s movement,” as this critically renders many other identities invisible; but rather, I seek to illustrate how scholars have conceptualized this kind of activism, and the emphases they place.

In their model of *women’s media action*, Byerly and Ross (2006) seek to “illustrate how women manifested their agency in creating both a feminist public sphere and a feminist component within the dominant public sphere in which men are still ceded the greater authority” (p. 100). Via extensive fieldwork and interviews with women from across the globe, the authors sought to find out how women forge spaces for themselves--both in the media industry and also in civil society. Their findings yield that women activists primarily aspire to increase the amount
of information about women available in the media and to stop media stereotyping. Secondly, the authors found that participants seek to mobilize other women and increase the coverage about women in media.

Both of these dominant themes focus women media activists on the messages about them. Byerly and Ross (2006) explain that the model fits “any organized effort on women’s part to make changes in established media enterprises or to create new media structures with the goal of expanding women’s voice in society and enabling their social advancement” (p. 101). While the study participants also commented on the structural issues that enable misrepresentation and underrepresentation, as well as their own roles in the media industry and NGOs, Byerly and Ross’ (2006) perspective cannot fully capture MMA’s activism in all its nuance. Women’s media action has a content-based goal to increase women’s social participation and advancement through media, while perhaps underplaying the political economic dimensions that forestall gender equity in media.

One of the ways in which scholars and activist voice discontent with media messages about gender is through the systematic analysis of content in print, broadcasting, and online media. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (a sub-charter of UNESCO) sponsored the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, during which activists and politicians generated the “Beijing Platform for Action” (hereafter BPFA) that sought to address two main objectives around women and media. First, to “increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication” and secondly, to “promote a balance and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.” (UN.org, n.d.).
To address this, media organizations, activists, and NGOs were urged to “establish media watch groups that can monitor the media and consult with the media to ensure that women’s needs and concerns are properly reflected’ (BPFA, 1998, sec J. para 242a). Correspondingly, Gallagher’s (2001) book project on media monitoring and advocacy situates the necessity and goal for monitoring groups in the critique and creation of symbolic visibility for women. Within the scope of a feminist critique, Gallagher (2001) roots media advocacy in the form of monitoring as “based on the belief that the public can play a role in the determining what stories are told, and how” (p.8). As Hoynes (2005) explains, media monitoring and research “produces knowledge that has a cultural authority that activism lacks” (p. 107).

Gallagher (2001) has offered some of the most insightful contributions on media monitoring and activism for social justice, particularly around gender. In her book project, she offers case studies of different monitoring contexts and even includes MMA (then called MMP) as an example of a successful monitoring agency. For Gallagher, activism stands at the crux of ensuring representational equity in media messages. She continuously underscores the potential of civil society and grassroots activism groups in fostering representational equity.

In the South African context, Geertsema’s (2010) ethnographic study with the NGO GenderLinks illustrates the gender dimensions of media activism. Geertsema interviewed 25 members of GenderLinks, analyzed organizational documents, and spoke to leading voices in the media industry. Geertsema also interviewed the Director of MMA and included his testimony in her piece. The industry experts lament that gender activism often becomes reframed as policy critique, thereby rendering the gender dimensions subordinate. In the end, Geertsema found that the “professional-technical approach” to feminist media activism, such as “gender mainstreaming,” does not facilitate long-term impacts in patriarchal cultural values (p. 84).
Perhaps the biggest shortcoming of these conceptualizations is the framing of women’s media action as limited to women as the sole agents, with little provisions for an intersectional or cross-cultural commentary. While I do believe that Byerly and Ross (2006), Gallagher (2001), and Geertsema (2010), respectively, thought of a diversity of individuals within their frameworks, FMS appears to hinge on women advocating for women’s representation in media. In the feminist activist women’s studies literature, scholars warn against the “one-size-fits-all activism” (Lugones, 2003) and urge to recognize “interlocking oppressions” by accounting how “difference” can work to strengthen grassroots efforts (Lorde, 1984). The FMS framework thus has the potential to fall trap to “single-issue” activism that can critically omit political economic factors in the mediascape.

As this review of DMA and FMA demonstrates, MMA’s specific activism in South Africa requires an integrative framework that accounts for their structural and message-based media activism. Neither DMA nor FMA can fully account for MMA’s range of activism. Here, I would like to propose an extension of both formulations in order to illustrate the synchronous activism geared toward changing the structure and messages in media employed by MMA. I term this theoretical extension feminist democratic media activism, or FDMA. By putting the “feminism” first, FDMA is a feminist gesture that privileges the critical goals of equality. It also acknowledges the democratic ideals inherent to the feminist movement.

**Feminist Democratic Media Activism (FDMA)**

FDMA is foremost a way to reflect the actual experiences of NGO activism in our theories. This study of MMA is driven by my conviction that activism can be utilized as a site for theory building. As noted by Gallagher (2001), scholars should keep in mind the push and pull of theory and praxis, and between action and research. She explains that “it is this reciprocity
between action and research that defines feminist media studies and that contributes to its intellectual and political force” (p. 14). FDMA is an effort that operates inductively, to let lived experiences influence theory and to translate praxis into conceptual ideas that have the potential to inform other contexts and activist-oriented research projects.

FDMA is directly informed by the work of MMA, and by extension, also informed by other media activism NGOs like it. While unique in its impact and history, MMA shares a vision with many other monitoring organizations in the Global South. It seeks to expand existing theories that make mention of media monitoring and advocacy by centering the lived experiences of this work. MMA’s testimony reveals that successful interventions in the mediascape urgently require both structure-based and message-based activism. Within the larger scope of NGO work, and specifically in realm of media monitoring, FDMA can ground non-profit media activisms that seek to change censorship laws, advocate for media policy changes, and issue complaints against stigmatizing media coverage.

By basing theory on experiences and actions beyond the Western context, FDMA is also an attempt to speak from the margins. Willems (2015) echoes Raka Shome, Chandra Mohanty, and other transnational feminists in their prompt to decolonize theoretical approaches by privileging the realities in the Global South. While some theories allow a certain cultural and contextual nimbleness for applications outside of their intended background, Willems argues that the perpetual use of Western ontology continues a colonial domination of African knowledge production. Though not limited to the Global South, FDMA can serve as a starting point for comparative analysis, without the linear “singularity” in intercultural relationships (Lugones, 2003). While localized to South Africa in this project, FDMA shares applicability with other nations in the Global South that are battling similar economic and social issues in media.
As discussed by Hackett and Carroll (2006), scholars often see media monitoring agencies as operating in “border zones,” or blurred spaces (p. 55). At MMA, media monitoring is a central effort; however, the organizers also assert that one of the most important characteristics is to stay relevant by adapting and innovating. MMA members do not see themselves as restricted to analyzing media coverage and producing data-driven reports. Rather, they articulate that the changing mediascape presents them with new sets of challenges to which they need to adapt. This also creates opportunity for innovative projects that become resources for media intervention. MMA, as an NGO, sees the structural activism on policy and public broadcasting, as well as the representational activism for women and children in the media as working in tandem. I argue that MMA displays that it fits the FDMA model through their organizational beliefs, interpersonal identifications with feminism and democracy, as well as activist gestures.

The following section focuses on the method for this project, Smith’s institutional ethnography. I clarify my theoretical goals, epistemological anchoring, and chart the methods I employed for data gathering.

**Feminist Institutional Ethnography**

In this project, I seek to address what role MMA plays in the South African mediascape, how MMA mitigates stakeholder relationships affecting their social position, and how MMA can be located as an FDMA organization. In order to address these research questions, I selected Smith’s (1974; 1897; 2005; 2006) institutional ethnography as my method. More than a tool for data gathering and analysis, institutional ethnography allowed me to let MMA’s real-life action shape FDMA as a theory. This inductive approach, advocated in Smith’s (1974) early work, serves so that theoretical models can better account for the material reality of our study participants and study site. In activist literature, scholars repeatedly argue that activism should be
theorized (see also Adelman & Frey, 2000; Chávez, 2013; Croteau, 2005; Frey & Carragee, 2007; Rodino-Colocino, 2012; Smith, 1974; 1987; 2005).

As Figure 1 illustrates, Smith’s (2005) institutional ethnographic method encourages the building of theory from field experience, rather than pushing field experience into “authoritative” models that often do not fit. For Smith, the experience becomes “authoritative” (p. 139). Thus, I study MMA’s activism via institutional ethnography to derive theoretical value from their real-life activist experience, which in turn, develops a theoretical framework that can to capture MMA’s organizational identity and activist work with sufficient nuance.

In order to illustrate my own research approach, I draw on feminist research scholarship that decenters positivist epistemologies and ontologies about credibility, objectivity, and researcher-participant relationships. This exploration is important because it fundamentally shaped how I interacted with MMA during my stay in Johannesburg. Upon this review of feminist research methodologies, I proceed to detailing the institutional ethnographic method of this project.
Before further discussing this project’s methodology and method, I would like to begin by reasserting Harding’s (1987) differentiation between methodology and method(s). I do so because method and methodology often become conflated or merged in scientific research, which leads to inaccurate uses and applications of these terms. Methodology is “a theory and analysis of how research should proceed” (p. 2); i.e., our philosophical ideals about who can know what and how the research ought to unfold. Embracing a post-positivist epistemology, feminists have long raised questions about the construction of objectivity, reality, and the role of the researcher. Methods, then, are the “techniques for data gathering” (p. 2), i.e., the ways in which the researcher collects the data. The two operate in tandem, as one’s methodological orientation fundamentally affects the method one chooses to employ.

My own methodological position is deeply informed by the contributions of Smith (1974), Harding (1987), Haraway (1988), and Fricker (1998), who pushed into the dominant social science paradigm from the margins. Collectively, they have enriched existing assumptions about methodology, method, and who research ought to serve. Among their collective contributions, three lines of arguments informed my time with MMA in South Africa: First, issues of credibility; second, feminist standpoint and objectivity; and third, researcher-participant relationships. Collectively, these yield important insights into how axes of power affect all aspects of the research process and the individuals involved in it.

Methodology

Feminist scholars have long pondered the concept of credibility for women researchers. This is the first line of argument that shapes my own project. In her critique of androcentrism, Fricker (2007) contemplates “Who can be a knower?” and theorizes concerns for knowledge production in what she later terms “testimonial injustice” (p. 9) and “hermeneutical injustice” (p.
She points to the underlying power dynamics about the researcher’s competence and the ways in which axes of power mediate how we can understand ourselves, our study site, and our participants. Doing research is a heavily gendered space, the praxis helps us reflect on our philosophical foundations about how we believe research ought to unfold. As Smith (1974) so famously noted, sociological research “has been based on and built up within the male social universe” (p. 7).

Smith (1987) and Stacey’s (1988) historic accounts illuminate that methodologies and methods alike did not account for a woman’s perspective. Both scholars discuss the difficulty of speaking to social phenomena from the margins. However, the simplistic assumption that women will study other women, or women’s issues, is misplaced. In fact, both black feminists and postcolonial feminists have voiced critiques about the (white) academic female researcher as a “privileged insider,” who, similar to the contested colonialist anthropologist, “studies down” on her subjects, while failing to account for her own positionality. Smith (1987) stresses that we ought to recognize how power affects researchers, the research process, and participants in order to provide more nuanced testimony from the margins. For example, studying marginalized women’s perspectives is worthwhile because it fosters intersectional understandings and helps decolonize our academic knowledge production.

Along with these critiques of credibility, a second line of argument emerges from feminists who have deliberated myths of objectivity and the researcher’s role in the research process. An important contribution here comes from Harding (1987), who articulates a feminist epistemology for research and activism that emphasizes the feminist “standpoint.” Standpoint theory presupposes an understanding of positionality and partiality in the form of “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1988). Situated knowledges exist under two conditions: First, a
recognition of how researchers and participants “can know” within existing structural power dimensions; and second, how these conditions affect the outcome of scientific inquiry, as well as the knowledge we can produce. Standpoint theory argues against the “God trick,” which has dominated social scientific inquiry by reinforcing unrealistic doctrines of objectivity, and has contributed to the omission of marginalized perspectives altogether (Haraway, 1988).

A third line of methodological influence comes from feminist scholars’ arguments about the researcher’s relationships with participants. Stacey (1988) states that feminist research ought to be shaped by the understanding that the research process is reciprocal, involving the researcher and participant(s) in equal scopes. In ethnographic interviewing, for example, feminists do not simply “use” participants for their information, but rather, take the opportunity to collectively develop ideas. This is why feminist scholars, including myself, prefer the term “participant” over “respondent,” as the latter implies a passivity, exploitation, and hierarchy in the research process.

In the positivist tradition, researchers would see themselves as separate from their participants, without accounting how their own identity shapes the interactions. Smith (1987) already argued that her experience and identity as a woman helped her connect to research participants in a way that her male colleagues could not. Feminist researchers listen, account for biases, and find value in behaviors and utterances previously not deemed significant (see also Harding, 1987). Developing relationships should not raise flags about the quality of the research. Smith’s (1987) call to foster identification with participants anchored my interaction with members of MMA. My ability to form relationships with some participants improved the productivity of our interactions. I was able to share my own experiences as an activist and social justice scholar, which helped establish credibility. It also fostered trust in the sense that they felt
comfortable to share personal information and explain their own relationships to feminist and democratic ideals. “Coming out” as a scholar-activist allowed me to foster trust and credibility.

Underpinning these three lines of feminist methodological thinking is a different vision about research axiology. Feminists have critically reshaped axiological concerns about the individual goals of research projects, as well as the overall contribution to the production of knowledge. In critical/cultural and feminist studies, researchers focus on the “how” and “why,” rather than counting or measuring occurrences to deduce generalizability, replicability, and predictability. Feminist researchers fulfill the axiology of social justice by providing accounts of previously overlooked experiences, challenging common assumptions, and calling out how power mediates our daily lives.

Credibility, standpoint, and researcher-participant relationships point to the central argument of feminist methodologies, which is to situate how power works within and around the research activity. This is a key component in how I approached my research with MMA. Smith (1987) notes that research often takes on generalized approaches that have either glanced over, or omitted entirely, the ways in which axes of power influence our research. This includes our beliefs about realities, how we research, what/who we research, and the end product we yield. Fricker (1988) aptly summarizes that the process and outcomes of scientific inquiry “imitate structures of social power” (p.170). These definitions are indeed important, not only to clarify my epistemological, ontological, and axiological positions, but also to situate my field work with MMA.

As a young woman researcher, who identifies and performs feminine, I was aware of three power dynamics that would impact my time in Johannesburg: I was neither male, South African, nor a cultural insider, and I did not know what group dynamics to expect at MMA.
These identity dimensions fundamentally influenced how I could access my study site, how MMA members and other South Africans would interact with me, and how they gauged my ethos. I was fortunate enough to research among a community of individuals who value gender equality, democracy, and ethics. My first day with MMA coincided with a team workshop and this gave me the opportunity to introduce myself, discuss my work, and briefly clarify my epistemological position. I also asserted my commitment to social justice, media democracy, and gender equality. These personal identifications provided a way to begin individual interactions and start building identification with MMA members.

In order to employ a feminist methodology, I selected a method that would allow me to link the experiences of MMA and its members to the larger systemic structures in the South African mediascape and explore the nuance of their activism—Smith’s (1974; 1987; 2005; 2006) “institutional ethnography.” Smith inaugurated a methodological paradigm shift in feminist studies, which has also contributed to new feminist methods. Smith developed her institutional ethnography out of the central concern that existing sociological research of the 1970s and 80s produced ethnographies about people, rather than for people. Recognizing that the female researcher ran up against androcentric methodologies, she sought to forge a new path in her field: An ethnography for study participants that centers their experiences and maps how these experiences relate to larger systemic power structures.

Method

In her institutional ethnography, Smith (1987) argues for the theoretical value derived from the researcher’s observations of real-life experiences and interactions, instead of deducing findings from established ways of knowing. As explained by Campbell and Gregor (2002), inductive research processes should bypass the assumption that “new findings must be built up
from and refer back to ideas already established in the literature” (p. 17). Smith (1987) explains that all human phenomena are “organized as social relations,” mediated by multiple axes of power (p. 151). Building on structuralist methodology, which recognizes that social phenomena must be embedded into their cultural and systemic context, Smith’s (1987) institutional ethnographic method points to the ruling social apparatus that grounds “institutional processes, which together organize, coordinate, regulate, guide, and control contemporary societies” (p. 152).

The central difference between classic ethnography and Smith’s (1987) contribution is that institutional ethnographies seek to go beyond explicating the local. Using the institutional ethnography framework, the researcher is able to understand how phenomena and activities “are organized and how they are articulated to the social relations of the larger social and economic process” (p. 152). As explained by G. Smith, Mykhalovskiy, and Weatherbee (2005), institutional ethnographies are not constrained by what the researcher observed in the field, but rather, “seek to reveal the extended bureaucratic, professional, legislative, and economic, as well as other social relations involved in the production of local events and activities” (p. 172).

Drawing heavily on her own experience as a woman in academia, Smith’s (1987) original institutional ethnography sought to situate the woman’s place in the hierarchy of education. Over the past thirty years, institutional ethnographies shed light on people’s experiences with HIV/AIDS health hazards (Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2011), studied the interactions of gay men with drag queens (Berkowitz, Belgrave, & Halberstein, 2007), and sought to explain how institutional policies impact people’s decisions to seek out post-secondary education (Restoule et al., 2013). As these diverse sets of studies illustrate, the institutional ethnography method readily applies to a variety of human experiences and study sites.
Originally, institutional ethnographies unfolded during prolonged interactions and primarily using informal interviews as the method for data gathering. In more current applications, institutional ethnographies incorporate a commitment to a range of data collection techniques in order to gain a “360-view” of a particular phenomenon or experience (see also Taber, 2010). According to G. Smith, Mykhalovskiy, and Weatherbee (2006), institutional ethnographers employ various methods, including—but not limited to—in-depth interviews, archival research, and textual analysis.

Through triangulation (see also Denzin, 1978) and thick descriptions, researchers are able to identify the effects of institutional processes on organizational activities. It is important to address that Smith (1987) mentions social relations as embedded in both physical and cultural institutions. Physical can include governments, schools, and, in this case, the media. Cultural institutions are more in line with guiding power structures that affect physical institutions, such as hegemony, ideologies, and cultural conventions. Hence, institutional ethnographies allow researchers to draw from individual and collective experiences to study the institutional(ized) processes that shape lived experience with the goal to map social relations (see also DeValut & McCoy, 2006). This is a valuable technique for the non-profit sector.

Ethnography as an overall method is gaining more traction in NGO research. Markowitz (2001) comments on the proliferation of NGOs in the Global South and the positive attention they have received. She argues that scholars must study NGOs ethnographically in order to assess their interrelations and global-local relationships, including streams of funding. Within the scope of non-profit communications, Fisher (1997) critically notes the scarcity of studies that explain “the impact of NGO practices on relations of power among individuals, communities, and the state” (p. 441). He further laments the “little attention to the discourse within which
NGOs are presented as the solution to problems of welfare service delivery, development, and democratization” (p. 441). Fisher asserts that ethnographic studies of NGOs are worthwhile precisely because their analyses help challenge simplistic generalizations about NGO work as “uproducive.”

