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Voters Against Public Opinion: The Press and Democracy in Brazil and South Africa

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In both Brazil and South Africa, mainstream media sustain an uneasy relationship with left-wing governments. Conventional wisdom holds that this problem reflects the immaturity of their political institutions, which results chiefly from the late development of their democracies. Alternatively, this article hypothesizes that it relates to the crisis of a political order inherited from a colonial past: The mainstream media voices the perspectives of elites that present themselves as the authorized carriers of Western civilization's legacy in their societies, living among non-civilized multitudes. However, successive victories of the Workers' Party in Brazil and African National Congress in South Africa put these elites' leadership at risk.

Keywords: comparative studies, political communication, Brazil, South Africa

"The People Voted Against Public Opinion," a headline attributed to Alexandre Garcia, a journalist with the privately owned Brazilian broadcasting corporation Globo TV, synthesizes the frustration many leading Brazilian journalists experienced in view of the result of the 2006 presidential elections. Despite very negative coverage of his government by mainstream news media, the incumbent president and candidate for the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT), Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, secured a decisive victory in the second round of elections, defeating opposition candidate Geraldo Alckmin by a 60.8–39.2 margin. According to Globo TV General Director Carlos Schroeder, the election results were solid evidence of "the high levels of political apathy of the population" (Porto, 2012, p. 186). Adding to their disappointment, PT candidate Dilma Rousseff won both the 2010 and the 2014 presidential elections.

Journalists have long held inflated expectations about the role they should perform in Brazilian democracy. Many portray themselves as the voice of enlightened public opinion, which in fact corresponds to the views of urban upper and middle classes. Even though the PT won the last four presidential elections, such journalists perceive the PT as an irresponsible party with a leftist agenda, hostile to liberal democracy. Feeling politically insulated, they blame the PT's populism, propaganda, and corrupt practices,

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along with apathy and ignorance in much of the population, for the declining quality of Brazilian democracy. For these reasons, they claim, opposing the PT government is part of their duty as defenders of democracy itself.

This pattern of conflict between the liberal/conservative media and leftist governments is not unique to Brazil. It also occurs in other Latin American democracies such as Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia (Kitzberger, 2012; Waisbord, 2013), and in South Africa, whose media establishment behaves "in terms that liken it to an opposition political party" to counterweigh the "absence of a significant opposition party to the ruling ANC" (Wasserman, 2010, p. 248). Why does the same pattern occur in such significantly different societies? What does it reveal about the state of democracy in these countries?

It is widely believed that the tense relationship between media and government in these countries is evidence of their political institutions' immaturity, which results chiefly from either their late development or the transitional character of their democracies (Voltmer, 2013). This approach assumes that Western societies provide a universal normative standard for the rest of the world and evaluates non-Western societies according to their relative distance from Western ones. This premise has been critiqued in a growing body of literature (e.g., Curran & Park, 2000; Thussu, 2009), and recent trends indicating that the global order is shifting toward a multipolar world have made its limitations even more evident.

Pursuing this critical line of thought, this article directly compares two non-Western societies, Brazil and South Africa. Its core hypothesis is that the uneasy relationship between the media and the government in these countries is a consequence of a crisis in the political order inherited from their colonial past. In both societies, White colonizers of European origin ruled territories inhabited by large non-White populations and, after independence, constituted the bulk of their countries' political and economic elites. Perceiving themselves as inheritors of the legacy of Western civilization, they therefore claim the natural right to lead the insufficiently westernized majority of their societies' populations. Mainstream media have traditionally voiced the views of this group. However, recent developments have challenged the "natural superiority" of these elites. As more people come to exert their voting rights, a new type of political force has emerged to represent interests other than those associated with the old postcolonial elites: the PT in Brazil and the African National Congress (hereafter ANC) in South Africa. Mainstream media have reacted by denouncing these forces as a serious threat to liberal democracy. They worry that the hegemony of the respective parties poses a risk to competitive democracy and express concern about the populist style of these governments, corruption, foreign policies lacking Western orientation, and media regulation.

The exploratory analysis presented in this article is aimed at building theory rather than testing it. For this reason, and given the absence of a significant body of literature on the issues discussed here, some degree of imprecision and oversimplification may occur. Further research is needed to more rigorously examine the hypotheses and findings presented in this article.