While Markowitz (2001) and Fisher (1997) speak from an anthropological perspective, scholars from across the disciplines see value in Smith’s (1987) institutional ethnography. Though overall sparse, some studies have applied this method to the non-profit sector. Escobar (1995) draws on Smith (1987) and asserts that in order to study institutions—including NGOs—using Smith’s method, scholars must investigate the practices of organization’s members, the organization’s activities and most critically, the structural dimensions shape these practices.

Drawing on Escobar’s extension, Lewis (1998) was the first to apply the institutional ethnography framework to the non-profit sector. Lewis sought to study inter-agency interactions to gauge what type of effect these collaborations had on local government and community. In a later project, Lewis (2003) maps social relations in the non-profit sector by studying a partnership program of a grassroots silk farming foundation NGO in Bangladesh.

As these studies illustrate, there is a strong case for the application of Smith’s (2005) institutional ethnography to the non-profit sector. Building on the theoretical opportunities institutional ethnographies deliver, Smith’s method granted me the best access to situate MMA as an FDMA organization and map the social relations that affect the NGO’s social position in the South African mediascape. Next, I detail the process of data gathering and specify the techniques employed to capture MMA’s activism.
Data gathering.

According to Smith (2005), institutional ethnography “begins by locating a standpoint in an institutional order that provides the guiding perspective from which that order will be explored.” (p. 32). Building on this initial standpoint, the researcher continues to study “how those actualities were embedded in social relations, both those of ruling and those of the economy” (p. 31). In order to arrive at a thick description of MMA’s activism and role in the South African mediascape, I follow Taber’s (2010) recommendation for a “360 degree view” in institutional ethnographies. Thus, in this study of MMA, I employed three data gathering techniques: Participant-observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis of organizational documents.

Participant observation.

My research began with participant-observations. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2010), participant-observations are opportunities to “experience events in their native cultural settings” (p. 135). Diamond (2005) explains the merits of participant-observation in institutional ethnography: “Because they have the potential to refine our appreciations of . . . stories, authors, bodies, place, time, motion, now ruling relations work, and particular ways for seeing the social organization in the local” (p. 58). I found participant-observation to be one of the most successful ways to capture the day-to-day operations at MMA, which gave me valuable insights into organizational dynamics of team members, as well as the organizational mission and specific activist projects.

Over the course of my time with MMA, I expanded twelve informal observation notes into fieldnotes. These stem from participant-observations at MMA meetings, which include both internal team meetings and project-based meetings, as well as meetings with clients and other
organizations MMA collaborates with. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2010), fieldnotes “are concerned with describing and interpreting the symbolic qualities of communication as social action” (p. 155). In addition to participant-observation, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews.

**Interviews.**

Interviewing is a classic technique in ethnographic research, as it allows participants to speak from their own perspective about things that matter to them. In preparation for my time in Johannesburg, I crafted a semi-structured interview guide, with ten major points that I hoped to discuss with each participant. I chose this method to guide the conversation and allow for elaboration, clarification, and cognitive meandering, rather than constraining conversations to a strict interview protocol.

The interview guide contained prompts about MMA’s role in the South African mediascape, issues in the current political economy, and issues in media content. I also prompted discussion about MMA’s specific activist projects that seek to address these issues. Moreover, I prompted participants to speak to the notions of “feminism” and “democracy,” as they saw them in relationship to their own activist identities as well as MMA’s specific activist work. The order of these prompts did not remain stagnant across interviews and some prompts also changed along the way as I began picking up on themes. Smith explains this process in a personal interview in 1999: “You sometimes don’t know what you’re after until you hear people telling you things” (DeVault and McCoy, 2005, p. 24).

During my time in Johannesburg, I conducted 23 in-depth semi-structured interviews, which I recorded on my portable USB voice recorder. Seventeen of these interviews involved those directly involved with MMA: all MMA members, the Director, the Chairman of the Board,
and another Board member. Additionally, I interviewed four media professionals and three activist NGO executives who have coalitional relationships to MMA. The 23 conversations lasted between 50 and 90 minutes, yielding an overall amount of over 1,000 minutes of analyzable data. The interviews were truly invaluable and provided nuanced insights into the stakes, mission, goals, and activist dimension of MMA’s work. In addition to interviewing, I also conducted analyses of MMA’s organizational and promotional documents.

**Textual analysis.**

In addition to fieldnotes and interviews, I analyzed a variety of MMA’s organizational documents. For institutional ethnographic research of organizations, Eastwood (2006) notes that “attending meetings does not necessarily give a sense of how . . . an organization works” (p. 183). She critically points to analyzing organizational documents as they provide valuable additional information about internal and external communications and supplement oral testimonies. I was fortunate that MMA granted me unobstructed access to all online and print publications, policy documents, media monitoring report, and promotional materials. For my institutional ethnography of MMA, the organizational and promotional documents became valuable as they validated oral accounts of the NGO’s mission, organizational priorities, project angles, and activist gestures.

**Data analysis.**

For the purpose of analyzing MMA’s social relations and FDMA in South Africa, Graheme’s (1998) institutional ethnographic study of feminist organizing clearly states the process: First, scholars should provide a thorough organizational profile, including the history, mission, and goals. Second, scholars must analyze the social relations to other institutions that
situate the organization within the larger cultural system. Third, scholars must analyze what structural factors determine the unique social position of the organization in question.

In following Graheme’s suggestions for institutional ethnographies of organizations, I began the data analysis process by transferring all audio recordings, pictures, fieldnotes, and scans of MMA documents to the qualitative research software, NVivo. A professional qualitative transcription service transcribed my recorded interviews verbatim, which I also transferred to NVivo. Once I imported all data, I began to code significant data into “nodes” in NVivo. The software allows users to aggregate, organize, and analyze data as well as explore tentative themes and map relationships between “nodes” (see Bazeley, 2007). Figure 2 visualizes the hierarchical organization of nodes through the NVivo coding process.
Figure 2: Hierarchical organization of nodes through NVivo coding process.

As Figure 2 displays, I began coding interview data, fieldnotes, and organizational documents into nine categories that later merged to form the three dominant nodes. The three categories for MMA’s social relations comprised all data associated with MMA’s organizational relationships: media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and public engagement. All data pertaining to opinions about MMA’s work and attitudes toward MMA’s
activist success are part of the reputation and impact categories that comprise the node around MMA’s social relations. Lastly, I associated all data in the three categories feminism, media democracy, and activism with the FDMA node, which sought to establish MMA as an FDMA organization and features data on MMA’s personal identifications, organizational ideology, and specific activist work among all three FDMA components.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The purpose of this chapter was to ground the theoretical framework of feminist democratic media activism (FDMA) and justify Smith’s institutional ethnography as the most suitable approach for this project. I reviewed existing activist theories, including *Feminist Media Activism* (Byerly & Ross; 2006; Gallagher, 2001) and *Democratic Media Activism* (Hackett & Carroll; 2006), which still fell short to capture MMA’s specific activist case in South Africa. I found that scholars often imagine political-economic and representational activism as separate projects, though MMA’s demonstrates that successful activist NGOs organize for both simultaneously. This is what I termed *Feminist Democratic Media Activism*, or FDMA. Moving forward, I use this framework to situate MMA as an FDMA organization.

In the second part of this chapter, I explain feminist methodologies around researcher credibility, objectivity, and researcher-participant relationships that guided how I interacted with MMA. I also discussed how institutional ethnography as a method privileges the lived experience of informants to allow theories to be built-up from them, instead of constraining experiences for the sake of fitting them into established ways of knowing. I discussed how institutional ethnography allows researchers to map an organization’s network of social relations, assess its social position, and thus determine its specific social roles. I also discussed my three data gathering techniques (participant-observation, semi-structured in-depth interviewing, textual
analysis of organizational documents) and explained how I analyzed the various data sets utilizing NVivo.

The following chapter is the first of three analysis chapters. Chapter 4 details MMA’s organizational profile and main activist technique—media monitoring. According to Graheme (1998), this first analysis is necessary so that scholars can draw on the organizational profile to make assessments about organizations’ network of social relations and their social position.
CHAPTER 4

Media Monitoring Africa:

Organizational Profile and Monitoring Techniques

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce MMA as an organization and explain its main service—media monitoring. I follow Grahame’s (1998) instructions for institutional ethnographies of activist organizations, in which she argues that scholars who study organizations ethnographically must begin by introducing the organization’s formation, mission, and structure. Moreover, Grahame notes that scholars ought to explain any services or activities that become important for their social interactions with other entities. For MMA, the organization’s main service to this date is media monitoring for content analysis.

Upon introducing the most important feminist and media activist groups in South Africa, I begin this chapter by offering an organizational profile of MMA. I introduce MMA as an organization, including its history, mission, and goals. According to Eastwood’s (2006) and Smith’s (2005) suggestions for the use of data in institutional ethnographies, I offer the values and “Theory of Change” MMA utilizes as part of their promotional documents and supplement their self-description via my observations and interview testimony. I describe the political economy of the organization, including the various roles of MMA members, its governance through the Director and Board of Trustees, and its funding model.

I proceed with an in-depth discussion of MMA’s main method of data gathering: media monitoring. In order to understand the impact of MMA’s monitoring reports and monitoring-based complaints to regulatory bodies and media stakeholders, it is imperative that I explain their media-monitoring techniques. As media monitoring during elections is one of the areas MMA is
most known for, I explain “Dexter,” MMA’s proprietary media monitoring online platform, via the case of the 2016 National Municipal Election media monitoring campaign.

I transition to introduce a few of the additional services MMA offers. Realizing that innovating and keeping up with the changing digital mediascape of news production and access are two imperative traits of a relevant media NGO, MMA has created a variety of online tools. These tools serve everyday South African media consumers, as well as journalists, editors, and news media producers. Moreover, MMA offers physical training sessions on ethical reporting at a local university, thereby strengthening its commitment to aid media professionals and stakeholders do their jobs with more integrity.

To introduce and contextualize my study site, I begin with a brief introduction of feminist activist and media activist NGOs that are important for South Africa. I include these various South African groups and organizations to illustrate that activism around media is locally more abundant than in many of the other African nations, yet many do not hold the same rapport as MMA. The introduction of these groups is also important because MMA has cultivated relationships and forged alliances with a series of them. These alliances become important in their network of social relations.

**Feminist Activism and Media Activism in South Africa**

With respect to Africa, Willems (2015) notes that NGOs are important in the mediation of public concerns, which would otherwise be concealed or “managed” by governments and the legacy press. Von Lieres (2014) articulates that in Angola and South Africa, NGOs work in tandem with other local associations to mobilize around issues of public interest, including healthcare and media coverage. For Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, Okon (2015) similarly notes that NGOs are important mediators (and sometimes, even legal arbitrators) in issues of
media policy. As such, NGOs become important community media partners in the pursuits of media freedom and media diversity.

South Africa has a long-standing tradition of grassroots activism for social change, including those that focus specifically on gender equality. On a local level, there are various feminist NGOs that also concern themselves with media representation, among them the African Gender Institute, the Institute for Gender Studies (housed in the University of South Africa/Pretoria), GenderLinks, and Agenda Feminist Media. The Commission for Gender Equality was established through the government to foster the status of women in society and recognizes that media become an important agent in hindering or fostering this pursuit. As Ferree (2006) argues, NGOs and groups in the Global South often refrain from using the term “feminism” or “feminist” to avoid negative connotations. Most South African NGOs focus on the term “gender.”

In addition to the gender-specific NGOs—though they also concern themselves with matters of sexuality—there are numerous LGBTQ activist organizations that serve the local population. The most well-known include OUT South Africa and Gay and Lesbian Archives (GALA), the latter of which issues reports—in conjunction with the Media Diversity and Development Agency (MDDA)—on the representations of LGBTQ individuals in the media.

Due to its complicated history with the authoritarian mediascape during apartheid, the local media activism scene is vibrant. On a transnational level, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) operates as both an umbrella advocacy organization and “as a social movement with national chapters” (Misa.org, 2016). Founded in 1985 in Namibia, MISA now has local chapters in 11 countries, including Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. While not solely invested in
women’s representations in media, MISA articulates in its objectives that gender monitoring and advocacy are a priority. In addition to the local MISA chapter and the South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ), there are various NGOs that concern themselves primarily with media.

Among the most active are the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI), the “Save Our SABC” Coalition (SOS Coalition), the inter-institutional academic research center Media Policy and Democracy Project, the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ), and the newly forged Right to Know Campaign (R2K). Johannesburg is also home to the Media Diversity and Development Agency (MDDA), which was established to fund and produce citizen-oriented media content. As this brief overview illustrates, feminist and media activism in South Africa is more vibrant than in many of the other African nations; yet, the role of one NGO is rather unique.

**MMA’s Organizational Profile**

*Media Monitoring Africa* (formerly known as the *Media Monitoring Project*, 1993-2005) is an organization created during the immediate post-apartheid governmental, social, and cultural changes in South Africa. It was “established by a group of Australian and South African media academics who were concerned that the South African media would not cover the first democratic elections fairly” (William Bird, MMA Director). With this concern in mind, MMA began its systematic media monitoring of print, radio, and public broadcasting news. MMA produced its first election monitoring and gender reports in 1995 and has since evolved from a pure media “monitoring” group to a meaningful activist organization for South Africa’s civil society.

MMA organizes its mission around specific actions and goals. MMA’s four central goals are media democracy, media diversity, media quality, and media ethics. MMA seeks to
accomplish these through media monitoring, lobbying, activism, and alternative content production. The NGO recognizes that media democratization requires activism geared at both the structural dimensions of the mediascape as well as actual content production. Summed up briefly, MMA promotes equity and ethics in media reporting, broadcasting, and media policy, with—as I will argue—an overarching agenda around feminism and democracy.

MMA has established itself as somewhat of a model NGO of media activism in the Global South (Gallagher, 2001; van Zyl & Kantor, 1999). To date it is the most “influential organization of its kind in Southern Africa” with industry connections in “all important media sectors” (Tawana Kupe, Deputy Vice Chancellor at the University of the Witwatersrand & Chairman of the Board of Trustees at MMA, personal interview). MMA’s reputation transcends the South African borders and the NGO has actively worked with foreign NGOs in other countries of Southern Africa, and has contributed to transnational media activist initiatives, such as the GMMP and FreedomHouse.

In order to analyze MMA’s activist strategies and assess its impact on the composition, regulation, and output of the South African mediascape, MMA’s own organizational profile must be discussed. MMA’s organizational profile consists of its team members, governance, financial structure, and mission and goals. Since MMA grew from a small-group effort to a sizeable NGO, I begin by detailing the roles, work, and project areas of MMA’s “team members.”

**MMA Team Members**

As of February 2017, there are 16 full-time members employed at MMA, including the Director. There are three members in supervising roles, which includes the Head of Programs, Head of the Children’s Unit, and Head of the Policy Unit. The Head of Programs is immediately subordinate to the Director and supervises the Head of the Children’s Unit, and the Head of the
Policy Unit, as well as all team members assigned to the Monitoring Unit. In line with their organizational employment equity policy, MMA employs individuals of different genders, races, ethnicities, nationalities, and sexual orientations.

The gender stratification at MMA for full-time employees is equal—neither gender dominates the workforce. The MMA members in leadership positions are two females (one black, one white) and two males (both black), while the monitors reflect both genders equally and with high diversity of ethnicity. This representation is not tokenized, but rather, a heartfelt reflection of the NGO’s institutional policy and becomes indicative of the feminist organizational practices at MMA—a key element of FDMA organizations (further discussed in Chapter 6).

Head of Children’s Unit, George Kalu, recounts:

The last two positions that opened up… we really tried to get women for them and we are so fortunate to have Motshabi and Sarah on our team now. They’re great and each bring a different area of expertise. Motshabi is great for the children’s program and social media campaigns, and Sarah is really savvy for our monitoring reports. They add to the organization in important ways.

During times of public interest, such as elections, MMA hires—on average—ten to fifteen additional team members as part-time or full-time monitors. This is done in order to monitor news coverage in all seven languages, with a focus on public broadcasting news and newspaper coverage. In 2016, the seasonal monitors were all media studies students at the University of the Witwatersrand in Braamfontein, Johannesburg—just fifteen minutes north of MMA headquarters. As seasonal monitor Jacques explains: “It has been great working for MMA. Next to monitoring, [which] is my prime responsibility—I do English news since I’m
from Kenya—I also feel as though I got a sense of what this organization does. I get university credit, real-life experience, and it feels good.”

MMA members work on projects within their unit, but also collaborate on various special projects as they occur. As part of their organizational policy, members join sub-committees dedicated to various aspects of MMA’s mission and structure. These committees, with three to four members each, are focused on “monitoring and evaluation,” “sustainability,” “governance and leadership,” “human resources,” “finance,” and “programs.” Each of these committees is designed to improve and strengthen the NGO’s organizational setup and productivity.

MMA monitors report to their respective unit heads, the Head of Programs, and the Director. Above the Director, MMA’s Board of Trustees advises on financial and legal matters and provides guidance on MMA’s projects. The Director and Board are part of MMA’s organizational governance.

**MMA’s Governance**

MMA has been under the leadership of current director, William Bird, since his father stepped down in the late 1990s. William is a former broadcast journalist, who worked for the SABC, and who has influential connections in the industry. William recounts that he has always been passionate about media freedom and democracy, which is why he chose to work with his father at MMA until he retired. The Board elected William as successor. William self-describes his role as the Director around responsibilities that he solely is tasked with. He explains:

I’m ultimately responsible for the running of the organization, which means . . . everything that happens ultimately comes back to me. If it’s a disaster or it’s very good, it comes back to me. That’s something that . . . rests on my shoulders. I’m ultimately responsible for securing the funds for us to operate and for paying people’s salaries and
for raising the money to get people paid and also for determining the strategic direction of MMA. I mean, the Board plays a role in that, but overall [this is] what I do as the Director.

William has built a strong rapport for MMA and for himself as a media equity expert. As Amanda Rowen, MMA Communications Manager, explains: “William gets invited to speak at conventions all over the world. Organizations and universities seek him out because he knows how to get an important job done. I think we can all learn from his leadership.”

At the top of MMA’s organigram stands the Board of Trustees, which has to sign off on financial decisions and legal documents. William explains: “They are responsible for financial oversights, to check that we are clean [during audits and that we] are complying with the donors.” William reports a good relationship with the members of the Board, who come from different backgrounds, and who bring different areas of expertise. William explains:

They’ve a great deal of faith in my abilities to run the organization . . . [and] I have faith in them to provide strategic direction broadly . . . Then [if] we’ve got big issues . . . [they] offer advice and opinion . . . Provided we can get money for it and we think it’s a good idea and it’s in line with our theory of change, we can do whatever we like.

MMA’s Board of Trustees has members who bring expertise in different areas of media and human-rights work. The board is led by a Chairman. Deputy Vice Chancellor Tawana Kupe from the University of the Witwatersrand has been the Chairman for about ten years. Laura Pollecute, the longest-standing Board member, is the Director of the Ceasefire Campaign, an NGO invested in preventing domestic gun violence aimed at women. Another Board member is Mandla Langa, an artist/poet and former chair of the media regulatory body ICASA. The two
other Board members are Paula Fray, who is a former newspaper editor of the *Saturday Star*, and Justine Limpitlaw, a media lawyer.

The Board is also diverse in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity. Similarly to the gender stratification among MMA team members, William recounts the importance of having diversity on the Board: “We didn’t just want to say we are for gender equality. We wanted to demonstrate it [and] quite frankly—we are lucky to have these brilliant women on our Board.”

The two major points of contention between the MMA Board of Trustees and MMA Director William Bird are commitment to the organization, and financial needs. William reports that he does not think the Board is as involved as it should be. “They should also be helping to raise funds and secure the sustainability of the organization.” Funding in general is an issue for many NGOs, including MMA. William notes:

> We have been trying to buy a building and the Board keeps denying our request because our funding is largely project-based and this raises flags for our financial stability . . . If we can’t pay the bank back, then they [become] responsible.

William’s testimony illustrates the hardships of non-profit organizations around finances. While MMA remains largely funded by donors, the NGO has found ways to subsidize its financial structure.

**MMA’s Financial Structure**

MMA’s financial structure mirrors that of many NGOs. MMA is mostly donor-funded, with 65% of MMA’s of finances coming from donors. Thandi explains: “We are always applying for funding from local and international agencies . . . Any which way we can make our work fit, we’ll apply for it.” William adds: “We’re usually on one-year or three-year funding cycles for grants and donations.” Of the overall 65% of donor funding, the majority—80%—is
project-based and can only be utilized toward the funding and execution of certain projects. 20% of the donor funding is “core money” that goes toward supporting MMA at large. This includes wages for MMA employees, payment of rent for their current office spaces, and expenses such as maintenance and office supplies.

The remaining 35% of financial income derive from two sources—training and contract work. 5% income comes from training at the University of the Witwatersrand. Taryn, a part-time MMA employee, explains her role:

Every semester, we offer a course at Wits that prepares media studies majors for their journalism careers. We have a heavy focus on covering gender and children in the media. I teach them about journalism ethics, we rewrite stories, and I try to make them conscious of their power in telling other people’s stories. . . Sometimes we bring in children who tell them about how stories make them feel. This is always very powerful . . . Ultimately, we teach about ethical reporting.

Taryn further explains that MMA offers training session in newsrooms. “Those training sessions are much less frequent . . . Last year I did two . . . Editors and media executives don’t spend money on developmental workshops for their journalists.”

Where MMA’s funding model is different from many other NGOs—and perhaps even unique—is that 30% of its revenue derives from contract work. An example of this is their current contract with FreedomHouse, an American NGO active across the globe. FreedomHouse is invested in monitoring and publicizing the state of media freedom in all countries. MMA currently works with FreedomHouse on a media literacy campaign. The goal is to have all South Africans living in rural knowing how to navigate the Internet, and where to find credible information. David Lindgren from FreedomHouse explains: “MMA put a bid in for this project,
and we had worked with them before. They are very reliable, so it was clear that we would work with them again.” The project redistributes donor money from FreedomHouse to MMA for this particular project. At MMA, this money is utilized to pay project expenses, as well as fund Motshabi’s salary.

At the MMA induction meeting for new team members in July of 2016, the “finance” sub-committee brainstormed for lines of revenue for MMA. MMA Director William explains that he envisions the sustainability and future of MMA by increasing the paid monitoring services, as well as training. He explains: “What we would like to see happen is that we develop other areas, such as our online tools for journalists, and charge an institutional subscription fee.” William further explains that the threat of “running out of money” is always present, though he reassures that they have sustained for two decades, and is looking toward MMA’s future with enthusiasm.

A critique here is to be made around MMA’s recent efforts to sell monitoring services. This raises two ethical issues: First, through donors “directing” projects and activist agenda through money and business ideology; and second, the dangers of falling into a commercializing model for NGOs. As a non-profit NGO, MMA is reliant on donor funding to sustain the organization, its members, and activist efforts. As Reith (2010) notes, power manifests through money in NGO-donor relationships. Some institutions donate to civil society organizations as a way to boost their own reputation, while others expect their funds to be allocated in such ways that may forestall an NGO’s goals and project needs. At MMA, donors direct projects through specific monetary allocations thereby often constraining activist areas that might be most needed.
Additionally, I observed a tendency at MMA to consider moving into a more commercially-based model. Since donations for projects such as “gender in media” are decreasing, MMA sees an increasing need to commercialize and sell monitoring evaluations and training, putting their interest at odds as these services are sold to the very same media organizations they monitor as part of their democratization agenda. This represents both a conflict of interests as well as an important insight into the material limitations of media NGO work across the Global South.

Perhaps one of MMA’s biggest “selling feature” for the increase of contractual work is its consistency in term of mission and goals. MMA’s monitoring and activism seeks to improve the political economic structure of South Africa’s mediascape while centering the needs and identities of diverse South African audiences through more equitable programming and reporting. MMA’s two-fold mission has been consistent. Director William explains: “We have revised our mission statement numerous times over the years, but the values of a quality media that is ethical, diverse, and cultivates a democratic civil society has not changed.” William illustrates how important it is that NGOs have a well-articulated mission.

**MMA’s Mission and Goals**

MMA’s mission promotes four central goals: media democracy, media diversity, media quality, and media ethics. To describe MMA as a mere “monitoring” agency would undercut the important activist work the members do. As Chairman of the MMA Board of Trustees, Tawana Kupe, explains: “They do much more than monitoring. They also do advocacy . . . [MMA] monitor the media environment to make sure that there are no obstacles to media freedom and, more broadly, freedom of expression . . . On the other, also they monitor the media so that they follow ethical standards.” MMA embraces a human rights-based approach that centers media
freedom and democracy through ethical reporting and citizen-centered media. MMA highlights that this must include the fair representation of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, and religion in media.

As part of their promotional materials, MMA advertises their organizational values as “consistency,” “independence,” “uniqueness,” and “innovation.” These values describe a seasoned NGO that offers unique monitoring and advocacy, free from government control, with impact that grows as they stay up-to-date with the demands and technologies of the media industry. In the words of MMA Director William Bird: “Nobody does what we do with the same methodology and the same impact.”

In order to formulate their ideological anchoring and organizational beliefs, MMA has created a “Theory of Change” infographic (see Figure 3) that devises the path to citizen-centered, quality, and ethical media. MMA’s “Theory of Change” illustrates the NGO’s specific activities that ought to change certain characteristics of South African media.
Figure 3: MMA’s “Theory of Change” infographic (permission for use by William Bird).
The central activities in the “Theory of Change” infographic include media monitoring and research. The data from monitoring forms the basis for lobbying and advocacy, generation of alternative media content, as well as training for media professionals. Based on media monitoring and activism, the “Theory of Change” suggests that MMA is able to change inequitable media representations in content and facilitate a more democratically based media system by holding the powerful accountable. For media representation, the core value is the provision of quality content that—instead of focusing on the upper-class cisgender male—centers the needs of the diverse South African audiences. For media structure, the core value is a democratic mediascape that offers a multitude of opinions, condones critical reporting, remains free from government or capitalist intervention, and encourages feedback from civil society.

As much as MMA’s “Theory of Change” represents the value of their monitoring work to the everyday South African media consumer, it also represents the belief that media, culture, and societal well-being are inexorably linked. MMA summarizes the relationship between media, culture, and society through its ultimate goal, which is to hold the powerful to account so that hegemonic institutions and social elites respect human rights and perpetuate democratic ideals.

Even such formulation as the above “Theory of Change” is rather unique for a media activism NGO. While many other feminist or media NGOs, such as MISA, FXI, and GenderLinks advertise their mission and goals, MMA sets an example by considering the normative and ideological dimensions of the work. As MMA Head of Programs, Wellington Radu succinctly explains:

Our “Theory of Change” . . . I always battle with it. It is an ongoing process, never finished. We always revise, revise. I routinely bring it up in our meetings. Its basic task is to convey that we believe what we do matters for the greater good of this society. To
have government and capitalist interference [in our media] is surely doing a disservice to citizens in this country.

Wellington’s testimony alludes to the depth of awareness of the role of MMA as well as the larger relationship of the organization to the powerful institutions.

The “Theory of Change” begins with the activities of media monitoring and research. As its name suggests, MMA’s main activity remains media monitoring. As one MMA member describes: “We believe that when we monitor media and call the powerful out then media will be more diverse, ethical, and more accountable to the people it ought to serve” (Amanda Rowan, MMA Communications Manager). In order to understand how MMA aggregates and formulates these representational critiques, it is imperative to understand the NGO’s media monitoring method and data analysis techniques. The following section details how monitoring at MMA works.

**MMA’s Media Monitoring Process**

Strongly rooted in principles of media ethics, media monitoring is the one activity MMA has offered since its inception two decades ago. MMA currently provides monitoring of print and online journalism, public broadcasting newscasts, as well as public and community radio. Newspaper monitoring and SABC news monitoring receive priority as they are most widely accessed and consumed by South Africans.

Stakeholders in the South African mediascape know the NGO for its monitoring. As Reggy Moalusi, editor of *The Daily Sun*, explains: “[MMA does] media monitoring with regard to how the media cover certain aspects like the representation of children and women and how they are portrayed.” Lebo Ngobeni, a SABC broadcast journalist, summarizes: “MMA’s
monitoring reports during the election are famous, they do good quality research on how media cover election topics.”

On a day-to-day basis, the organization has monitors who read and listen to news sources in all eleven of South Africa’s official languages. During election periods, MMA hires additional monitors, amounting to well over 200 monitored news pieces per day. Though the process of monitoring is now digitized and run through an effective content analysis system, it takes many eyes, ears, and hands to input monitoring data. As MMA Director William explains: “You know, we used to do this all by hand. Copy news articles, put them into folders, color-code and tag them. It was quite the operation.”

In 2006, MMA invested in the creation of a proprietary data analysis program, specifically targeted to their unique monitoring needs, called “Dexter.” Dexter runs entirely online and functions similarly to other qualitative data analysis programs. Dexter can input and store media files, run user-generated analyses, and provides auto analyses of dominant subject categories that allows users to see trends in media coverage at a glance. Figure 4 below offers a visual of the Dexter homepage interface design, which lists the most recently added monitoring pieces, the date, as well as the medium.
While the MMA monitoring tool Dexter has data storage and analysis functions, it does not have the capacity to pull content automatically. Though all available radio programs in Johannesburg are automatically recorded onto the MMA server, Dexter still requires manual input of television and news data. MMA monitors read through newspaper articles, watch televised newscast, and listen to radio news. When monitors come across a media piece of interest—either for a special program, such as election coverage, or ongoing monitoring projects—they manually enter information into Dexter. For written news articles that appear online, monitors copy/paste articles of interest into the system. Print-only news articles are scanned and fed into the system as readable PDF files. Figure 5 offers a view of Dexter’s article entry.
Figure 5: Dexter news article input, including link to source, word count, and “analysis area.”

Figure 5 above visualizes the specific information monitors assign to articles. Next to specifying the medium source and link (for online content), monitors can assign tags to articles,
such as place, referenced speakers, and subject area. Tags may include generic descriptors such as “children,” “crime,” or “gender.” These tags then serve the categorization of the article and facilitate quicker keyword searches in the database. Monitors can also highlight important sections of articles that they believe might become useful for future analyses. Figure 6 below is an image of Dexter’s analysis feature.

**Figure 6:** Dexter article analysis for the exploration of content.

Overall, Dexter helps to partially automate the analysis portion of the media monitoring process. MMA team members can use Dexter to search the database for tags or download reports on special programs. Figure 6 represents the first level of analysis, where users can explore content within a specific time frame (last 7 days, last month, last 90 days, or specified range), search for keywords and tags, search for coverage in a specific medium or on a specific speaker, or display all pieces uploaded by a single user. Dexter automatically displays search results visually in tabulated graphs, as displayed in Figure 7 below. The automatically generated graphs include a categorization by source, speaker, topics, or geographical area. This preview function helps MMA monitors and analysts to detect dominant themes in media coverage.
Further, Dexter also allows users to export raw data spreadsheets as MS Excel files. The raw data spreadsheets include the publication source, medium (print, online, radio, television), and news piece title. When applicable, the sheet also includes the name and profession of the writer, word count, and link to news articles. For example, a raw data sheet of news pieces with the keyword “gender” within a 90-day period would bring up an average of 34 generic results. Monitors can then take the raw data sheets, filter through them for more specific criteria, and create monitoring statistics for reports.

A shortcoming Dexter as MMA’s content analysis program is the lacking functionality for visual and audio media. As SABC newscasts are important agenda-setters and information sources for South Africans, the monitoring of the public broadcaster is pivotal. The same goes for public broadcasting radio. However, MMA does not have access to written transcripts of
visual or audio newscasts, which substantially limits the content analysis capacity. In this case, MMA monitors watch/listen to newscasts and input a written summary into Dexter, though these are not complete transcripts. While a limitation and not ideal, MMA is still able to caption media coverage than any other NGO in South Africa.

As articulated in MMA’s “Theory of Change,” monitoring exists at the basis of MMA’s activism. The data they produce from monitoring news media provides the basis for their projects and initiatives around media representation. Media monitoring is the common denominator across all MMA team members. As Mike, MMA monitor and podcast producer, explains: “All of us working in MMA, I could rightfully say, is that the basic thing that we all do is monitoring. Nobody runs away from monitoring. We all monitor, whether we are formally inputting data into our tool Dexter, or we’re just looking out for news. Broadcast, print, online. We’re monitoring. We’re monitoring.” While monitoring is the central shared activity, MMA has been expanding its activist repertoire to include additional services and tool development.

**Additional Services and Tools**

Beyond monitoring and analysis service, MMA also engages in consulting, contracted monitoring, training for media professionals, online tool development, and a community Wi-Fi initiative. MMA offer media businesses analyses of their content and organizational structure to ensure that they foster equitable media production. Media businesses can also contact MMA to hire independent consultants. Additionally, MMA offers training opportunities for journalists, editors, and other media professionals. MMA trainers can visit their location to lead a workshop that is targeted to the organization’s needs. Alternatively, media professionals can sign up for one of the recurring “media ethics in reporting” courses offered at the University of the Witwatersrand.
Moreover, MMA has been developing online tools to help journalists and media professionals do their jobs with better resources. The most widely used statistics website by journalists is the MMA website Wazimap.co.za. Wazimap provides census data in a user-friendly interface design. MMA encourages journalists to utilize this tool so they can spruce up their stories with credible data about service delivery and elections. Another MMA website is Newstools.co.za, which offers media professionals and academics data on online “churnalism”—reposting of the same stories across various media platforms—and diversity statistics in news content. Both MMA’s consulting work as well as the provision of resources for media professionals speaks to its mission to democratize the mediascape and make content more inclusive.

In addition to resources for media professionals, MMA has also made efforts to narrow the digital divide. While mobile phones have increased overall access to technology and information, many online users are constrained by free Wi-Fi. Since 2016, MMA has cooperated with other media NGOs to develop a community Wi-Fi and messaging tool called Shika Moto (“catching fire”). Shika Moto allows users to use commercial Wi-Fi by opening it up to selected sites and instant messaging. The initiative is aimed to assist in the closing of the digital divide gap and promote access to information.

In addition to these journalist resources and community Wi-Fi initiatives, MMA has developed two websites specifically geared at children media users. Hashplay.co.za and the Webrangers initiative, co-sponsored by Google, aim at training children how to critically utilize the Internet and social media. MMA frames these resources around “digital rights” for children and to promote an online space that is ethical and does not harm young users. Similarly, MMA also created a website called TVDiet.co.za, where media consumers, including children, can
indicate what programs they watch in order to have their television choices compared to food (junk food, poison, healthy). TVDiet is an educational initiative that seeks to raise awareness on media quality and viewing habits.

As these various digital tools illustrate, MMA has become conscientious of the digital space. A key component around MMA’s mission for media quality is to provide digital resources that take into consideration the changing nature of the media profession as well as media consumption patterns. Overall, MMA has developed from a monitoring group to a media NGO that offers various services and digital tools, hence asserting its space in the South African mediascape as relevant and important.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce MMA’s organizational structure and main service—media monitoring. Before scholars can analyze particular organizational activities and derive conclusions about the role of an organization in a particular social setting (Smith, 2005), institutional ethnographies of organizations, Graheme (1998) argues, must begin with a thorough introduction of the organization under investigation. According to Eastwook (2006) and Smith (2005), scholars assess an organization’s profile through multiple data sources. In this chapter, I generate MMA’s organizational profile from both self-descriptions in organizational documents and promotional materials, as well in-depth interview data.

I began this chapter by contextualizing feminist activism and media-related NGO work in South Africa. This context provided insights into the South African activist landscape as well as introduced the NGOs that become part of MMA’s network of social relations (explained in following chapter). I then transitioned to focusing on MMA as an NGO, detailed its history, introduced the team members, its governance and financial structure. I then provided a detailed
account of MMA’s mission, vision, and goals via their “Theory of Change.” I closed this chapter with an overview of MMA’s monitoring process, data analysis program, and charted the additional services MMA offers next to monitoring.

As this organizational profile of MMA begins to illustrate, MMA occupies a crucial space in the South African mediascape. MMA’s “Theory of Change” is the first analytical moment that points to the NGO’s simultaneous activist focus on media structure and content. MMA’s two-fold mission to reform and improve the structural conditions of South Africa’s mediascape as well as enhance equitable content becomes central to FDMA framework I discuss in Chapter 6.

Overall, this chapter completes the first step to an institutional ethnographic analysis of organizations. According to Graheme (1998) and Smith (2005), organizational institutional ethnographies must include a thorough description of the organization’s structure and composition so that scholars can begin to analyze an organization’s relationships to hegemonic entities—or “ruling relations,” as Smith calls them—and other important stakeholders. The next chapter proceeds with the two following procedural elements of institutional ethnographies of organizations—network of social relations, and social positioning.
CHAPTER 5

Mapping MMA’s Social Relations and Social Position in the South African Mediascape

The purpose of this chapter is to detail and analyze MMA’s network of social relations and assess the NGO’s social position in the South African mediascape. In the previous chapter, I introduced MMA’s organizational profile and explained their media monitoring process as a first step to institutional ethnographic analyses of organizations (Grahame, 1998). Following the organizational introduction, Smith (2005) calls for a “mapping of social relations” through the explication and analysis of an organization’s relationships to “ruling” entities and organizational networks (p. 200). This mapping is the second step in the overall institutional ethnographic process for organizational analyses. The third step of this method is to analyze how organizations coordinate their social activities. Here, scholars analyze how an organization’s particular activities, strategies, and stakeholder relationships affect its own social positioning.