Lost in Transition? "Late," "Transitional," and "Third Wave" Democracies

Comparing political communication in Brazil and in South Africa is undeniably a difficult task. Comparisons between two or more non-Western societies are unusual, and those that do exist have often focused on their relative distance from Western normative models (Meng & Rantanen, 2015; Voltmer & Wasserman, 2014). A particularly popular way to do this is to describe such societies as "late" or "transitional" democracies. Since the 1970s, the transition from authoritarianism to democracy has attracted growing interest in scholarly literature. Early studies explored factors influencing different aspects of transition processes, including the reasons behind the crises of authoritarian regimes that open opportunities for regime change (Rustow, 1970), the degree of rupture or continuity between new democracies and old regimes (Share, 1987), and the prospects of a new democratic order's survival (Linz & Valenzuela, 1994). In these early studies, requirements for classifying societies as democracies were relatively easy to meet. For instance, Huntington (1991) defined democracy simply as the regime in which "the most important decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections" (p. 7). Only after the collapse of communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the 1990s did the transition to democracy became a full-fledged area of research.

At first, a great majority of scholars believed that most societies in the world would converge toward the Western model of democracy. However, this optimistic attitude was soon replaced by the more nuanced view that democratization processes usually did not lead to real democracy but to "gray zone" regimes (Diamond, 2002; Merkel, 2004; O'Donnell, 1994). Slowly, research on late democracies changed from a positive approach focused on closure of the gap between them and mature democracies, to a more negative one emphasizing the barriers that keep these societies from becoming more democratic. This change in attitude did not happen by chance but resulted from systematic effort by a group of soft-power organizations committed to promoting Western neoliberal views in order to influence scholarly research and decision-making agendas. As its foundation manifesto makes clear, the *Journal of Democracy*, for example, was created with the core political and intellectual purpose of helping to curb authoritarian theories' influence at universities so as "to unify what is becoming a worldwide democratic movement" (Diamond & Plattner, 1990, p. 4).

Something similar happened to Freedom House—an organization dedicated to evaluating the status of civil rights and press freedom across the world—whose reports have exerted considerable influence on scholarly research, despite criticism of their methodological flaws and ideological bias (Becker, 2003; Giannone, 2010). The World Bank also played a strategic role in promoting Western (neoliberal) values and institutions as models to be followed by the so-called late democracies (Kramarz & Momani, 2013; Nay, 2014).

In particular, political communication studies of "late" or "transitional" democracies have usually evaluated them against the Anglo-American Fourth Estate model. Whereas some describe cases of successful Fourth Estate building (e.g., Lawson, 2002), others emphasize obstacles to the media's satisfactory performance of such a role (Hughes & Lawson, 2005; Jabukovicz, 2001). Most start from the premise that journalists and media organizations are (or should be) naturally committed to liberal principles, and attribute failure to behave accordingly to the influence of perverse factors such as

corruption (McNair, 1996), clientelism (Lee, He, & Huang, 2007; Örnebring, 2012), and a weak market economy (Waisbord, 2000). Interestingly, the Fourth Estate is not a good parameter for evaluating the quality of Western democracies. Rather, studies referring to those societies usually regard the Fourth Estate as a historically constructed, politically motivated idealization that does not correspond to current media practices (Lewis, Williams, & Franklin, 2008; Sparrow, 1999).

Despite its popularity, the "transition to democracy" model has its limitations as a tool for comparing non-Western societies like Brazil and South Africa. To begin with, it does not allow direct comparisons between these societies; studies using it must refer to some Western model to make sense. In addition, it defines non-Western societies negatively in comparison to so-called mature Western democracies in terms of what they should (or fail to) be, to the detriment of what they really are (Albuquerque, 2005), thus consigning these societies to an eternal political adolescence. Finally, this kind of analysis covers a truncated time span, as it does not take into account data collected before the authoritarian period that preceded democratization.

The Media, Government, and Postcolonial Dilemmas in Brazil and South Africa

Defying the "transition" paradigm, this article argues that the origins of the current conflicts between media and society in Brazil and South Africa can be traced to these countries' colonial past. Both societies are ethnically diverse and have a westernized white minority that has enjoyed dominance since these nations' independence. Recently, however, Brazil and South Africa have undergone major political changes that allowed left-wing political groups to ascend to government. Since then, conflicts between the government and the mainstream press have generated continuous political stress.