The first portion of this chapter is dedicated to a stakeholder analysis of MMA’s network of social relations. Per Smith (2005), I describe and analyze MMA’s social relations as they become evident through their stakeholder interactions. Through the revelation of social hierarchies, organizational practices, and cultural patterns, this first part of the stakeholder analysis makes visible who MMA engages with and how MMA relates to governing institutions and cultural stakeholders (Smith, 1987; 2005; 2006). MMA’s social relationships can be summarized around four central groups: media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public.
The second part of this chapter is an analysis of MMA’s social position in the South African mediascape. Through the examination of MMA’s stakeholder relationships I assess how MMA has woven into the organizational fabric of the local mediascape. The assessment of how organizations achieve a certain social status and how they secure their social position is the third step in the institutional ethnographic process for organizations (see also Grahame, 1998).

Building on the mapping of MMA’s social relations, and because organizational relationships affect activist strategies and activist impact, I argue that two central factors have contributed to MMA’s social standing: reputation and impact.

MMA’s reputation as consistent, innovative, and credible NGO, as well as MMA’s measurable impact through consistency and long-term engagements in local media undergirds the NGO’s stakeholder relationships and influence in the South African mediascape. MMA already has—and continues to—improve the structural conditions of the media industry as well as helped the production of more equitable content. I close this chapter by offering the strategic rhetorical choices MMA makes to avoid alienating stakeholders and encourage a more collaborative approach for the sake of equality and democracy.

In order to analyze MMA’s relationships with stakeholders, “ruling” entities, and other organizations, I begin by charting MMA’s network of social relations across four groups: media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public.

Mapping MMA’s Social Relations

In the spirit of institutional ethnography, scholars must analyze an organization’s relationships to hegemonic institutions (such as government or powerful media), other organizations, and the public. Smith (1987) calls this a network of social relations. Through the revelation of social hierarchies, organizational practices, and cultural patterns, institutional
ethnographic analyses make an organization’s network of social relations visible (Smith, 1987; 2005; 2006). MMA has relationships with governing institutions, media and cultural stakeholders, and the public. Thus, MMA’s network of social relations can be mapped around four central groups: media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public. In order to establish MMA as an FDMA organization, I must begin by analyzing its network of social relations.

For the purpose of explaining and analyzing the various social relations of MMA within the South African mediascape, I begin by visually illustrating MMA’s relationships to media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public. In ethnographic research, visual representations can help make visible the social relations of actors and institutions of a particular cultural setting (Smith, 2006; Diamond, 2006; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). In her opening description of the institutional ethnographic method, Smith (2006) explains that researchers “put into words supplemented in some instances by diagrams or maps what she or he discovers about how people’s activities are coordinated” (Smith, 2006, p. 1). To map such networked realities, LeCompte and Schensul (1999) recommend the use of “causal networks” or “sociograms,” both of which allow an organization to be placed in relationship to others.

The following sociogram (Figure 9) visually represents MMA’s relationships with four groups—stakeholders in the mediascape, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public. These four groups constitute the entities and people MMA engages with most frequently.
Figure 8: Sociogram of MMA’s social relations including media stakeholders, other NGOs, regulatory bodies, and the public.
Figure 8 is a sociogram that visually illustrates MMA’s social relations at a glance. This includes the four main groups with which MMA developed organizational relationships, as well as some of the entities that become the target of MMA’s FDMA.

Within the media stakeholder group, the sociogram details the three-tier organization of South African media around public broadcasting, commercial/private media, and independent media. The upper half of the sociogram includes the specific media and names of titles and stations with which MMA interacts. The organizational relationship also maps the local and transnational NGOs and activist groups among MMA’s coalitions or alliances. MMA’s relationships to regulatory bodies includes all important media regulation entities in South Africa, including ICASA, GSIC, and CCC. Lastly, MMA also interacts directly with the South African public through alternative media coverage, publication of media monitoring reports, social media, or one of their many digital tools and websites.

The following section of this chapter explains MMA’s relationships with each of the four groups by drawing on interview data with MMA members and members of the groups.

**MMA’s Relationships with Media Stakeholders**

I began my in-depth individual interviews with MMA members, the Director, and members of the Board of Trustees through a brainstorming activity that asked participants to identify the stakeholders in the South African mediascape and comment on a contemporary issue. The conversations about the stakeholders, the important entities, main media corporations, or “key players,” as George Kalu of MMA describes them, forms the basis for this part of the stakeholder analysis. The interview data made visible MMA’s relationships to the public broadcaster SABC, commercial media, and independent media.
During the brainstorming activity, participants immediately noted the gulf between the intent of media regulation to create a three-tier broadcasting model—composed of public media, commercial media, and community media—and the reality of media in South Africa in which this model falls short. Thandi explains: “We are ‘supposed’ to have a three-tier model, but you can’t really count the SABC in because they are becoming a government-controlled broadcaster.” As Fourie (2003) suggests, the SABC was never able to fully assume its role as a nation-builder and developer in South Africa and requires policy restructuring from the ground up.

The SABC is internally split into three core areas: SABC TV, SABC Radio, and SABC Online. SABC TV hosts the five main news and entertainment networks. SABC Radio hosts three major radio channels. SABC Online houses the SABC News Online platform that cross-promotes and centralizes content from SABC TV and Radio, while offering online exclusive content. Overall the mandate of the SABC remains to operate in the interest of the South African people by offering culturally relevant content to all ethnicities, while contributing to nation-building post-apartheid. Still, the SABC’s executive decisions about programming and content suggest a stark departure from the mandate (see also Ciaglia, 2015; Ciaglia, 2016; Duncan, 2000; Fourie, 2003; Tomaselli, 2002).

MMA’s relationship with the public broadcaster SABC is thus complex. It involves monitoring, interactions between MMA and SABC reporters, uncomfortable conversations with editors and journalists, and even lawsuits. Between 2015-2017, MMA was involved in collective action against the SABC. Together with SOS and R2K, MMA sued the SABC around the controversy of Muthambi’s 2015 amendment that put control over the public broadcaster into her hands. The amendment to the Broadcasting Act of 1996 effectively granted the appointment of
the SABC Executive Board to the Communications Minister and President. The lawsuit went from ICASA to the ad hoc committee in Parliament where Muthambi’s amendment was declared unconstitutional. MMA members actively recall the divergence of the SABC’s mandate and actual organizational practices, which constitutes a major concern for media diversity, quality, ethics, and democracy.

While MMA members recognize the importance of the public broadcaster around issues of access and agenda-setting, they explain that interactions with the SABC require tenacity, precision, and often litigation. As Mike explains: “We monitor and record all SABC outlets every day of the week, year-round. Many people only access the SABC so it’s a big focus for us at MMA.” Musa notes correspondingly: “I have been with MMA for seven years. Sometimes it takes months before we get to a point where they’re [SABC] so stubborn that litigation is the only way to move forward.” Because of the SABC unstable governance, contact persons in the various departments change frequently, making it difficult to direct complaints to the appropriate person. Litigation involves the formal submission of a complaint to one of the regulatory bodies—in the SABC’s case, ICASA. As Musa further explains, the SABC is constitutionally mandated to respond to ICASA inquiries, so MMA makes submissions to the regulatory body in cases where the SABC fails to respond to urgent complaints—such as the Muthambi amendment case.

MMA Director William explains the relationship between MMA and the SABC from his own experience. He notes: “I used to work as a broadcast journalist. I know how they [the SABC] run their business and I still know many executives from my time in the industry.” He further notes the “pivotal” role the SABC plays in South African public opinion. George explains: “We have a good working relationship with some of the executives and editors at the
William explains: “Look, journalists aren’t bad people. They aren’t out there to actively undermine our democracies . . . They do it because that’s how they’ve been taught, which is the institutional culture.”

MMA members describe the NGO’s relationship with the SABC around both content and structural activism. For structural activism, George explains: “My colleague Lethabo has done great work on workplace culture in newsrooms, including the SABC, and while they have more women than other media companies, the decisions about content come from the top.” Structural inequalities often lead to content misrepresentation (Byerly & Ross, 2008). As Thandi notes: “When the public broadcaster isn’t governed right, it emits messages that only cater to the social elite, or over-represent the male perspective.”

Structural activism continues as a key element of MMA’s relationship toward the public broadcaster. William explains that the SABC has tried to shape up its image as a citizen-centered public broadcaster through “news content planning workshops,” during which viewers, listeners, and users could provide input about content. He notes: “They did this because of pressure from civil society organizations like us but the outcome of these meetings left much to be desired.” Banda (2007) similarly argues that the SABC implemented some suggestions for entertainment programming, while ignoring critical questions about media policy and reporting.
Though the public broadcaster SABC shares the largest viewership, commercial broadcasting media have increasingly privatized and merged. Wellington explains the effects of media conglomeration as follows:

If you look at that, you then realize that we don’t have as many media as we think we do. We seem to have a diversity of titles, but owned by few key people . . . then among their titles, they share their content, so you don’t get a diversity of content either.

Wellington’s testimony alludes to the content and structural inequalities in an increasingly converging mediascape (see also De Beer, Malila, Beckett & Wassermann, 2016).

In the commercial media sector, MMA has curated relationships with editors and media executives in print, television, and online news media. MMA’s interactions are often concerning media content and violations around media ethics and reporting. An example of MMA’s weekly engagements with media professionals are their MADs and GLADs, which are part of the “Children’s Program” and are a firm agenda item during Monday Meetings. Throughout the week, MMA members aggregate news stories about children and bring them to the meeting to discuss which pieces made “glad” and which made them “mad.” The MADs/GLADs of the week become a reciprocal learning opportunity, both for MMA members and the institutions that produce the articles. Whether “glad” or “mad,” MMA members democratically vote which cases to further investigate. Upon the voting, a MMA member volunteers to contact the journalists and editors of the MADs/GLADs with the points that made the article stand out—good or bad.

The GLAD pieces offer journalistic integrity by protecting the identity of the child and reporting ethically on the issue. The MAD pieces often stand in violation of Clause 8 of the Code of Ethics and Conduct for Media, specified in the South African Constitution, which tasks journalists with executing exceptional care in covering matters related to a child. The MAD
pieces often reveal a child’s identity, without needing to, or include a child’s picture in a vulnerable situation. The journalist or editor in question then has an opportunity to respond to the inquiry. MADs/GLADs are a good way to train incoming MMA members in monitoring, as well as to perpetually engage with writers to ensure they are upholding their ethical standards in reporting. Many times, journalists directly respond to email inquiries, offering to issue immediate correction or withdrawal.

For example, MMA issued a MAD to *The Sowetan* on September 22, 2016 for identifying a child by name, revealing the child’s home address, and including a picture of the child in a vulnerable situation, visibly in pain and bloody. An exchange occurred between MMA and a *Sowetan* journalist in the following days, resulting in a withdrawal of the story from *The Sowetan Live*, the tabloid’s online presence. These interactions are not limited to the MADs/GLADs of the “Children’s Program” but rather, symbolize MMA’s stakeholder relationships with the commercial media sector as a whole.

The editor of *The Daily Sun* explains jokingly: “MMA, yes, we know them well . . . We do interact with the MMA when they have concerns about how we cover children . . . When they call I know we are in trouble. [Laughter].” A former journalist at *The Sowetan* critically notes: “MMA has friends in good places . . . Many times, all it takes is an email.” Similarly, a journalist for IOL online news recounts: “We try to deal with MMA complaints swiftly . . . They are well-respected . . . Always good to avoid further steps and stay in their good graces.” As these testimonies illustrate, MMA has built a strong reputation with commercial media stakeholders.

The organizational and social relationships between MMA and the print sector of South African independent media is characterized by cooperation and integration. MMA Director William is a frequent contributor to *The Mail & Guardian* and *The Daily Maverick*, both known
for their non-partisan and critical media coverage of politics and social issues. Amanda explains: “William has this recurring column in the *Maverick*, where he is . . . shall we say very blunt about what is happening in the media.” William was offered a column in the mid 2010s because of his reputation as a media expert. The editor of The Mail & Guardian also frequently publishes commentary by other NGO leaders, including GenderLinks and FXI.

Waltz (2005) notes that activists oftentimes “strive for mainstream appeal, and to try to reach a very broad audience . . . their intention is to make activism mainstream” (p. 4). Though the production of their own media content is not a focus at MMA, and the outlets for MMA commentary are independent, not commercial, William recognizes the importance of contributing to media discourse. He explains: “You can’t try to influence what is covered and how by just critiquing, cuz, you have to give them alternative representations, too.”

Across MMA’s interactions with stakeholders in the South African mediascape—public broadcasting, commercial media, and independent media—MMA was able to establish relationships that facilitate its FDMA. The relationships toward stakeholders are characterized by two-fold FDMA that advocates for more equitable representation in media content, and more democratic organizational practices and industry structures. As part of MMA’s four central goals—to increase media quality, enable media ethics, and foster media diversity, and advance media democracy—the NGO frequently interacts with regulatory bodies in the mediascape.

**MMA’s Relationship with Media Regulatory Bodies**

In South Africa, there are two independent regulatory bodies that focus on media regulation, licensing, and conduct—BCCSA and ICASA. BCCSA is a self-regulatory body in the form of an “independent judicial tribunal,” established in 1995, whose role is to adjudicate complaints from the public about broadcasts by members of the National Association of
Broadcasters – including the SABC, all commercial broadcasters, and the majority of community radio stations. ICASA is the independent regulatory body established in 2000 to regulate telecommunications broadcasting and licensing. The Broadcasting Act specifies that any alleged breach of license or content conditions must be brought to the CCC at ICASA (see also Brand, 2011).

MMA has a reciprocal relationship with the BCCSA and ICASA. By reciprocal I mean that MMA both brings cases to these regulatory bodies while also serving the regulatory bodies in various capacities. One capacity is that MMA members function as experts during complaints hearings and legal proceedings. Wellington explains: “Carol sat on the BCCSA committee for print media for nearly a decade . . . and now Thandi gets called into ICASA hearings as an expert in media all the time.” Another capacity is that they seek out MMA’s opinion when revising policy. Thandi explains:

So the press council [at BCCSA] every few years updates their press code . . . They would say, “Hey we are revising our press code. We’re calling for input” . . . and ask for input from MMA because of its objective position and ability to analyze the media in a way that keeps the interest of the public and the consumer in the center . . . The larger issue this year [in] 2016 was that if you’re a news outlet or news room that signs on to the press code for your print publications, your online content . . . could get away with anything online, pretty much. So we helped them revise the press code for online journalism . . . Now the news media, even if they’re completely online, have to adhere to our press code.
Another agency that affects South African media policy and regulation is the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). The GCIS is the official agency for government media, chaired by the Minister of Communications, currently Faith Muthambi. The GCIS agency centralizes government communications to the public, including official statements. Though not a regulatory body like BCCSA or ICASA, the policies at GCIS have influence on the public broadcaster SABC. Wellington describes MMA’s advocacy on behalf of others with respect to a current project with GCIS, where MMA is responsible for the drafting of new broadcasting policy. Wellington explains: “They approached us and said, ‘Look, we want you to do research that informs our policy on media diversity and transformation.’ Based on our research we can actually advocate for certain entities and try to foster change.” Though MMA has sued the SABC and Communications Minister Muthambi for misconduct around the SABC mandate and Executive Board, the GCIS seems to continue to hold the NGO in high regard. It is possible that the government entity might become interested in having present and past MMA members work for their office.

As these selected instances of MMA interaction with media regulatory bodies illustrates, the NGO has partially become a component of the regulatory processes by virtue of its policy work and expert depositions. MMA both brings cases to ICASA and BCCSA for litigation as well as serves these regulatory bodies in various capacities. Many times, litigation and FDMA occurs in conjunction with other civil society groups, NGOs, and activist groups.

**MMA’s Relationships with other NGOs and Activist Groups**

Over the years, MMA has cultivated relationships, alliances, and coalitions with various other activist groups, civil society organizations, and NGOs in Africa. These relationships are mutually strategic and facilitate inter-organizational support. For media monitoring, Hoynes
Media monitoring is often issue-specific, and this can provide a substantive basis for coalition building between media activists and organizations focused on other policy domains” (p. 105).

Inter-organizational collaborations and alliances also bolster MMA’s own organizational impact, as MMA has an opportunity to become involved in additional activist projects. MMA researcher Sarah explains: “We have a great relationship with FXI . . . we also work with R2K through the SOS Coalition.” A member of FXI notes: “We can mutually broaden our reach by supporting each other . . . FXI is part of the SOS Coalition, which was founded by MMA.” Thandi explains: “We are officially part of the SOS Coalition but we also collaborate with others outside of the coalition . . . for example DemocracyWorks. They’re not media-specific but we share interests.”

For some South African civil society organizations, it is beneficial to have an established and reputable NGO such as MMA become part of their activism. Chairman of the MMA Board Tawana explains: “The MMA get invited into many boats. Just like I have to apportion my time carefully, they have to see how it benefits their mission and what impact it will bring.” Upon the formalization of the R2K campaign, for instance, MMA advised the founding members on media activist strategies surrounding the constitutionality of the SABC.

Though MMA’s relationship with FXI has been stable over two decades, other relationships have subsided, including that with R2K. Sara and her colleagues deemed R2K “too radical” because the group formalized very quickly, drawing media attention through aggressive activism. She recounts: “They started chaining themselves to the SABC gates. We [at MMA] also protest but we try to do more with research and litigation.” As R2K’s activism is primarily
geared at the public broadcaster SABC, converging activist interests fostered inter-organizational collaboration between R2K and the SOS Coalition, while diverging with MMA.

MMA members also report on the difficulty of collaborating with GenderLinks, though the NGO remains in alliance. Director William explains: “We used to do more work with GenderLinks but the issue is that all they do anymore is critique gender inequality without offering solutions.” This critique has also been articulated by Geertsema’s (2010) ethnographic study of GenderLinks where she articulated the difficulty of fostering change on gender issues through their current activist strategies. Though inter-organizational relationships are dynamic and change, they do provide opportunity to engage with South African media consumers more frequently.

**MMA’s Relationships with the Public**

MMA demonstrates the importance for activist organizations to be visible to the public. This includes building relationships with audiences and making civil society feel engaged and included in their mission. Wellington explains: “You see, we don’t do this for the powerful. We do this for the person turning on the telly in rural South Africa, not seeing any representation of themselves.” In many case, MMA communicates directly with the South African media consumer.

MMA facilitates relationships with direct audience members through both technologically mediated as well as interpersonal communication. The mediated ways in which MMA directly engages with South African media consumers is through op-ed pieces in newspapers, television appearances, or social media or when South Africans uses of one of their digital media tools. MMA also speaks to South African media consumers directly in physical, interpersonal settings, such as during workshops. Mothsabi explains:
I coordinate a rural media literacy program in Limpopo. We at MMA recognize that it’s important to speak to the people directly, to find out what matters to them, where they think the issues lie.