Different Colonization Processes and Their Consequences

Brazil and South Africa experienced very distinct processes of colonization that shaped their societies differently. Brazil was subject to exploitation colonialism focused on low-cost extraction of natural resources for Portugal's benefit. South Africa, on the other hand, initially experienced a form of settler colonialism in which colonizers enjoyed much more autonomy from colonial powers and acted as an internal colonial agent (Veracini, 2010). Dutch settlers who arrived in the region in the mid-17th century established two republics—the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic—but after two wars against British troops they became part of the British Empire.

Brazil and South Africa are each widely regarded as having two main racial groups—Blacks and Whites—and a common pattern of Whites' dominance over Black people. However, things are considerably more complicated than this. When Portuguese colonizers arrived in Brazil, a native people they called "Indians" was already there. As a small country with a global empire, Portugal relied heavily on racial mixing—initially with natives and later with African people—as a means of occupying the Brazilian territory. Africans who came to Brazil as slaves lost their previous identities and became simply "Black" people. Nowadays, intense racial mixing has somewhat blurred the boundaries between Blacks and Whites, although this does not mean Brazil is a "racial democracy" (Bailey, 2004). Slavery in Brazil lasted until 1888, just a year before the end of monarchy. The subsequent republican regime also adopted racist

policies, such as encouraging immigration by Europeans and denying entry to people of other races so as to "whiten" the Brazilian population (Schwarcz, 1993). In South Africa, "Black" and "White" refer to very heterogeneous groups. "Black" applies to a heterogeneous ethnic group existing before European colonization, whereas "White" refers to two main colonizing groups: Afrikaners descended from Dutch settlers who emigrated to South Africa, and British colonists. To a great extent, the perception of Blacks and Whites as unified categories is a by-product of apartheid legislation (Posel, 2011), which formalized their classification as racial groups alongside two other groups, the Coloured and the Indians/Asians. Despite the demise of apartheid legislation in 1991, these categories remain fully integrated into the South African culture and still provide a basis for government policies today.

Colonization processes in Brazil and in South Africa also differed sharply in both their degree of political centralization and their cultural homogenization. In the process of colonizing Brazil, Portugal energetically supported political centralism and cultural homogenization policies like the active promotion of Portuguese as the primary language of nearly all Brazilians. These policies remained active even after Brazil's independence, often taking big southeastern cities—first Rio de Janeiro and later São Paulo—as cultural models for the rest of the country, sometimes by authoritarian means (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1990; Ortiz, 1988).

On the other hand, as usually happens in settler colonialism (Veracini, 2010), Dutch settlers in South Africa were primarily concerned with building a sovereign society, not with civilizing other people or even extracting surplus from the indigenous workforce (Wolfe, 1999), so they had no interest in promoting political and cultural homogenization policies. However, their project clashed with another colonial project implemented by the British Empire. Starting early in the 19th century, when they took the Cape Colony from the Dutch settlers, British colonizers implemented cultural homogenization measures. They continued to do so until 1910, after the annexation of the rest of the South African territory. Dutch colonizers reacted to this by using their language as a means of resistance (Olman, 2008). A common (White) South African identity was not forged until the first decade of the 20th century, when it served as a means of reconciling the English and the Afrikaner communities at the expense of the excluded Blacks and other non-White people (Dubow, 2011).

Common Legacies of Postcolonialism

The similarities between Brazil's and South Africa's colonization processes and postcolonial statuses are as significant as their differences. Unlike most societies described in postcolonial literature, Brazil's and South Africa's local White elites, who regarded their countries as displaced European societies, remained dominant after independence.[2] In South Africa, the nation-building project began decades before independence from the British Empire. In 1910, the Act of Union promoted reconciliation between

[2] Literature on postcolonialism has focused primarily on societies that became independent in the second half of the 20th century—particularly those in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa—and has been associated with the work of Edward Said, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha, among others. Latin America has generally been misrepresented in postcolonial literature, in part because its experience of the colonial process differed considerably from that in African and Asian societies.