In addition to workshops and focus groups, MMA also tries to directly intervene in South Africans’ media consumption habits. Director William explains: “The tools are important in two ways: They let us aggregate data about user preferences and they let us tell users which media outlet offers more credible information.” MMA accomplishes this by advertising the use of their online tools. Phakamile succinctly notes: “I manage one of our social media accounts and I try to post numerous times a day so we are always present in the minds of users.” Overall, MMA recognizes the central route to organizing for social change involves the mobilization of the public. As this analysis of MMA’s network of social relation illustrates, MMA has developed crucial relationships with hegemonic media stakeholder, political regulatory bodies and activist groups, as well as the South African public.

In the first part of this chapter, I mapped MMA’s network of social relations in South Africa amid media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public. According to Smith (1987, 2005), a third and subsequent analytical aspect of mapping social relations includes how organizations coordinate their social activities. Upon establishing the main entities in an organization’s network of social relations, scholars can then analyze the organization’s particular activities and strategies that lead to its social positioning. The following section details how MMA has achieved its status in the South African mediascape and how the NGO maintains it.
MMA’s Social Position in South Africa

According to Smith (2005) an institutional ethnographic analysis of social relations seeks to further unveil the underlying ideological and organizational factors that establish an entity in relation to others. For individuals, she calls this the “subject[‘s] position in the public sphere” (p. 9). For organizations, it is their social position within their networks of social relations. In an institutional ethnography of an activist organizations such as MMA, scholars should unveil the key conditions that undergird an organization’s social position. For MMA, the key aspects that creates and maintains its social position in South Africa is its reputation and impact.

Across the relationships between MMA and various groups and entities, media professionals continuously point to MMA’s reputation and influence. The overall social relations between the four major groups—media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs, and the public—illustrate that MMA’s reputation has helped the NGO secure its social positioning. MMA has achieved this through its reputation as a reliable, consistent, and innovative NGO.

MMA’s Reputation

From the interview data with MMA members, journalists, media executives, and other civil society organizers, it becomes evident that MMA was able to curate its reputation through three central techniques: Reliable and credible research, consistent intervention, and organizational innovation. MMA’s name carries the word “monitoring,” and the research is a key element of MMA’s organizational identification. MMA has been able to build and maintain its reputation because the NGO has become a household name in South Africa for quality media research. MMA’s high-quality research is a first and very important aspect of MMA’s overall social standing.
MMA’s media monitoring serves as a two-fold purpose: first, media content monitoring is an analytic tool to challenge representation; second, policy and governance monitoring is an analytic tool to challenge structural inequalities in the political economy. As Hoynes (2005) suggests “media monitoring became valuable to media activists precisely because research produces knowledge that has a cultural authority that activism lacks” (p. 107).

Similarly, Gallagher (2001) notes that quality empirical research is needed to back up critiques. MMA makes use of quantitative content analyses as well as qualitative focus group research, often creating mixed-methods approaches to adequately ground media critiques and activist strategies. Gallagher explains: “For . . . monitoring groups, a sound research design is essential to ensure that the audience data they present have credibility” (p. 135).

Activist groups and NGOs, more so than other types of groups—need to manage their reputation and credibility in the eye of the public and the stakeholders. Hoynes (2005) cautions that journalists and citizens will “dismiss media critics” and activism if not properly grounded and publicized (p. 100). MMA’s research expertise is the main reason why transnational NGOs such as the GMMP and FreedomHouse contract them for their services. In turn, these large-scale contractual engagements bolster reputation and validate the quality of MMA’s research. The editor of The Daily Sun, South Africa’s leading tabloid, has received many inquiries from MMA during his tenure. He explains: “We respect their research, they do it well, yes.”

Secondly, MMA develops its reputation as a credible and influential NGO through its consistent intervention. I understand “consistency” as a sub-category of reputation in two central terms: sticking to goals, and keeping a firm mission over time. In other words, activist NGOs need a clear and sustained activist identity. As Fassin (2009) explains, activist organizations often advocate goals and then diverge from them, thus undermining their credibility and impact.
Mitchell (2015) surveyed 150 transnational NGOs and similarly found that “singleness of focus” as an attribute of effectiveness. In the case of MMA, all media professionals identified MMA’s goals as monitoring and activism to improve policy and actual media content. MMA has a clear organizational identity and there is little ambiguity about their work.

Another aspect of reputation around consistency is ensuring that activism occurs long-term. MMA Director William explains: “We have been doing this for a long time and have not wavered from our initial premise . . . Some critics gave us a year, five years. Twenty-two years later, we’re still here—with the same message.” Thandi similarly notes: “I have been with MMA for over half a decade and we have not changed our mission once.” A journalist at City Press explains: “I actually learned about MMA in a journo seminar . . . When I entered the profession, they were there, doing the same work.” Bunnage (2014) identifies long-term commitment to the same goals as a key factor for activist success and retention.

A third way in which MMA secures its reputation with stakeholders is through innovation. MMA Director William explains why innovation is pivotal through the case of MMPZ, which MMA helped set up in 1996. He explains:

I think they’re still going just barely cuz they just didn’t innovate, you know. They kept doing the same thing . . . and when the politics wasn’t changing, you can’t— you’ve got to offer things, even if it’s presenting same things in slightly different ways, really meet people differently.

William’s testimony explains that while consistency is important, activist NGOs must both adapt to the changing media industry, regulation, and politics and adjust activist strategies.

MMA has been able to stay relevant by creating their own activist tools and adapting activist strategies. William reaffirms that innovation has “ensured our existence.” George
explains: “When online news media began to really become popular, we started doing work on
development of digital rights . . . access to information.” A member of FXI notes at a SOS Coalition meeting that
MMA is “on the pulse of technology.” Sarah explains: “Part of my job as researcher with MMA
is to find out what technologies people are using to communicate and where they get their news
from. This is obviously always changing.” MMA develops digital media tools catered to both
South African media users (such as “Twitter Diet”) as well as media professionals (such as
“Wazimap” or “NewsTools”).

MMA adjusts methods for activism including specific tactics and broader strategies
(Paquette, 2002) in order to stay relevant in the eyes of stakeholders. Thandi explains: “I am with
the policy unit and probably one of my favorite project is when we moved our activism into the
online space.” A contributor to The Mail & Guardian notes: “William has been writing op-ed
pieces for us since we began. He knew the importance of online journalism before consumers
knew it.”

As this overview of MMA’s reputation indicates, the organization asserts its space in
the South African mediascape through its high-quality research, consistency, and innovation.
Reputation links to impact in the sense that only reputable entities can truly influence their
stakeholders. In the case of MMA, the NGO has forged a unique space for itself in the South
African mediascape.

**MMA’s Impact**

MMA has been building its reputation as a monitoring and activism NGO since its
inception in 1994. MMA has undoubtedly affected the current state of South Africa’s
mediascape and impacted media representation in content as well as media policy and
organizational practices in the overall political economic structure. In their promotional
documents and official website, MMA makes a statement about its impact around the use of their monitoring work and their invitations by media corporations as experts. MMA’s own description reads:

Our impact cannot only be measured by what our partners say about us, but also by the usefulness of our work and how people engage with our work. The President and the Vice President of the Republic of South Africa have quoted our work on media related issues. Not only government see the value of our work. Media from the public broadcaster, SABC, to other independent broadcasters, print and online newspapers and community radio regularly invite us to comment on critical media issues.

Using the data from participant-observations of client meetings as well as MMA meetings, combined with the interviews with MMA members and media professionals, I was able to derive a more nuanced analysis of MMA’s impact: MMA’s impact can be seen through their impressive activist output, continuous funding, and their sustained engagement over time.

Scholars and activists alike note that the impact of activism is difficult to determine and assess. Meyer (2005) critically explains that “most social movement organizations lack the resources to assess the[ir] impact” (p. 202). This is particularly difficult for activist NGOs in the Global South. Specifically with respect to analyzing MMA’s impact as a result of their activist projects, Director William explains:

One of our organizational weaknesses is that we don’t have systematic M&E—monitoring and evaluation—for everything we do. In some of the projects where we get money . . . funding or contract work . . . consultants come in and see whether the campaign was effective, and how. We just don’t have the capacity to do that across all activities right now. We have some data, yeah, but nothing comprehensive.
Though lacking empirical evidence in the form of numbers, MMA’s impact can be assessed in three ways.

First, MMA’s impact can be assessed around their activist output. As of February 2017, MMA has produced over 100 monitoring reports and facilitated an equal amount of media policy submissions. Special programs include projects on gender, children, race, sexuality, and media freedom. Gallagher (2001) explains that activist output are specific achievements of media monitoring and advocacy, while the impact of these efforts, “the extent to which they have influenced practices and mentalities in an enduring way,” are more difficult to assess (p. 188).

For MMA, Thandi explains:

It’s easy to measure output. We’ve got work, we’ve got activities, we’ve got things that we do, but the impact of that is often difficult [to measure]. I mean the number of reports that we publish, the monitoring results that we put out, the social media work that we do, the policy submissions, the tools that we build—those are very easy to define. They’re very easy to measure. They’re very easy to see.

Visibility is also a key characteristic of impact for the Chairman of the MMA Board of Trustees. Tawana explains that MMA shows impact when their monitoring reports and publications become resources to others. He explains: “I think that one sees impact is when media organizations and other people cite the MMA as a source around how the media perform. . . then that fosters credibility, when you become a resource.” Citations foster reputation, and the visibility leads to more funding. MMA has been cited in media and government materials through GCIS.
A second way to assess MMA’s impact in the South African mediascape is their continuous funding. MMA has been able to sustain itself almost entirely on funding and donations since its inception in 1994. The longevity of the NGO on the basis of funding illustrates that institutions and private investors think their enterprise worthwhile. Tawana, Chairman of the MMA Board explains that funding illustrates both rapport and impact. He explains: “I think that [donors] believe that it’s useful to have an organization like this and that it has a meaningful impact.” Wellington similarly notes: “We have become somewhat of a ‘epitome’ for media monitoring so many fund on a continuous basis and are very happy with what we do.” In their promotional documents, MMA has gathered testimony by media experts and professionals who attest to the NGO’s impact.

Thirdly, MMA’s impact can be assessed through its longevity, its sustained engagement over time. As Gallagher (2001) explains, assessing impact “requires retrospective study covering many years” (p. 188). Carol summarizes MMA’s impact over time and explains:

If you look at particular policies, especially broadcasting, or even print policies that come out, had MMA not existed, we would have been further down the slope. Yes, we are on a download slope, but we would have been further down the slope.

MMA has helped create a section in the Broadcasting Act that specifies ethical reporting on children and is currently working with ICASA on a digital rights and Internet governance policy. Both are examples of how MMA’s existence and activism has shaped the mediascape in South Africa.
Similarly, MMA Board Chairman Tawana poses that MMA has helped foster and stabilize South Africa’s media democracy. He explains:

Has the media environment changed because of Media Monitoring Africa? I can’t claim empirically so, but I think the environment, while things are not good, would be significantly worse if an MMA didn’t exist.

William summarizes that evidence for their impact comes through their consistency, how they have affected policy, and journalistic practice. He explains: “Every now and then, we put together a report to track how coverage has changed over time.” He notes particular improvement in journalistic coverage on matters related to children:

We get good funding for the children’s project, so we can put a lot of energy into that particular program—slowly, we are seeing that journalists become better at protecting children’s identity . . . not exposing them in vulnerable situations . . . cuz ten years ago, it was a different story.

Though media activism impact is difficult to measure and determine (Gallagher, 2001; Hoynes, 2005), MMA’s long and consistent intervention and credibility has undoubtedly affected the development and current status of South African media. MMA’s reputation and track record has aided the NGO in becoming part of the South African mediascape.

**MMA as Part of the South African Mediascape**

In promotional documents, MMA calls media corporations “partners” and their relationships “partnerships.” Among their four partners, they cite corporations in the media industry, oversight structures, civil society organizations, and citizens. This rhetorical shift indicates a less threat-oriented and more collaboratively oriented approach. Den Hond and de Bakker (2007) distinguish between radical groups—whose goal is to de-institutionalize
stakeholders—and reformative groups, who aim to make existing institutions more democratic and citizen-centered. MMA falls into the reformative category since it monitors and performs FDMA to make the South African mediascape more democratic. MMA acts as a watchdog, both in terms of media content and structure, and has cultivated partnerships with journalists, editors, and programming executives, who are stakeholders in the South African mediascape.

MMA has woven into the organizational fabric of the South African mediascape through “necessitating” and “aestheticizing.” Patterson and Allen (1997) studied how stakeholders perceive the legitimacy of activist organizations via impression management theory. The authors found that activist organizations need to “necessitate” and “aestheticize.” “Necessitating” occurs when activist organizations support their activism by continuously articulating their motivations and their mission. Activist organizations “aestheticize” by reminding the public about the benefits of their existence. Both “necessitating” and “aestheticizing” fosters credibility and the need for their existence. MMA’s long-term engagement has situated the NGO as an important entity in the South African mediascape and journalists receive training that includes awareness about the existence of the NGO.

Relationships between activist and stakeholders are often characterized by animosity and confrontation. In the case of MMA, media professionals, journalists, and broadcasting executives actually appear to value the existence of the NGO. An example of this is MMA’s interaction with The Daily Sun, the leading tabloid. Despite having taken the paper to litigation at ICASA at numerous occasion, the editor still describes their relationship as follows: “There is a mutually acceptable relationship between us and the MMA.” The question to address here is how MMA develops and maintains relationships with stakeholders.
Media professionals in South Africa are part of MMA’s media stakeholder relationships. Framed as a “partnership,” MMA needs to seek productive dialogues with media professionals and executives in this group. Burchell and Cook (2013) examine how NGO-stakeholder dialogue strategically transforms engagements. The authors found that dialogue frames and shapes relationships between NGO and larger stakeholders, underscoring the importance of frequent interactions. MMA’s Director analogizes MMA’s relationships with media stakeholders with an “open hand” and a “fist.”

The “open hand” is friendly, provides monitoring reports and information, offers training, and validates a job well done. The “fist” enforces media policy and regulation, holds media producers to their mandates, and involves the public through published opinion pieces and television appearances. When asked about another analogy, former MMA researcher Carol explains: “I used to go on TV on matters related to media policy and coverage. I would say, ‘MMA is that friend, that even on your bad day will be there. We’ll help you get back on your feet.’” William further explains, “I would rather employ the open hand to keep the SABC and the tabloids in check but the reality is that the SABC breaks the rules all the time.”

As the “open hand” and “fist” analogy demonstrates, MMA’s relationships with stakeholders in the South African mediascape is dynamic. Meikle (2002) calls relationships between media activist organizations and stakeholders a “pragmatic symbiosis” (p. 19). Media activist organizations, such as MMA, openly criticize media while interweaving into the fabric of the mediascape, thus taking on a unique and indispensable role. MMA’s rapport and impact continuously affirmed through stakeholder actions—e.g., withdrawal of stories, issuing of corrections, acknowledging the role of MMA.
MMA is also nimble in its tactical choices, activist strategies, and degrees of confrontational activism. Dreiling and Wolf (2001) note that one well-known strategy, used by both reformative and radical groups, is to increase the legitimacy of their demand and to strengthen their position in the organizational field by seeking support from other powerful and legitimate actors. MMA Director William explains: “We can afford to be critical and direct cuz luckily, we enjoy a lot of institutional backing.”

Though MMA members think passionately about activism, and characterize MMA as an activist organization, the NGO has learned more productive ways to work with stakeholders, thereby generating institutional backing through the local university, and forging a key role in the South African mediascape. Perceptions of MMA’s work are characterized by respect. William explained that it took years to learn how to speak to stakeholders in a way that would not alienate them, but make them partners in the pursuit for media democracy, media equality, and media quality. He notes: “It’s a lot harder to say, ‘Okay, this isn’t good and here’s why and here’s an alternative.’” By overcoming frequent highly confrontational interactions, MMA was able to build more integrative relationships with stakeholders.

This particular approach is driven by feminist principles, which pertains to both the feminist goals of activism, as well as a feminist mode of activism. To build on MMA’s experience as evident through the testimony, integrative approach to FDMA suggests a socially networked relationship akin to a symbiotic dependency. MMA seeks not to agitate unnecessarily, carefully grounds claims in media monitoring research and legal policy review, and is open to stakeholder input. William’s account of the backlash against MMA’s gender activism in one of their early engagements with media editors highlights that MMA has adjusted its approach. As Amanda notes, activist often denotes “agitator” and the agitative model of FDMA has its
limitation, both for industry structure activism and content activism. Geertsema (2010) found a similar dilemma in her study of the NGO GenderLinks, an organization whose activism is characterized by quick critiques, loud activism, and declining rapport.

Once the opportunity to speak with media stakeholders and policy makers arises, it is important to keep the people-centered goals in mind and generate compromises that foster inter-organizational relationships. Carefully curated and sustained stakeholder relationships enable MMA to impact media content and policy more effectively. For MMA, this symbiotic dependency is characterized by their own stakeholder-level positioning in the mediascape; i.e., MMA has woven into the cultural fabric of the South African mediascape by asserting itself as important intermediary entity. This status is only feasible if an NGO has curated rapport among stakeholders. Director William explains: “We value relationship to stakeholders where activist organizations are respected for their role in society . . . We have a competitive edge because MMA gets invited to the table, that’s what makes us different.”

**Concluding Thoughts**

The purpose of this chapter was to analyze MMA’s network of social relations and assess MMA’s social position in the South African mediascape. Before scholars can begin to analyze the importance, impact, and role of organizations in a society, they must first take the time to explicate the main social relationships that characterize an organization (see also Graheme, 1998; Smith, 1987; 2005; 2006). MMA’s network of social relations consists of four larger groups: media stakeholders, regulatory bodies, other NGOs and activist groups, and the public.

MMA’s network of social relations and relationships made visible the NGO’s organizational ideological character. MMA understands the importance of productive interactions with media stakeholders. MMA also understands the normative dimensions of the
mediascape in relation to the circuitous relationship between media and culture. Via the mapping of MMA’s social relationships, I then assessed MMA’s social position in the South African mediascape.

Organizations forge their space in the network of social relations through their agendas, social activities, and negotiation of stakeholder relationships (see also Smith, 2006). Through conversations with MMA members, media professionals, and other NGO practitioners, I argued that two central factors have contributed to MMA’s social standing: reputation and impact. MMA’s reputable name in the South African mediascape derives from its ethos as a credible research entity that is marked by consistency and an ability adapt to the market through innovation. MMA has also been operating consistently, with the same central mission and goals, since its inception over two decades ago.

For the South African mediascape, MMA has assumed a role that is best described as part of the system, rather than the frequent role of activist NGOs in a strictly interventionist role. MMA already has—and continues to—improve the structural conditions of the media industry as well as helped the production of more equitable content. Thus, MMA has woven into the organizational fabric of the South African mediascape—a mediascape that journalists and editors admit is hard to imagine without the existence of MMA.