Anglophone and Afrikaner groups by establishing a basis for a Whites-only political community, thus relegating the remaining South Africans to second-class citizenship (Bonner, 2011). Meanwhile, Brazilian independence in 1822 was in a sense a family affair: A rebel son of the king of Portugal was crowned Emperor of Brazil under the name Pedro I. For almost seven decades, Brazil remained the sole example of monarchic government in South America, amid many Spanish-speaking republics. Throughout this period, Brazil refused to take part in inter-American initiatives (Santos, 2004), deciding instead to cultivate closer relations with Europe. The turn from monarchy to republic in 1889 did not bring Brazil closer to its South American neighbors. On the contrary, it reinforced a project of modernizing the country according to examples set by Western advanced societies like France and the United States (Carvalho, 1990).

In both countries, social and political exclusion were key to the westernized nation-building projects. In South Africa from 1948 on, apartheid laws extended the preexisting logic of racial segregation to almost every aspect of social life. They consolidated groups based on racial classification, forbade mixed-race marriages, compelled people of different races to live in different places, and severely restricted non-White peoples' mobility inside the country (Posel, 2011). In Brazil the logic of social segregation was never so explicit, but it has been effective anyway. In 1881 illiterate people were denied the right to vote. The new republican regime installed in 1889 reinforced this rule, arguing it was a measure needed to assure a certain "quality" in the electoral process. Considering that in 1940, 56% of Brazilian adults were illiterate, and that 39% of the total population was illiterate in 1960, the exclusionary impact of this rule was tremendous (Nicolau, 2012). Predictably, these rules disproportionally affected poor and non-White people. Only in 1988 was the ban finally lifted.

Why has such a scenario developed? Historically, the ruling elites of South Africa and Brazil (and other countries in Latin America) regarded their countries as essentially peripheral Western societies and evaluated them according to their relative distance from the core Western societies they took as models (Mignolo, 2005). They ascribed this distance to the racial and cultural background of most of the population, which supposedly made them unfit to meet the requirements of Western civilization. In other words, they identified a "West versus the Rest" divide inside their own countries and claimed responsibility for defending Western values and institutions from the uncultivated sectors of their societies (for an early version of this argument, see Casanova, 1965). According to these elites, political institutions like liberal democracy and the Fourth Estate model of the press took their value from their status as legacies of Western civilization rather than from their own capacity to enhance citizenship. Consequently, they asserted, massive popular participation in politics could endanger liberal democracy by replacing it with a degraded, low-quality version of democracy.

Elite-Oriented Media

In both Brazil and South Africa, an elite-oriented media emerged in connection with the postcolonial legacy. Here, the term "elite-oriented" means two different things. It refers first to characteristics of newspaper readership. In both countries, the very low circulation of newspapers is concentrated in the upper and middle classes. According to the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, in 2012 the circulation of daily newspapers per 1,000 people was 61 in Brazil and 41 in

South Africa, in contrast with a rate of 166 in the United States, 255 in Germany, and 433 in Japan.[3] A different situation prevails in broadcasting. In 1950 Brazil became an early adopter of television, and its governing military regime systematically strove to ensure good infrastructure for national broadcasting as a way to promote national unity, a core value in their national security ideology (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1990; Ortiz, 1988). In contrast, development of television in South Africa started late, in 1975 (Horwitz, 2004).

The second, political meaning of "elite-oriented" refers to the elitist nature of mainstream media political positioning. In Brazil, a handful of family-owned media groups have controlled the mainstream press, which is mostly concentrated in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (Azevedo, 2006; Lima, 2001). They usually reaffirm their commitment to classic Western liberal journalistic values like the watchdog role and the Fourth Estate model (Waisbord, 2000), but in practice their behavior differs from the liberal tradition of journalism in many significant ways. Mainstream press organizations have traditionally cultivated close relationships with Brazilian governments, which have provided them with economic advantages and political influence, often at the expense of journalistic independence. As a rule, these media organizations supported the 1964 coup that birthed the military regime and remained loyal to it almost to the end. However, during the transition process to democracy they changed sides, shifting their political support to the new regime (Guimarães & Amaral, 1988).

South Africa presents a more complex scenario. Historically, its press was organized according to three main media models, based on ethno-linguistic criteria. The English-language press was the dominant model in print media from the 19th century to the 1940s. It emulated the British press in both its liberal political views and its informative rather than partisan orientation. The Afrikaans-language press developed later, from the 1920s on, and became an important political force in the late 1940s, when the Afrikaner-based National Party gained political dominance in the country. Afrikaans-language newspapers adopted a different, partisan-oriented journalistic style aligned with the defense of Afrikaner culture and apartheid politics. The third model refers to the so-called Black press. It emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, but systematic persecution by the South African government kept it from developing (Hadland, 2011).

Broadcasting in the two countries was organized according to different logics. In South Africa, it followed the principles of the British public service—as established by John Reith, the founder of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)—under the public service monopoly of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), created in 1936. However, unlike the BBC, which had cultural homogeneity as a core premise, from the outset the SABC faced the challenge of dealing with multiple publics divided according to ethnic and linguistic criteria (Teer-Tomaselli, 2008). Currently the SABC retains a leading role in the South African broadcasting system but no longer enjoys a monopoly. Now it competes with other privately owned broadcasters and many communitarian stations too (Milton & Fourie, 2015). In Brazil, commercial media had a head start in radio and television from the very beginning (in the 1920s and the 1950s, respectively). For decades, radio and television remained local businesses because there was no infrastructure allowing national broadcasting. This changed when the military government's creation of a sophisticated satellite- and microwave-based system made it possible to build television networks. One

[3] http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2013/06/daily-chart-1

media organization in particular benefited greatly from these circumstances: TV Globo, a privately owned company, dominated the television scene for decades in a quasi-monopolistic way (Brittos & Bolaño, 2005; Porto, 2012).

Mainstream Media and the Transition to Democracy

The transition to democracy presented Brazilian and South African media with new challenges and opportunities. In Brazil, mainstream media remained in the hands of the same owners as before, who had no qualms about changing their loyalty from the authoritarian regime to the new democracy. Indeed, they became stronger in the new order, moving from mouthpiece status into a prime political role. During José Sarney's presidential term, the owner of Globo Television, Roberto Marinho, was influential enough to secure the appointment of his ally Antonio Carlos Magalhães as Minister of Communications (Guimarães & Amaral, 1988; Porto, 2012). Mainstream media organizations strategically mobilized popular support for different economic plans in the 1980s and 1990s, supporting liberal candidates Fernando Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso against their leftist contenders, and in many occasions acted as arbiters to solve political disputes (Albuquerque, 2005).

In South Africa, the end of apartheid and the advent of globalization affected the diverse media differently. The Afrikaans-language press, which had been closer to the apartheid regime, lost much of its prestige (Wasserman, 2009). In contrast, the new circumstances offered a promising opportunity to develop the indigenous-language press (Ndlovu, 2011). As for the English-language press, the changes allowed it to improve its international prestige, given that its liberal perspective was attuned to the spirit of the time after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European communist regimes (Hadland, 2011; Wasserman, 2006). Media globalization and Black empowerment policies have since contributed to numerous cases of changes in print media ownership (Horwitz, 2004; Tomaselli, 2000). Deregulation and satellite television allowed the development of "a plethora of new private stations and community radio across the country" (Teer-Tomaselli, 2008, p. 85).

Power Shift and Media Concerns About the Quality of Democracy

In both Brazil (Pires, 2007) and South Africa (Wasserman, 2006), sectors of the mainstream media hoped that globalization and the end of the authoritarian regime would allow their societies to converge toward the Western liberal model of democracy. Initially, these wishes appeared to be on the way to fulfillment, as Fernando Henrique Cardoso's and Lula's earlier governments in Brazil (Power, 2010), like the Thabo Mbeki government in South Africa (Bond, 2000), adopted neoliberal policies. However, soon it was clear that the political projects of the new forces dominating South African and Brazilian politics—the ANC and PT, respectively—differed greatly from the Western liberal agenda. In Brazil, the postcolonial elites grew increasingly suspicious as the PT gained successive electoral victories, an attitude that worsened when other Latin American countries turned to the left (Castañeda, 2006; Kitzberger, 2012). In South Africa, ANC reinforcement of the country's African identity provoked a similar anxiety (Ajulu, 2001; Gumede, 2008).

From a historical perspective, the PT and the ANC look like very different political parties. Founded in 1912, the ANC was outlawed under the apartheid regime and led an armed resistance against it. Only in 1990 did the ANC became legal again. Since 1994, it has won all presidential bids by a large margin and obtained more than 60% of votes in every legislative election (Southall, 2001). The PT—founded much later, in 1979—came about through an alliance of labor unions, Catholic grassroots movements, and different leftist groups. Since 2002, the PT has won all presidential bids, though in second-round elections in all cases. However, the PT's inability to get more than a fifth of the seats in the National Congress has compelled the party to build broad party alliances to guarantee solid congressional support for its presidents (Hunter, 2007). Nevertheless, the PT is the only Brazilian political party to have enjoyed the kind of mass support that makes it a keystone of the entire Brazilian political party system (Samuels, 2006).