Through the process of analyzing the organizational aspects of MMA, its stakeholder relationships, and its social positioning in the South African mediascape using Smith’s (2005) institutional ethnographic method, I am now able to situate MMA as an FDMA organization. In the following chapter, I argue that MMA is an FDMA organization by discussing the NGO’s organizational relationship to feminism, democracy, and activism.
CHAPTER 6

“Yeah we do a lot of activism on gender in the media:”

MMA as a Feminist Democratic Media Activist Organization

The purpose of this chapter is to identify MMA as an FDMA organization. In the previous two chapters, I have provided an institutional ethnographic analysis of MMA’s organizational profile, stakeholder relationships, and revealed the underlying reasons for MMA’s unique social position and activist success in South Africa. Following Smith’s (1987, 2005, 2006) call for inductive research that brings lived experience into our theories, this chapter brings MMA’s activist practice into the FDMA activist theory.

The first section of this chapter explores the role of feminism, democracy, and activism for MMA. I begin by analyzing how MMA becomes an FDMA organization through its identifications with activism, feminism, and democracy. Here, I draw on the in-depth interviews in which I asked the various study participants how they related to “media activism,” “feminist activism,” and “media democracy” and whether they believed these terms reflect MMA’s work and organizational identity. I link these findings back to the arguments by scholars who employ either FMA (Byerly & Ross, 2006) or DMA (Hackett & Carroll, 2006) for activist organizations and articulate why this separation cannot account for MMA’s activism and thus, disrupts media activism theorizing.

Upon establishing MMA as an FDMA organization, the second part of this chapter illustrates how MMA puts FDMA into practice. To do so, I offer a case study of news media coverage around gender interests in the 2016 South African National Municipal Elections. The case study describes the specific activist strategies employed by MMA and explains how these strategies become illustrative of MMA’s FDMA identity and work. The case study draws on
MMA’s “2016 Election Watch Report,” which argues that South African news media reinforce the interests of the wealthy and powerful while largely ignoring social issues, including gender interests. Drawing on the analysis of the report results, I discuss the specific MMA addresses gender parity in South African media coverage through various activist initiatives and digital media tools. I close this chapter by addressing how MMA’s FDMA critically illustrates the need for intervention that goes beyond data analysis and moves toward critical engagements with stakeholders in the mediascape.

I will begin my discussion of MMA as an FDMA organization with an analysis of MMA’s media activism—the “MA” in FDMA. This following section analyzes how MMA members personally identify with activism, how MMA self-describes their activism in organizational and promotional documents, and how activism becomes a part of MMA’s organizational identity.

The “MA” in FDMA: MMA as a Media Activist Organization

To be considered an FDMA organization, the organization must engage in some form of media activism. During conversations with MMA members, the Director, and members of the Board of Trustees, many interviewees began identifying MMA as an “activist organization” before being prompted. Tawana Kupe, Chairman of the Board, immediately explains: “The core of what they do is monitoring . . . but they do much more than monitoring. They also do advocacy.” He explains advocacy in terms of their structural activism with the SABC. Tawana elaborates: “We’re big on media advocacy . . . That is why we’re right now at the forefront of the SABC cases.” What becomes clear from Tawana’s description of MMA’s advocacy work is that he strongly associates it with their mission to improve the political economic structures of the South African mediascape.
In their individual in-depth interviews, many MMA members identified the links between media monitoring (“the research”) and activist activities. As Hoynes (2005) explains, media monitoring is often a “critical component” of media activism (p. 107). At MMA, media monitoring is the basis for media critiques and activism. Tawana explains:

By monitoring, you get the empirical evidence of what’s happening. Based on that empirical evidence . . . you either promote good practices, or you campaign against bad practices in order to improve the broader media environment and promote freedom of expression.

MMA monitors and analyzes activities in the South African mediascape. On the basis of these analyses, MMA members coordinate activist activities. Phakamile, a social media coordinator for the children’s project, correspondingly notes: “You see, we do the research and then we can go out and say ‘This wasn’t fairly reported.’ We never protest without monitoring evidence.”

While MMA members often describe MMA as a “watchdog” or “monitoring” organization, both activism and advocacy are an integral part of their organizational identity. Clarifying these two terms is important, as interviewees explain their own definitions of the two terms and how they relate to MMA’s work. In the academic literature, the terms “media activism” and “media advocacy” are often used interchangeably, though scholars might have a personal term preference that influences the term they choose (see also Croteau, Hoynes, & Ryan, 2005; Jansen, Pooley, & Taub-Pervizpour, 2011).

In the case of MMA, the NGO facilitates advocacy and performs activism. Carol explains how she relates to activism and advocacy: “An activist is somebody [who] is willing to lobby even their own neighbor to adopt a particular idea. Yes, there’s activism [at MMA] . . . Advocacy to me is on someone else’s behalf, and activism is directed to a particular
community.” As Carol’s testimony shows, activism is part of civic engagement, built into the socio-cultural fabric of democratic societies, with the goal of immediate social or political change. Advocacy, then, is often on behalf of others, where people or organizations lobby, advocate, raise awareness, or litigate for external entities. In the case of MMA, they do both.

MMA’s advocacy work is best described through their contract work. In Chapter 3, I described the financial organization of MMA and noted three lines of funding: donations and grants, training, and contract work. An example of MMA’s advocacy work is when MMA performs media monitoring and analysis for MDDA to help MDDA secure funding for their community media projects. Advocacy, however, does not fit the scope of MMA’s activities when MMA members take to the streets and protests.

Social protests and picketing are a clear form of activism, one that MMA engages in frequently (see the next section for a discussion of MMA’s protests of SABC). Motshabi, a newly hired social media editor and rural media literacy coordinator at MMA, recalls: “I came to MMA right about when [Communications Minister] Muthambi put herself and [President] Zuma in charge of the SABC. One of the first things I did as a new team member with MMA was tape a big “X” over my mouth and go to Constitution Hill to protest [media] censorship.” Mike summarizes that protesting is “the best outlet for civil society organizations to make their demands heard to the media corporations.” Thus, MMA engages in activism on issues such as government censorship or media regulation.

The interview prompt around MMA’s identification as an “activist organization” received overwhelming enthusiasm from interviewees. Motshabi recalls the first time she heard of MMA: “They were known for their activism . . . ensuring that journalists cover topics fairly and with balance . . . and holding the SABC accountable.” Motshabi further explains that MMA’s
relationship with activism was something that “drew” her to the organization. Similarly, Mike recounts that he first learned about MMA during his introductory media studies seminar at the University of the Witwatersrand. He explains: “We read about them in our textbook . . . I think the textbook said they did research and activism . . . yes, activism, I remember.” Mike further notes: “MMA is a media activist and a human rights activist [organization], I would bet my last penny on that.” Aya also makes the connection between activism and human rights and explains:

I would . . . use “activism” to describe what we do . . . We [take] the steps . . . in ensuring a social change. That again ensures the uphold[ing] of human rights. In my definition that’s what activism is.

Though every interviewee, with the exception of one MMA member, identifies MMA as an activist organization, many later resorted to the term “advocacy.” Amanda explains this when she contemplates the connotations of activism: “Someone might hear ‘agitator’ or ‘protester,’ rather than someone who wants to get the public’s attention by saying: ‘Hey, they’re covering this wrong and this affects you because this, this, and this.’” Thandi also notes that the term “advocacy” might be a cultural preference. She recounts her own experience of watching her parents protest during the apartheid era, explaining that these memories give her a very specific “notion of what activism is, and what it requires of people . . . untiring attention and energy, always involved in the cause, instigating true political change.” Wellington similarly summarizes:

By and large, I think the work that we do is activism. Whether you call it that or you don’t call it that is another thing . . . Some would consider activism as getting dirty and being in the streets and running around. Which we do, time and again, with our picketing and all of that, but mostly our work is around analyzing content, and that’s activism.
Litigation and advocacy, that’s activism, so I think we are. Whether we call ourselves that is something else.

MMA members personally identify with activism as well as denote MMA “as an activist organization.” Amanda summarizes: “I am personally very interested in activism. Back in Australia, I have always worked with organizations . . . LGBT and community initiatives, for example.” Similarly, Motshabi articulates that her own experience as an “black woman underserved by relevant media programming” spurred her interest in doing activist work herself. Louis, Amiot, Thomas, and Blackwood (2016) suggest that “greater activist identification” leads to “stronger intentions” to engage in activism, and to increase the “activist social network size.” (p. 244). Throughout the conversations with MMA members, interviewees continuously underscored how they personally relate to activism.

What becomes clear from conversations with members of MMA is that activist ideals and activist work manifests in two ways (which are, of course, interrelated). MMA members reveal their own personal identifications and experiences with activism, while also denoting the organization itself as an activist organization. For the purpose of the FDMA framework, this two-fold identification becomes an important marker—successful FDMA activism stems from an individual conviction that activism is needed (see also Louis, Amiot, Thomas & Blackwood, 2016). MMA meets the “MA” in FDMA in an exceptional way.

The following section identifies the ways in which MMA meets the media democracy elements of FDMA—the “D” in FDMA. As South Africa has been undergoing the process of media democratization and reform (Barnett, 1999; Hadland, 2011; Sparks, 2009; Teer-Tomaselli, 2006) since the end of apartheid, the language of democracy becomes important for media activist NGOs such as MMA.
The “D” in FDMA: MMA as a Media Democracy Organization

The “D” in FDMA asserts its space in the theory through MMA’s structural activism around media democracy, citizen participation, and an equitable media industry. These goals can be summarized under part of their mission for “media democratization.” Striking examples of MMA’s goal to improve media quality and media democracy in South African media are MMA’s interactions with the public broadcaster SABC.

During the ongoing SABC public broadcasting crisis (2015-present), MMA has engaged in various level of democratic media activism. Upon the passing of the 2015 amendment that gave Communications Minister Muthambi and President Zuma exclusive power to appoint and regulate the SABC Executive Board, MMA began creating pressure on the basis of the constitutional laws that specifically forbid government control of media. MMA helped launch a coalitional campaign that organized protests against SABC censorship. Figure 9 is an image of MMA members protesting in front of the SABC headquarters.

*Figure 9:* MMA members getting ready to protest SABC censorship (photo by Thandi Smith).
MMA has been a driving force behind the SABC activism. Between June 2016 and November 2016, MMA protested three times in front of the SABC headquarters. MMA co-organized the protests together with their SOS Coalition alliance members FXI and R2K. As Mike explains: “The Constitution grants . . . non-governmental organizations . . . to lobby for issues that are in the public’s [interest] and to try and create pressure around that.” Amanda similarly argues: “The SABC’s power is forceful and stable . . . Through the protests, people will know that this is an issue that pertains to them.”

MMA has displayed its interest in media democracy at the SABC through litigation at ICASA, one of the media regulatory bodies. Once the SABC terminated eight journalists (the SABC8), MMA immediately began an inquiry of the SABC that quickly evolved into an ICASA case. During the SABC Inquiry hearing at ICASA, and later at the Parliament, MMA members’ testimony was streamed live on ANN7 and eTV News. Figure 9 shows MMA Director William and Head of Policy Thandi speaking during the second hearing at Parliament.

Figure 10: MMA Director William Bird and MMA Head of Policy Thandi Smith during SABC Inquiry at ICASA (photo by ANN7, permission for use by William Bird).
At the ICASA hearing, William and Thandi delivered the four coalitional demands for the future of media policy at the SABC: First, to immediately reinstate the eight terminated SABC journalists; second to prohibit Muthambi’s SABC policy that prevents the public broadcaster from covering protests; third, the removal of Hlaudi Motsoeneng as SABC COO; and lastly, to dissolve the SABC Executive Board appointed by Muthambi and President Zuma.

Both William and Thandi recall this experience as an act of “activism” where “we acted as MMA to actively ensure that the SABC serve the people, not the government” (Thandi, personal interview).

MMA’s activism around the SABC crisis is only one example where the NGO actively pursues media democracy through activism. The larger themes of MMA’s media democracy activism—the “D” in FDMA—become apparent through the NGO’s commitment to media reform of industry structures, the fostering of more equitable conditions in newsrooms, as well as citizen-oriented media policy and regulation.

Personal identifications to activism and media democracy also brought to the fore ideals about equality and feminism. In the in-depth interviews, I began by asking questions about the role of “activism” and “democracy” as I was hoping that stories about past activist engagements would spur thoughts about MMA’s “feminist” goals as well. An illustrative example of this thought process comes from Wellington, who explains: “I think we do activism as a human rights based organization, and I know to me, feminism falls within that frame . . . Our ideals as an NGO, yeah, they do fall into [feminism].” Other examples of this include ex-MMA member Carol, who began speaking of Lethabo’s activist work with the “gender in media project,” and Board member Laura, Director of the gender-violence prevention Ceasefire Campaign, who commented on MMA’s connection to activism through their gender work.
The following sections detail how we can think of MMA as a feminist DMA organization through their organizational commitment to gender equality, overarching ideals that center human rights, and how MMA tries to bring in feminist dimensions to their various activist work.

**The “F” in FDMA: MMA as a Feminist Organization**

To be considered an FDMA organization, the actions and work of organizations must display an underlying identification with the feminist goals of equality, human rights, and diversity. In their individual interviews, MMA members addressed the question of feminism in two different ways: MMA as a feminist organization, and the feminist dimensions of MMA’s activist work. Interviewees commented both on the organizational structure of MMA, in terms of how many women worked at MMA, how they contribute, why they are important, and why intersectionality in workers makes an organization stronger. Second, they discussed the organization’s minimization of hierarchical decision-making, which allows MMA members to provide input on projects of interest. Third, MMA members described MMA’s activist work around feminist goals of gender equality in both the newsroom as well as media content.

MMA members comment on MMA “as a feminist organization” by brainstorming what feminism means to them. Thandi first reacted confused to my question and explains: “Give me a second here… I’m trying to think of a good definition of feminism.” Thandi began by associating feminism specifically with gender dynamics and explains: “Feminism . . . it’s the challenging the dominant ideologies of male representation.” After brainstorming more, Thandi also thought of other dimensions that become part of feminism. She notes: “There’s issues of feminism in animal rights. I mean whatever [it is], it’s such an integrated issue or challenge that, yeah, that links to every category of identity that you can’t separate it.” This process of thinking through what feminism means—and what it stands for—was similar in other interviews.
Interviewees first associated feminism with the pursuit for gender equality, though many immediately began questioning this categorization. After discussing what feminism means to him, Aya critically notes the intersectional dimensions of feminism that bring together co-constructions of sexuality, race, and class. He explains:

Gender, definitely . . . also the LGBTI community, which has a difficult cultural standing in South Africa . . . And with that, I would consider race to be a feminist issue, as well as class . . . socioeconomics. I think it does cross cut across those categories. It’s not just looking at the empowerment of women, but you need to understand there are various issues that affect different groups that need to be paid attention to when you look at feminism as a whole.

After clarifying what feminism means to them, I asked the question of whether they thought of MMA as a “feminist organization” again.

To my surprise, many MMA members began commenting on MMA as a feminist organization on account of its internal organization, institutional policies, makeup of workforce, and social goals. When I thought of this interview prompt, I was thinking of the denotation of feminism through the actual project of the organization. Five MMA members, including the Director, made immediate associations between MMA and “feminism” as connected to the organizational fabric of MMA.

When I asked whether MMA members think of the organization as a feminist organization, Aya immediately sought to clarify. He asks: “Do you mean the organization itself, as in are we interact with each other, and the culture within the organization, or the work that we do?” Similarly, Mike’s thought process of defining feminism was interrupted by his own cognitive associations between MMA and feminism. He notes: “[Feminism] includes activism
for gender rights or for feminism in society . . . or perhaps—and how we embrace our organizational culture? That we have a fair number of female[s] working . . . in the office. They are important for MMA. Where do you want me to go?”

In many ways, though, MMA member’s identification of MMA “as a feminist organization” is just as important as the feminist goals of their actual activism. When the topic of MMA “as a feminist organization” came up in the conversations, I encouraged MMA members to elaborate. Aya further explains: “As a culture and how we interact with one another. You don’t see the same linear power structures that you see perhaps in other organizations.” This identification stands in sharp contrast to the dominant critiques in feminist organizational studies, where scholars continuously lament the hierarchies, gendering, and sexism present in organizations (Acker, 1990; Calás & Smircich, 2005).

The interview data suggests that MMA’s denotation “as a feminist organization” also becomes emblematic of how workers’ feminist ideals can translate into intersectional, equity-driven hiring practices for NGOs. Aya calls MMA “a feminist organization,” which speaks to his personal and—by extension—MMA’s organizational investment in pursuing intersectional equality. Among the four new MMA hires in 2016, three were women, two of them black. Beyond gender, MMA member Carol discusses the role of race and class for MMA’s organizational profile. She explains: “I was the first poor black woman from Soweto to work at MMA. My being here was political. I hope when they find a replacement for me, they will consider another poor black woman. We are needed for perspective.” Drawing on Acker (1990) and Crenshaw (1991), Healy, Bradley, and Forson’s (2011) study brings critical awareness to the need for intersectional hiring practices and workforce composition. Taken together with Aya and
Carol’s testimony, MMA’s sensibility toward feminist organizational practices becomes evident through their hiring practices and gateway for bottom-up decision-making on projects.

A study by Zanoni (2011) illustrates a trend in organizational communication literature to move away from feminism that solely advocates for gender equality and move towards the umbrella concept of “diversity.” Though I agree that this is true for the Anglo-American context, where “diversity” and “inclusion” have become haphazard standards based on legal employment policies, the realities of NGOs working in the Global South suggests otherwise. The “feminism” in FDMA is important because of its activist connotation. Diversity neither carries the language of activism nor the action-based connotation of activism.

For the purpose of denoting MMA as an FDMA organization, the inductive process of privileging data over established ways of knowing allows me to include a finding that might otherwise have been overlooked. Ignoring the institutional dimensions of FDMA alongside identifications of MMA as a feminist organization though their organizational gender dynamics, hierarchies, and projects—a prominent theme in the interview data—would not adequately reflect the material reality of MMA members. As Smith’s (1987) initial motivation for the institutional ethnographic method illustrates, her goal was to write for people, not about them. Additionally, the testimonies that situate MMA as an organization that is based in feminist principles merits inclusion in the theory.

**MMA’s Feminist Mission and Feminist Projects**

An important marker of the FDMA framework is that the organization at hand promotes a feminist mission and organizes projects with feminist goals. MMA’s “Theory of Change” maps the path to citizen-centered media by advocating for ethical media that hold the powerful accountable. This formulation in itself is feminist because it centers the needs of people—
regardless of gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, or ability. MMA enacts its “Theory of Change” through specific activist projects that tackle gender misrepresentation and inequities in the structure of the mediascape. MMA’s work in South Africa made apparent that in order to be considered an FDMA organization, activist and feminist values must emerge both through organizational missions, as well as put into praxis through projects with feminist goals.

Though about half of the interviewees commented that MMA’s organizational practices were feminist, many also made explicit connections to MMA’s mission. Whereas Mike identifies MMA as a feminist organization, he also comments on how to put the institutional descriptions into praxis. Mike explains: “For an organization itself, you need to ask [yourself]: What are some of our goals and your objectives around feminism?” In their edited volume on feminist organizations, Ferree and Martin (1995) explain that many NGOs have feminist goals but do not articulate them as a foremost concern in their mission statements. MMA similarly frames their “Theory of Change” though this rhetorical omission—a “tactical” omission, as Ferree and Martin note—though their overall goal to democratize media is explicitly feminist.