Neither the ANC nor the PT is strictly a leftist party, even though both their government coalitions include Communist Parties (Bond, 2000; Samuels, 2004). However, the PT and the ANC are unquestionably located much farther to the left of the political spectrum than their predecessors were. As the ANC and the PT proved their ability to hold the presidency for successive mandates, mainstream media began raising questions about the quality of democracy and the risk that liberal democracy might be replaced by a noncompetitive, degraded form of democracy. The two countries' media have voiced concerns about the current state of democracy in remarkably similar fashion. In particular, they have demonstrated anxiety about (a) the advent of one-party democracy; (b) populism as factor degrading the quality of democracy; (c) widespread corruption associated with the PT and the ANC party machines; (d) government foreign policies, and (e) media regulation as a menace to the independence of the Fourth Estate.

The Hegemonic Party Issue

Brazilian and South African mainstream media have repeatedly expressed concern about the PT's and ANC's political dominance nationally. Despite considerable differences in the two parties' relative strength,[4] the media in both countries have portrayed the issue through convergent frameworks, according to which the continued permanence of the same political party in power threatens democracy. Thus, they claim, fighting that threat in the name of democracy is part of their Fourth Estate duty (Johnston, 2005; Pereira, 2010; Wasserman, 2010). Party dominance itself, however, does not necessarily pose a threat to democracy. In his classic book on party systems, Sartori (1976) refers to many Western democracies—for instance, Sweden, Denmark, and Italy— that have experienced party dominance for long periods (pp. 192–201).

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[4] To be sure, PT dominance in Brazilian politics cannot be properly described as hegemony. The PT has never obtained more than a fifth of the seats in the National Congress, so it has to build large, ideologically heterogeneous alliances in order to govern. However, mainstream media have often depicted the PT as promoting the capture of governmental institutions by party logic, and some journalists believe this capture could represent an embryonic establishment of an authoritarian party–state formation (e.g., Pereira, 2010).

In Brazil, as in South Africa, the ruling parties' dominant position, their mass party characteristics, and their leftist profiles have helped fuel generalized anxiety among sectors of the previous elites and mainstream media about the building of a party–state, proto-authoritarian type of government. Mainstream media have repeatedly accused the PT and the ANC of colonizing the state apparatus for the benefit of a particularistic partisan agenda that they consider incompatible with the more general public interest. In South Africa, critics have consistently condemned the persistence of a comrade ethos in the ANC (Johnston, 2005), which they deem incompatible with liberal democracy; in Brazil, journalists created and popularized a derogatory term, *petralhas*,[5] to describe PT members' supposedly collusive behavior with respect to the state. According to the president of the Brazilian National Newspapers Association, Maria Judith Brito, the media have a moral duty to work as a de facto opposition party, reestablishing a political balance despite the weakness of the formal political opposition (Farah, 2010). South African journalists have presented a very similar argument (Wasserman, 2010). In a way, this rationale inverts the logic of the partisan model of journalism, which links media political engagement to the existence of solid political parties (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Seymour-Ure, 1974).

Populism

A second vein of criticism in mainstream media in Brazil and in South Africa refers to the populist style of some of the new leaders, in particular the PT's Luis Inácio Lula da Silva and the ANC's Jacob Zuma. Lula's populist style was criticized during his first term as president, when his and the PT's political support base changed dramatically. On the one hand, the 2005 outbreak of the "Mensalão Scandal"—a pay-per-vote scheme to guarantee support for Lula's administration in the Brazilian Parliament—disappointed many southeastern middle-class voters who had supported the PT in the belief that it was ethically superior to other political parties. On the other hand, social policies like the income-transfer plan Bolsa Família significantly improved the administration's popularity among Brazilians with lower incomes and less education, especially in the northeast (Hunter & Power, 2007). Despite highly negative media coverage of his government, Lula soon recovered his popularity and easily won reelection in 2006, finishing his second term with an 80% approval rating. For some critics the only possible explanation for this was Lula's exceptional communication skills and populist manipulation of masses, reminiscent of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez; accordingly, they coined terms like *lulismo* and *lulo-petismo* to describe his political style (Kamel, 2009; Pereira, 2010). In South Africa, accusations of populism became more common during Jacob Zuma's presidency. The media contrast the restrained, moderate style of Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki with Zuma's "anti-establishment," and "polygamous Zulu warrior" style, describing it as closer to the "typical African despot" than to a modern democratic leader (Gumede, 2008; Gunner, 2009).

In fact, populism is a somewhat vague concept. It refers to an anti-institutional type of politics in which charismatic political leaders try to establish a direct relationship with the people, bypassing existing political institutions that they see as elite-dominated. As a rule, the literature describes populism as a type

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[5] The term *petralhas* mixes the words *petista*, which refers to the PT militants, and Metralhas, the Brazilian name given to the Disney criminal characters Beagle Boys.

of political pathology (Laclau, 2005), but in practice it applies to various political situations. In Western societies, populism tends to be linked to the far right, jingoist nationalism, and xenophobia (Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003). In Latin America, however, it has been commonly associated with left-wing caudillos who address mostly poor, socially and politically excluded people (Laclau, 2005). In South Africa, populism is associated with particular ethnic identities and particularly, since the end of apartheid, with "African natives."

It is somewhat problematic to describe the recent Brazilian and South African governments as populist in character. After all, populism is generally associated with non-institutionalized political parties, which the PT and the ANC can hardly be said to be. Indeed, scholars usually regard Brazil, alongside Uruguay and Chile, as an example of the non-populist type of Latin American leftist government, in contrast to countries like Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia (e.g., Castañeda, 2006). Use of the populist label to describe the Lula and Zuma governments seems largely politically motivated. It chiefly reflects the distress a significant part of the postcolonial elites (and media) experience when confronted with the political style and agenda of a new type of political actor that has come to power in each country.

Corruption

Mainstream media have often criticized the Brazilian and South African leftist governments as inherently corrupt. In Brazil, major corruption scandals have occurred in every government since the military regime ended (Porto, 2011), and the media were foremost in denouncing them. Media denunciations played a crucial role in President Fernando Collor's impeachment process in 1992 (Albuquerque, 2005; Waisbord, 2000). Beginning in 2005, coverage of the "Mensalão scandal" differed from that of previous scandals in two main aspects. First, it had a strong partisan character, systematically describing the PT as an essentially corrupt political party. Second, it had extraordinary endurance, remaining a hot topic in media coverage for eight years (Biroli & Mantovani, 2014; Pereira, 2013). Since then, only corruption scandals involving PT politicians have drawn full media coverage.

In South Africa, denunciations of corruption became more common under ANC governments and especially during Zuma's presidency. They focused on themes like privileges accorded to ANC "comrades" (Johnston, 2005) and allegedly collusive relationships between government officials and businesspeople with dubious reputations, and they particularly denounced Zuma's involvement in criminal behavior (Gumede, 2008). Unlike in Brazil, in South Africa corruption is held to relate to the broader theme of Afro-pessimism, which dates back to the 19th-century colonization of Africa (Wasserman & de Beer, 2009). In this view, Africa is a dark continent condemned to chaos, which justifies the civilizing intervention of Western powers.

Meanwhile, although basic definitions of corruption are relatively simple—for example, the World Bank (1997) defines it as "the abuse of public office for private gain" (p. 8)—practical use of this concept is discretionary and depends significantly on the subject of observation: evaluations of non-Western societies are generally much more rigorous than those of Western societies. Take for instance the "pork barrel" concept used in U.S. political science studies: though a form of particularistic use of public resources (Mayhew, 2004; Piatonni, 2001), pork-barrel projects are seldom subjected to normative

analysis; instead, the practice is considered just "politics as usual." In non-Western societies, however, similar practices are treated as evidence of corruption (de Sardan, 1999). Hence, "corruption" is not a politically neutral term, for in practice it promotes the idea of Western moral and political superiority over the rest of the world. Brazilian and South African mainstream media's reference to corruption as a key feature of their countries' leftist, insufficiently westernized governments appears to be in line with this approach.