While not using the language of feminism, MMA Director William explains: “We exist because we know that inequity in media exists. Whether it is around gender, or race, the problems are there and at MMA, we try to fix how these issues pan out in our media.” Wellington also describes MMA as a human-rights based organization, but one that promotes a feminist mission. Thandi similarly explains: “Because our main focus deals with issues of race, deals with issues of gender, deals with issues of marginalized and oppressed class issues, deals with that. If we see ourselves as fighting for those rights, and you can’t separate that from feminism.”
An orientation of MMA’s mission around feminism is explicit to many. In organizational communication literature, Harding, Fort and Fotaki (2012) explain that advertising an organization’s mission and work as “feminist” continues to bear negative connotations. Amanda explain this when she contemplates feminism as embedded in activism: “It’s similar to activism in the sense that the word ‘spooks’ people . . . they hear ‘radical’ rather than someone who wants to find out why policy entrenches patriarchy.” The question of self-describing an organization as feminist is a large theme in global feminism literature. According to Ferree (2006), the lack of the feminist name does not mean that a person, group, or organization does not have feminist goals. Rather, it speaks to the connotations this identification carries in a particular location. In Africa, NGOs invested in gender issues often avoid this term in order to appear less threatening, radical, exclusive, or culturally different (Ferree, 2006).

Depending on the situation, the feminist goal may be pushed to the fore or receive less priority, and FDMA organizations have to negotiate this. Sarah, a new researcher at MMA admits that she is still learning about the organization’s mission, though she is certain about MMA’s commitment to cultural change. With respect to feminism, she explains: “I think that we dial up the ‘feminist activism’ in certain projects and arenas, not in all though. It depends on the context, who we are engaging with, and how we need to do it to ensure an optimal outcome.”

MMA Director William recounts an experience with MMA’s first “gender in the media” project that illustrates the drawback of a radical feminist activist approach. He explains:

I’ll never forget, one of the first times we went to present to editors was on gender actually, and it was the first time we had done some clear comprehensive research on how the media would portray gender . . . and it was shocking, just diabolical. We just went in there and we shat all over them. It was just all about: “You guys use women, you
create gender inequality, you indirectly perpetuate gender-based violence . . . You’re contributing to patriarchal marginalization.” On every angle we hit them, nailed ‘em completely . . . Then we were surprised that they didn’t wanna see us again.

The lesson William recounts is what Hoynes (2005) calls the “less blame-oriented approach” that opens productive dialogue between stakeholders (p. 105).

William’s description of the negotiation of activism and feminism also specifically speaks to the cultural environment in which MMA operates. Amanda similarly explains: “You’re still there doing the activism, but it’s just that the language you’ve chosen to use is, I guess, less threatening to some players, like the publishers, or government.” Though gender activism is more abundant than elsewhere on the continent (see also Thoreson, 2008), the South African cultural context still limits radical feminist activist approaches. Geertsema (2010) specifically comments on the constraints of gender activism through her study of GenderLinks. She notes the overall backlash the NGO experiences through South Africa’s patriarchal culture.

MMA has had a “Gender in the Media” project since its inception. “It was a big part of our very first monitoring exercise,” William explains. The “Gender in the Media” project has gender-specific feminist goals. It includes both critiques of gender-based workplace discrimination in South African media corporations (Dibetso, 2013) as well as media monitoring reports that point out misrepresentation in media content (Banjac & Dibetso, 2014). Mike explains: “Lethabo’s research on women in the media also focused on gender-based violence.” While the “Gender in the Media” special project specifically has feminist goals, MMA has found ways to bring feminism into other projects and special programs.

The analysis of MMA’s organizational documents reveal that 15% of MMA’s total published reports specifically focuses on gender, both structural inequalities in the newsroom as
well as content-specific critiques. Aya explains: “We are constantly also seeking out opportunities [for] projects that speak to gender, but also the empowerment of women, or improving how media report and how people understand feminism, understand gender, and related issues.” Additionally, 80% of the remaining special project reports, though not specifically focused on gender, center goals of diversity and equality. Aya explains: “[E]ven in our analyses [of] our media monitoring that we do on an ongoing basis . . . we all consider feminist views in the media, gender-related matters, how the media communicate these, and how they are understood.”

Recalling that feminism is intersectional and concerns other identity markers, such as race and age, MMA often includes feminist critiques into their anti-xenophobia activism and their “Children in the Media” project. George, Head of the Children’s Program, speaks to this: “In the work I do, we always look at the ways media cover children’s stories differently based on whether it concerns a boy or a girl. If it’s a girl, it’s always passive, always victimized . . . there to pull on your heartstrings.” The analysis of these reports, together with George and Aya’s interview testimonies, reveal the strong feminist orientation of MMA members and the organization as a whole.

What becomes clear from the interview conversations is that MMA meets feminist ideals in three important ways. First, MMA members identify the NGO’s organizational profile as coalescing around ideals of participation and equality; second, MMA members remark personal identifications with feminist ideals; and third, MMA members define MMA’s activist work using the language of feminism. Due to those three central reasons, MMA cannot be theorized without its orientation toward a strong feminist agenda. MMA meets the “F” in FDMA through its organizational politics as well as interpersonal and organizational commitments to feminism.
In Chapter 3, I began a conversation around theories of media activism, where I introduced the founding principles of FDMA around existing concepts of feminist media activism (FMA; Byerly & Ross, 2006) and democratic media activism (DMA; Hackett & Carroll, 2006). I argued that neither of the theories can fully grasp the particular work of MMA in the South African mediascape. FMA falls short of capturing MMA’s activism because its focus rests on content representation critiques and women’s participation in the newsroom. DMA fails to capture the entirety of MMA’s activism because it hinges on internal media reform with the aim to completely overhaul of a media system’s political economy and policy framework. The two theories, FMA and DMA, see media content activism for more inclusive and diverse representation and political-economic activism for more equitable industry structures as two separate projects. Indeed, MMA’s two-fold activism in South Africa demonstrates the need to organize on both issues simultaneously.

**MMA’s Two-Fold FDMA: Media Content and Political Economic Structure**

MMA states in its “Theory of Change” and organizational mission that it seeks to invest in projects that call out misrepresentation in media content as well as structural inadequacies that hinder media freedom and democracy. This two-fold activist orientation lies at the crux of the FDMA framework. FDMA is a direct reflection of MMA’s real-life activist experience in South Africa. It takes into consideration both content and structural activism.

What becomes clear from the cases I have observed during my time in Johannesburg is that MMA is equally invested in ensuring fair coverage as well as ensuring that media outlets produce news in a free and uncorrupt environment. MMA’s Communications Officer, Amanda Rowen, explains the two-folded nature of their work: “We monitor to see how the big news
outlets cover people’s issues, but then we also need to see why they cover them the way they do. What is going on behind the scenes. You can’t do one without the other.”

An example of this simultaneous intervention comes from Thandi, who recalls MMA’s interaction with the leading tabloid, *The Daily Sun*:

We took *The Daily Sun* to court [at ICASA] twice last year. Once was after they repeatedly printed a xenophobic slur for “foreigner” in their reports of crimes against Ethiopians and other non-South Africans, thereby fueling xenophobic sentiments among certain groups. It is an example of reckless sensationalizing. ICASA ruled in our favor and they had to print corrections. They can’t use that word anymore.

The above case illustrates one of the ways in which MMA recognized how media messages affect attitudes toward a minority group in South Africa. At the same time, with the litigation at ICASA, MMA took a step further to conscientize toward (and prevent against) the use of this particular disparaging language in their news coverage.

In an informal lunch conversation, one MMA monitor succinctly analogized MMA’s two-fold content and structural activism. He explains: “It’s like trying to kill a gecko by only cutting off its tail. It’ll regrow that tail quickly.” As this testimony so aptly illustrates, democratizing mediascapes need NGOs like MMA that engage in simultaneous intervention. Activisms must both be geared toward the systemic production of media as well as toward the messages that emerge from it. FDMA captures MMA’s activist reality by illustrating that feminist and democratic media activism are not separate or sequential projects, but rather, are needed simultaneously.

As this first section of the chapter illustrates, MMA shares deep-seated identifications with feminism and democracy. MMA puts these identifications into practice by facilitating
media activism of nuanced critiques that reveals undemocratic industry structures and marginalizing content. In order to illustrate MMA’s work as a FDMA organization, the next section of this chapter includes a case study of one of MMA’s most recent activist projects, the “Gender in the 2016 Elections Monitoring Report.” This report revealed that news media neglected gender interests in their coverage, thus perpetuating the assumption that gender interests are not important to South African voters. The purpose of the following case study is to explain how MMA voices critiques of media messages and media industry structure, and what activist strategies they employ.

I use the term “gender interests” to denote both the actual socio-cultural and political interests of women as well as the interests South African media attribute to women on account of stereotypical gender perceptions. In other words, there is a difference between women’s actual gender interests and the interests that media publicize. As the following case study illustrates, news media coverage about the election neglected topics of interests to women; e.g., education, reproductive health, child support. Rather, the election coverage became a platform for party politics and campaigning, while dismissing social issues that affect the population, such as health, education, service delivery, and gender.

**Case Study: MMA as FDMA During the 2016 National Municipal Elections**

This case study illustrates how MMA puts FDMA into practice by discussing specific activism the NGO employs to point out how media organizations and journalists fail to report on the election in a way that centers the people’s interests. This case study showcases the “D” in FDMA through MMA’s critiques of reporting (structure) and the “F” in FDMA through its specific election special project on gender interests in election media (content).
Elections have always been an important aspect of MMA’s work. After all, the impetus that led to the formation of the organization was a deep concern about media coverage of the first democratic elections in 1994. MMA is well-known for its election monitoring. To date, MMA has completed, published, and publicized media coverage in election reports for every major election in South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe since 1994. These reports critically display the issues at the forefront of political interest. In 2016, South Africa voted on their municipal governments in a national election on August 3rd. National municipal elections are organized so voters cast their ballot for their local governments on a centralized day across South Africa.

Municipal elections can be quite powerful. As Thandi explains: “They really tell you about what is on people’s minds.” Oftentimes, the local elections make visible larger trends in governance, politics, and policy. According to MMA Director William, election time in South Africa is pivotal: “It really shows you what this country is about, who we trust, and don’t trust, and what issues we think are important.” In essence, political parties and local candidates have an opportunity to highlight issues they wish to see addressed in future governance.

Media play an important role during elections as they become the prime information source on politics for South Africans. Wellington explains: “The ways in which political parties, councilor candidates, and issues are covered in the media is essentially setting the agenda for who we end up with in parliament. This is scary. The media have a lot of power.” Particularly the public broadcaster SABC has an active role in setting the agenda for politics in South Africa. Sarah notes: “The SABC is everything. Some people swear by it. It is all they can see and hear, and they do so without questioning it.” Similarly, Wellington remarks: “We are supposed to have
a three-tier model of public broadcasting, commercial broadcasting, and community media, but really, people are too reliant on public broadcasting for political information.”

Information sources become crucial in the mediation of political information and salience of social issues. As articulated in Chapter 2, the SABC holds the largest market share in viewership, and often it is the only medium South Africans can afford. The second most-circulated news medium is the tabloid press, which holds strong influence over opinions on social issues. Wellington summarizes this as follows:

The SABC and low-cred[ibility] papers like *The Daily Sun*. One person buys it, passes it on, then five, six other people read it. It gets hectic during the election season, neh. They really fuel the fire on issues like xenophobia and political sensationalism.

Election time allows MMA to detect pervasive trends in news coverage around social issues, including gender interests. A recurring issue in women’s representation in media revolves around the seemingly paradoxical activity in politics. As noted by Sreberny and van Zoonen (2000), “the underlying frame of reference is that women belong to the family and domestic life and men to the social world of politics and work” (p. 17). This coding of politics and action as masculine streamlines popular perceptions of gendered work and further separates the public and private. The reporting of this misrepresentation becomes central in the FDMA of many media monitoring NGOs, including MMA. As Gallagher (2001) articulates:

A good deal of media monitoring and advocacy in relation to the public spheres is motivated by a belief that women’s perspectives and agendas must be given more importance in politics, precisely so that current gender-based division in relation to public and private will be eroded. (p. 83)
Gallagher utilizes South Africa as an example of this problem in coverage and even cites election research by MMA from 1999.

In the week leading up to the elections, I worked with the MMA “election analysis team,” comprised of Sarah, Wellington, and myself. Together, our team verified the monitoring data by looking at the completion of news pieces that monitors fed into Dexter, as well as confirming the tags monitors assigned to the articles (e.g., party politics, protests, health, gender). We then exported the data sets from Dexter for thematic analysis of the 60 days leading up to the election on August 3, 2016. MMA Director William suspected a similar analysis outcome as in the 2014 reports, where social issues, such as gender, received almost no coverage in election news. He explains:

We have always done a special report on the elections on gender. It’s part of our gender program. We need to remind editors and journalists that they don’t ask the right questions, don’t get answers on things that really matter to the South African people. They need to focus on gender, health, and such . . . and if politicians don’t speak to those issues, they need to probe them to do so anyways.

William tasked me with writing the gender analysis special report for the 2016 municipal elections. Writing the report and media critique helped me understand the FDMA goals of MMA, their FDMA methods for activism, and become familiar the channels through which MMA publicizes its analyses. The gender report is an explicitly feminist critique of South African news media because women’s voices and gender interests were missing.
Gender representation in media means the ways in which individuals become (mis)represented according to their culturally assigned roles and how this leads to a disadvantaging (Gill, 2007; Modleski, 2008; Radway, 1991; Spigel, 1992; Tuchman, 1978). Gender identification and performance (masculine, feminine, fluid, other), as well as sociocultural marginalization (e.g., women in domesticity) collectively contribute to the dominant perception that women’s participation in politics is not as valuable as that of men (Fox & Lawless, 2004), and that gender issues are not a main concern (Sreberny & van Zoonen, 2000).

Gender equality in media coverage of elections is crucial, particularly as women’s voices and gender interests typically become underrepresented (Ross, Evans, Harrison, Shears, & Wadia, 2013). Goetz’s (1998) study of Uganda and South Africa found that while the nations have more women in political office, the presence of these women does not equate representational equity in policies. As MMA’s past research has indicated, South African news media coverage does not center gender interest during election periods. MMA’s 2011 election report of local government elections found coverage of gender interests around 1%. MMA’s 2014 election report of the national and provincial elections similarly found 1% of total coverage of gender interests. The 2016 municipal elections have essentially erased women’s interests and gender issues from the ballot.

In the 60 days leading up to the South African National Municipal Elections on August 3, 2016, MMA’s monitoring analysis found that gender issues were only covered in 12 out of more than 4,600 news stories. The monitored publication sources of the election report comprise over
70 print, broadcast, and online sources, including community media. The data pool includes news media pieces in all eleven official languages. The criteria for inclusion in this gender report were based on a broad interpretation of the issues associated with gender—for instance women in politics, education for girls, female candidates, women’s health, gender-based violence, and LGBTQIA advocacy.

The negligible news coverage surrounding the importance of these voices and issues is concerning – in the end, the coverage amounted to less than 1% of news stories about the elections. The news stories that did deal with gender issues featured pleas to include more women in politics (eight stories), covered the sexism of politicians (three stories), and the lack of party support on LGBTQIA issues (one story). Although twelve stories dealt with the topic of gender, these reports were not exactly exemplary for putting the spotlight on gender interests. The journalists remained neutral and engaged in event-based reporting, yet opinion pieces, analyses, and critical interpretations were missing altogether. The majority of media did not have a single report dedicated to women’s interest in this election. The following table illustrates a selection of election topics from the MMA report.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Selection of Election Topics (Numerical)</th>
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<td>Health</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>GENDER</td>
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<td>Service Delivery</td>
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<td>Demonstrations/Protests</td>
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<td>Party Campaigning</td>
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<td>Party Politics</td>
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0 200 400 600 800

*Table 1:* Election topics as featured in number of news reports (data from MMA).
To illustrate the omission of gender interests in the election coverage, Table 1 demonstrates that this election became yet another platform for party politics and campaigning, while focusing less than 2% of the overall election coverage on human rights and social issues, such as health, education, poverty, and gender. With women accounting for 51% of the current population (Statistics South Africa, 2016) a stark underrepresentation like this is disproportional. It means the majority of South Africans do not see their issues represented in the media. This is undemocratic and perpetuates classism, sexism, and racism. Additionally, the danger of this is that the amount of news coverage directly mediates the salience these issues have in public opinion. In other words, if the media do not report often about women’s interests and gender-related concerns, we may not think that these issues exist.

As previous MMA election reports indicate, gender has never been at the forefront of party election campaigns and news media coverage; yet, a further decrease in coverage signifies the fundamental lack of comprehension of the importance of gender dimensions in areas such as education, health, employment, and crime. At the tail end of this problem is that news media wipe gender topics from public deliberation, legislation and policy. Not informing South Africans about issues and interests pertinent to them—all of them, not only those in power—hinders the goals of equality and democracy at all levels.

Willems (2012) notes that NGOs have become important resources for election media research in Africa (for South Africa, she cites FXI, GL, and MISA as important actors in the mediascape). In South Africa, MMA is widely known for its election monitoring and reports. The following section details MMA’s specific FDMA strategies for raising awareness about the structural conditions and skewed news media reporting on gender in the 2016 election.
MMA’s FDMA Strategies for Improving Gender Coverage

The gender analysis report of the 2016 South African National Municipal Elections voiced two central critiques, the structural conditions that enabled a dismissal of gender topics and the actual lack of news media coverage on gender. This twofold critique exemplifies MMA’s commitment to advocate for equality in media content as well as the political economy of the mediascape. The dual activism geared at the simultaneous intervention of structural and message-based inequities is also a key principle of FDMA. The gender report is a feminist gesture to critique industry and content by asking media professionals and South Africans to focus their attention away from the powerful and back to the South African people.

MMA argues that only if reporting is unbiased, accurate, and diverse, can media live up to their potential to drive democratic efforts and facilitate productive social exchange. In line with this assessment, MMA members seek out opportunities to publicize the election reports and share the critiques with South African media consumers, journalists, and media executives. In order to facilitate a productive improvement in election coverage on social issues, media executives must be made aware of the chasm of coverage and actual voter interests, journalists must investigate these issues in their publications, and cover the issues with more ethical integrity.

The gender report first argued that news coverage neglected gender interests. News media coverage of the election did not focus on topics relevant to women and neither did they illustrate gender stakes in the election outcome. With respect to media election coverage, Willems (2012) argues that scholars must analyze with keeping the institutional processes in mind. In her call toward the concept of “radical democracy,” she notes that elections and their media coverage are “ritual events” that celebrate the democratic principles of elections, while
often ignoring the underlying politics. As shown in the MMA election reports, these politics often center certain political candidates and their agendas.

The gender report secondly revealed the structural conditions that enabled the lack of actual news media coverage. In his study on gender parity in the newsroom, MMA’s Lethabo Dibetso (2013) found that journalists are often discouraged from highlighting gender issues in their coverage. Amanda explains this in her personal interview: “I think [in South Africa] there’s what we call ‘gender fatigue.’ Even though it is such a pervasive issue, it seems as though people don’t wanna hear about it.” This might explain why media executives and journalists dismiss a focus on social issues since they do not “sell” as well as party politics and politician scandals.

News stories that marginally deal with women’s requests for more women in politics (see also Goetz, 1998) need to be amplified by investigative pieces that uncover the needs and interests of voters. Journalists rarely ask women about their stakes in the election (Ross et al., 2013). The gender report echoes Goetz’s (1998) assertion that journalistic coverage should both advocate for a diversity of legislators as well as focus on the experience of underserved populations, including—and particularly—women.

Additionally, as party leaders acknowledge that gender parity exists, they often reframe the discussion on the fact that women are able to vote for who they think suits their interests best. The final report revealed that public broadcasting news by the various SABC networks and radio stations, as well as most online and print newspapers, engaged in event-based reporting. Additionally, many articles celebrated the accomplishments of Nelson Mandela and the ANC and offered nostalgic, even “ritualistic” pieces lauding the existence of democratic elections in South Africa. Most critically, these reports neglected voter issues while sensationalizing the act of voting (Willems, 2012).
The perpetually poor coverage on gender issues exemplifies that news media executives and journalists are neglecting their duty to represent a diversity of voices and move these important social conversations to the forefront. Journalists should amplify gender interests in the public mind by asking questions and reporting on issues that reflect the lived experiences of the population. Through a focus on politicians and powerful elites, media executives and journalists contribute to the marginalization of underserved populations.

For the application of the FDMA framework, the central question remains how MMA engages with the results of the election reports. When I was tasked with writing a critique about (the absence of) gender interest in the election, I was unaware that MMA Director William was planning on sending it out to the national press. At the time of writing, I thought it was intended only for the MMA website’s election analysis report. My critique was published by *The Mail & Guardian* on August 12, 2016 as part of their special “election results” section. The journey of my gender piece illustrates the impact and reputation of MMA, Director William’s industry connections, and a core action in the FDMA of the organization.

Wellington summarizes MMA’s FDMA surrounding election coverage in news media around two central strategies—to inform the public and to conscientize the stakeholders. He explains: “We know that our ‘academic friends’ will look at our election reports on the website but more importantly, we need to tell journalists what they are doing wrong so they can do a better job next time.” Adriaan, MMA’s part-time IT specialist, notes that MMA’s website traffic reports from the second and third quarter illustrate that website clicks increase by up to 30% during election seasons. William notes: “Look, we’ve been doing this for a long time . . . we have become a resource, we are the watchdog, people who are interested in this kind of stuff know where to go for good research.”
MMA’s election FDMA specifically targets stakeholders by writing letters to editors and executives about specific news media pieces. Thandi explains:

> We do this every election season – we sort of pick the worst of the crop, a few on every issue, and we critique them... tell them what they [the journalists] did wrong and how they contribute to reporting that neglects the people.

This type of MMA’s FDMA work serves to hold media executives to account and remind them of their role they play in the pursuit of a democratic society. Thandi further notes: “Since we are known for our work during elections, the reply rate is relatively high.” Wellington similarly explains: “I was recently interviewed together with Richard Poplak from *The Daily Maverick* and he said that politicians rely on journalists not to push on the hardcore social issues.”

Next to direct activism targeted at media professionals, MMA also provides alternative media coverage to educate the public during elections. MMA features their analyses on their website, publicizes results via their social media channels and digital media tools, and also contributes to election analyses in news media. MMA Director William and I both contributed to opinion pieces in *The Mail & Guardian* and *The Daily Maverick*. During and after elections, MMA members also frequently receive invitations by local television news stations to share the results of the election monitoring report. The below picture shows Wellington on a television interview about the 2016 National Municipal Elections on eNCA, a 24-hour news networked owned by Nasper’s MutliChoice. During the interview, Wellington specifically spoke to the neglect of gender interests in election news coverage.
Figure 11: MMA’s Head of Programs, Wellington Radu, interviewed on “Meet the Media with Eusebius McKaiser.”

During public television appearances, MMA members explain how media contribute to election results and what these results mean for South African voters. Participating in both commercial and alternative news media allows MMA’s FDMA to accomplish three central tasks: First, to raise awareness of the chasm between voter interests and actual media coverage; second, to publicize their election report; and third, to establish MMA as a credible media NGO that operates in the interest of the voters.

In addition to alternative and mainstream media coverage and appearances, MMA successfully uses its social media channels as FDMA activist tools. With an approximate reach of 300,000 users across all social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), MMA utilizes its social media channels during the election season to publicize election reports and critique specific journalistic coverage. On Twitter, MMA facilitates various handles, including “Media Matters ZA,” MMA’s central Twitter initiative, as well as “Gender Matters ZA,” specific to the “Gender in the Media” project (see Figure 12 below).
Figure 12: MMA tweeting about gender inequality in the election.

Social media has been a growing technique in social movements and activism, both globally (Seo, Kim, & Yang, 2009) as well as specifically in South Africa (Wassermann, 2007).

The review of MMA’s FDMA strategies during and after the 2016 National Municipal elections illustrates that the NGO sought to educate the public and media stakeholders about the role of media in the election, as well as the actual journalistic messages. Within the framework of FDMA, MMA demonstrates its commitment to activism, feminism, and democracy through alternative media production, commercial television appearances, and social media activism.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this chapter was to identify MMA as an FDMA organization. I began by assessing how MMA becomes an FDMA organization through examining MMA member’s own identifications with “media activism,” “feminist activism,” and “media democracy.” Next, I assessed in how far these key terms accurately describe MMA’s activist work and organizational
identity. I articulated how MMA displays activism in its work, how it actively promotes the feminist agenda through its content-based activist projects, and how it fosters media democratization through structural intervention.

With respect to MMA’s mission statement and promotional materials, there is a critique to be made around the NGO’s lack of feminist terminology. The word “feminism” is absent and often equated with gender equality. While MMA does promote many documents and monitoring reports around feminist issues of gender, race, and xenophobia, to name a few, feminism is not an explicitly goal. Users of MMA’s website are quickly able to find feminist special reports, though these could be highlighted on the NGO’s landing page to make the connection to feminism more direct.

Additionally, the language of feminism is absent in MMA’s “Theory of Change,” which could benefit from a more explicit integration of feminist language around identity politics and representational equality—both in MMA’s infographic and explanation of it in other promotional documents. MMA also issues special reports that make use of feminist language through critical titles, such as the *Power, Patriarchy and Gender Discrimination in Zimbabwean Newsrooms* (2014) report by MMA. However, it seems as though more radical language is reserved for special reports, which begs the question, how do MMA’s everyday activism and monitoring submissions miss the opportunity to be perceived as feminist?

While MMA members personally identify the organization as feminist and see its four goals—media democracy, ethics, quality and diversity—as feminist goals, a more explicit inclusion of feminism in their mission statement, reports, and activist goals would strengthen MMA’s organizational relationship to feminism and democracy. For example, MMA should consider revising its vision statement from “MMA’s vision is a responsible, quality media that
enables an engaged and informed citizenry in Africa and across the world” to “MMA’s vision is a responsible, feminist, quality mediascape with equal access and engagement opportunities for everyone.” This revised vision statement would specifically allude to representational awareness in media content, while also highlighting structural participation in the media industry that centers the interest of the people.

The final part of this chapter illustrated how MMA puts FDMA into practice by offering case study of MMA’s recent activism. The case study on MMA’s gender in the election activism displayed the specific ways in which MMA addresses gender parity in South African media through digital media tools, alternative content, and critical engagements with stakeholders in the mediascape.

MMA displays identifications with feminism and democracy through MMA member’s personal activist and feminist agendas as well as the two-folded nature of the activist projects. Overall, this chapter displayed that MMA is not “just” a media activist organization but rather, MMA is in fact a FDMA organization through its equal commitments to feminism and democracy in media.
CHAPTER 7

Conclusion:

Lessons from MMA, Lessons about FDMA, and Lessons for Scholar-Activism

MMA occupies a special space in the South African mediascape. From a three-person monitoring organization in 1994 to a transnational NGO employing over 20 individuals in 2017, MMA has outgrown its initial expectations. Indeed, scholars from around the globe frequently access MMA as an example of a highly successful and influential media activist NGO (Gallagher, 2001; Geertsema, 2010; Van Zyl & Kantor, 1999). Through its high-quality research, continuous ability to secure funding, consistent mission, long-term engagement, impressive activist output, and innovation, MMA was able to weave into the very fabric of the South African mediascape. As many media professionals noted, MMA is an establishment in the media industry, the “watchdog of the watchdog,” there to pat on the back for a job well done and reprimand when misrepresenting or creating inequitable structural politics obstruct free and fair media.

I began this project by explaining the context for MMA’s activism in South Africa. In Chapter 2, I offered academic critiques of women’s misrepresentation in media in the Anglo-American tradition, as well as specific to South Africa. I then described the state of South African media regulation, explained its three-tier media system, and included an overview of the major stakeholders in the mediascape. The latter was particularly important as the overview of media corporations and major titles simultaneously introduces the newspapers, online media, and networks MMA engages with most frequently in their activism. I found that South African media content centers the male experience and privileges male contributors in the newsroom. In many ways, Chapter 2 served to situate the necessity for feminist democratic media activism by
introducing the problematics in media content and media structure in the South African mediascape.

The institutional ethnographic method is a way to map the social relations of MMA and to let MMA’s actual experiences as a successful media activist NGO infuse media theory. One way in which Smith’s (1974; 1987; 2005; 2006) institutional ethnography aided me to contribute to media activism theory was to center MMA’s action over established ways of theorizing media activism. FDMA derives from the experience of MMA as one of the most influential media activist organizations in the Global South. FDMA is inductive and centers action. By emerging from MMA’s real-life actions, FDMA critically adds to a gap in theories of media activism, which often employ an either/or logic. Via a focus of MMA, an NGO grappling with the realities of the Global South, FDMA is also an effort to decolonize theoretical approaches. Traditional media activism theories often privilege the efforts and experiences of the affluent and technologically saturated West, thereby falling short to grapple with media activists in developing regions.

I have offered feminist democratic media activism (FDMA) as a theoretical alternative to the separate logics of feminist media activism and democratic media activism so often employed in academic research. Feminist media activism (FMA), as employed by Byerly and Ross (2006) or Gallagher (2001), critiques of the trivialization, omission, and condemnation of women in media texts, and the perpetual cultural marginalization that arises from misrepresentation. FMA focuses on media content, but rarely considered structural elements of the mediascape that contribute to marginalizing ideologies. Hackett and Carroll’s (2006) democratic media activism (DMA) framework does offer specific ways to reform the media industry, yet pays little attention to representational critiques. FDMA, as I offer it, theoretically extends existing work in feminist
media studies and media democratization by positioning activism for more equitable media content and media structure as a simultaneous enterprise and not as a separate or sequential project. Using the analytic of MMA’s activism in South Africa as a moment for theory-building, I have emphasized how impactful media monitoring and activism can foster change in the mediascape. As MMA demonstrates, media activism must include both representational activism as well as political economic activism.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how MMA exemplifies the FDMA theory by illustrating the ways in which MMA members identify with feminism and activism. MMA members called out an important ideal for FDMA organizations, which is that FDMA organizations should be governed by feminist-democratic values. Members additionally identified MMA as a feminist activist organization because of its special projects that seek to improve representation in media content, as well as improve undemocratic industry structures that facilitate inequality. Overall, I found a deep-seeded identification with the goals of equality and democracy, which explains why MMA centers an activist feminist mission in their work.

Via the example of the 2016 South African National Municipal Elections, I offered several concrete strategies employed by MMA to call out misrepresentation in media content and the structural issues that enable them. I discuss MMA’s content-based activism around the provision of alternative content and MMA’s structure-based activism by critiquing specific journalistic practices. Note here that MMA engages in both simultaneously, which offers the NGO more ways to foster people-centered election coverage. The discussion of election activism also afforded a glimpse into MMA’s stakeholder relationships in the South African mediascape.

In Chapter 6, I offer an institutional ethnographic analysis of MMA’s social relations with stakeholders in the mediascape. This includes the four groups they interact with most
frequently, including media organizations, other NGOs and activist groups, regulatory bodies, and the South African public. I conclude that MMA’s reputation and impact with stakeholders via their integrative approach to stakeholder relationships enables MMA to impact media content and policy more effectively. Indeed, MMA’s integrative FDMA locally facilitates what I would term a “symbiotic dependency” between activists and stakeholders, rather than the often-employed “blame-oriented approach” (Hoynes, 2005) so prone to alienation and misalignment. For MMA, this symbiotic dependency is characterized by stakeholder-level positioning in the mediascape; i.e., MMA has woven into the cultural fabric of the South African mediascape by asserting itself as important intermediary entity.

FDMA offers an innovative way for scholars to situate and analyze media activism. MMA’s testimony reveals that successful interventions in the mediascape urgently require both structure-based and message-based activism. Within the larger scope of NGO work, and specifically in realm of media monitoring, FDMA can ground non-profit media activisms that seek to change censorship laws, advocate for media policy changes, and issue complaints against stigmatizing media coverage.

As FDMA directly derives from MMA’s activist efforts in South Africa, the framework shares inherent applicability with other nations in the Global South that are battling similar economic and social issues in media. FDMA can thus aid scholars who wish to study media activism in other African, South American, or Asian locations. Additionally, FDMA can serve as a starting point for comparative analysis, both around media systems theory and non-profit communications for social change. FDMA comparisons can include the analyses of various media activist NGOs across the Global South, or be uses as a framework to study the social impact on media through FDMA.
A weakness of the FDMA framework is that it becomes constrained by ideological and hegemonic factors of the media environment. As the name suggests, FDMA organizations are primarily characterized by their commitment to activism and feminism. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 5, I discuss some of the limitations that this identification brings in the context of the Global South. Ferree and Pudrovska (2006) argue that media monitoring and advocacy becomes embedded in “newly hegemonic and largely liberal discursive opportunity structure” that might forestall impactful activism (p. 249).

MMA experiences the shortcomings of FDMA with respect to funding. Croteau (2005) explains that funding proposals must “conform to the program specifications laid out by agencies,” which can result in a deviation from core activist goals to sustain the activist effort. It can also mean that MMA might not receive funding on projects that matter to feminism, such as a special program on LGBTQIA in the media. Though limited in some arenas, MMA is able to make a difference in the South African mediascape through their monitoring and activism.

MMA uses the “cultural authority” (Hoynes, 2005) of their monitoring research as strategy to navigate institutions. This strategic management of their overall image is a core strength of MMA and could become useful to other activist organizations grappling to make a change in their mediascape. As technological innovation and digital media continue to facilitate mass communication, media activism is important to keep stakeholders in check. At the same time, I firmly believe that media activism, and FDMA, have a bright future in social justice organizing and in academia.

One area of findings from this institutional ethnography of MMA that I was unable to address in this project is transnationalization. MMA has made efforts to build similar media activist NGOs in other parts of Africa and sees its role developing outside of South Africa. The
transnationalization data set may serve as a starting point for future research. I imagine a follow-up study on transnational feminist democratic media activism, for example through comparative research on two or more NGOs in the Global South.

I would like to conclude my remarks about this study on MMA’s activism by discussing some valuable lessons I learned as a scholar-activist. As scholar-activist enter the field, complete research, and exit the field, many neglect to reflect on their experiences. When I began my fieldwork in South Africa, I was unsure to what degree MMA granted me involvement. Though my own activist interests undergird this project, I went into the field as “scholar.”

For this study on MMA as a FDMA organization, I use the phrase scholar-activist (in that order) to describe my interactions and role with the NGO. While I openly introduced myself as a scholar-activist to MMA in the beginning, the lines between my research and activist participation began to blur almost immediately. At MMA, I was valued for my academic insights and asked to contribute to projects based on that expertise. Though I do not fully meet the “activist-scholar” definition employed by Rodino-Colocino (2012)—as someone who does their own organizing—I did aid in the analysis and compilation of election monitoring reports and attended coalitional meetings.

What is important here to note is that the lines of observation in my institutional ethnography of MMA became fluid. As noted by Diamond (2005), “all observation is participant observation” (p. 47). Post-positivist and feminist theorists continuously assert that researcher’s presence shapes the interactions we seek to observe (see also Frey & Carragee, 2007). During MMA client and project meetings, I was never a silent observer. In fact, MMA members would always encourage me to add to the conversation with ideas and opinions, which ultimately altered the course of the discourse.
There is theoretical value in contemplating “scholar-activism” for the purpose of research methodology. As noted by feminist scholars (Fricker, 1998; Haraway, 1988; Smith, 1987; Stacey, 1988), a healthy research relationship to informants requires relational connection. Looking back at my time with MMA, and with some temporal and spatial distance from the project, I realized that I “gave” to MMA about as much as I “took.”

Stacey (1998) comments on the “use” of study participant for information, which is what Adelman and Frey (2001) discuss as “researcher greed.” I agree with Rodino-Colocino’s (2012) reconceptualization of “greed” as “passion,” which “deepens participation” and brings to the fore the scholar’s commitment to doing the work of an organization justice (p. 548). In selecting institutional ethnography as my method, I was able to become involved in the organization and in the lives of the people in it. I also allowed myself to become swept-up in the energy of MMA and participated in coalitional meetings.

What often remains unaddressed in activist research are the ways in which scholars contribute to organizations. As a scholar-activist, it was also important to me to “give back to the organization” (Rodino-Colocino, 2012, p. 548). At MMA, I was actively seeking out opportunities to contribute. I was later told that my open communication style and collegial disposition encouraged MMA members to seek out my collaboration on projects. I also offered myself as a copy editor for written reports.

MMA as an organization benefitted from my stay in three central ways: I facilitated a developmental workshop on intersectional representation critiques; I completed a communication audit that aided the re-structuring of the program coordination; and I contributed my academic expertise to op-ed pieces that lauded MMA’s monitoring work during the election. through a developmental workshop, communication audit, and publicity for their monitoring
reports. through “taking” information from MMA and “giving” labor, time, and knowledge, I was able to strike the balance as a scholar-activist.

I was able to accomplish this balance because of my relatively brief fieldwork. Other scholar-activist may be more inclined to “prioritize activism at the expense of scholarship” (Croteau, 2005, p. 35) simply because they have long-term engagements with an activist organization or group. I imagine that in these cases, the lines of “scholar” to “activist” become increasingly difficult to define and maintain. Though, as Rodino-Colocino (2012) illustrates, there is still scholarly merit to the analysis of activist participation for academics, even when the lines blur.

For the purpose of MMA as an FDMA organization, my ability to develop the “activist” dimension of my scholar-activist identity relates back to MMA’s own identifications with feminism and activism. Members of MMA stated that they valued my contributions, encouraged me to participate, and supported my research. This FDMA organization underscored its democratic and feminist ideals through its support for scholar-activists via transparency and collaboration.
References


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