Foreign Relations

Both the Brazilian and the South African governments recently revised their foreign relations policies to favor a less westernized and more Global South-oriented approach. On the one hand, these two countries entered into global-scale alliances with other non-Western countries. The best known example of these alliances is the BRICS group, which includes Brazil and South Africa along with China, India, and Russia. The group has been sometimes described as a potential challenger to the Western hegemony (Thussu & Nordenstreng, 2015). On the other hand, Brazil's and South Africa's reinforcement of ties with their respective Latin American and African neighbors has been much criticized by mainstream media in both countries. South African media are particularly critical of the close relationship established with the Zimbabwean government led by Robert Mugabe, presented as a prime example of an African tyrant (Wasserman & de Beer, 2009). Brazil's mainstream media have likewise complained about the growing proximity between Brazil and other left-governed Latin American countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and above all Venezuela, at the expense of their traditional ties with the United States and Western European countries. In particular, the deceased Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez was long presented as the paradigmatic example of a Latin American dictator (Cañizales & Lugo-Ocando, 2008; Castañeda, 2006).

Media Regulation and Harassment

The topic of media regulation and harassment by the PT and the ANC governments is a fifth source of tension between mainstream media and government. In Brazil, a country dominated by privately owned media (in both the press and broadcasting) that has a very weak regulatory system (Lima, 2004), the very idea of regulation is considered a threat to the freedom of the press. Mainstream media strongly rejected the PT's proposal to create the Conselho Federal de Jornalismo—an independent authority charged with regulating ethical issues in journalism—perceiving it as limiting press freedom (Pires, 2007). In addition, mainstream media journalists regarded recurrent complaints about media coverage of the government as evidence of harassment, that is, an attempt to prevent the press from performing a true Fourth Estate role (Porto, 2012). In South Africa, complaints about media harassment have been closely related to racial imbalances and resentment, a legacy of the colonial and apartheid past. On different occasions President Mandela complained that the press staff's social composition—mostly middle-class White people—was not representative of the country's population as a whole (Wasserman & de Beer, 2009). Relations worsened in the following administrations. For instance, in 1999/2000 the South African Human Rights Commission investigated claims of persistent racist bias in the South African press and published a polemical report titled "Faultlines." Mainstream journalists and media organizations counterattacked, accusing the government of attempting to tame the Fourth Estate, making the SABC into

an ANC mouthpiece, and—in a curious inversion, considering the past—racializing the political debate by marginalizing the White press and its views (Johnston, 2005; Tomaselli, 2000).

Concluding Remarks

In both Brazil and South Africa, mainstream media have recently been at odds with the government. Claiming to speak for the public interest, mainstream media have described governments led by the PT and the ANC as responsible for degrading the quality of democracy. At the same time, government officials presenting themselves as authorized representatives of the national interest argue that media critics are motivated by an elitist bias. Similar conflicts have occurred in other countries, particularly in Latin America. What do these facts say about the quality of such democracies?

The usual interpretation relates these conflicts to the insufficient development of institutional pillars of liberal democracy. In this version, economic, cultural, and institutional factors act as barriers to an open media (Hughes & Lawson, 2002), foster collusive patterns in media–state relations (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002), and lead to a degraded form of liberal media system that Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez (2014) label the captured liberal media system. In most cases, scholarly literature associates these problems with particular characteristics of processes of transition to democracy, or to legacies of previous authoritarian regimes. The Western-centered hypothesis underlying this interpretation seems to be that in the absence of these impediments, a solid, independent Fourth Estate could be established in these countries.

This article explores a non-westernized approach to discuss how the media and politics interact in Brazil and in South Africa. It hypothesizes that the uneasy relationship between these spheres concerns the postcolonial character of both societies, specifically the way westernized (and mostly White) elites came to rule populations whose large majorities are non-Western (or insufficiently Western). As democratization consolidates itself, previously excluded political forces can successfully challenge established elites. Feeling insulated, and incapable of converting their supposed intellectual and cultural superiority into political power (Azevedo, 2011; Wasserman, 2010; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005), these elites and mainstream media associated with them describe the new government forces as hostile to democracy, even though they came to power by democratic means. According to their rationale, albeit correct in principle, founding democracy based solely on the people's will can be a real danger in contexts where people are not culturally and politically prepared. In these circumstances democracy can give way to populism, and hegemonic parties, clientelism, and propaganda can obliterate virtuous political choices. Such elites present themselves as the true representatives of enlightened (that is, westernized) public opinion and thus the legitimate defenders of democracy.

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