CHAPTER 3

THE HISTORIES: *SOWETAN* AND *MAIL AND GUARDIAN*

1. Introduction

This chapter offers the histories of both the *Sowetan* and the *Mail & Guardian* and applies the theories discussed in the previous chapter. This is done as an attempt to contextualise the newspapers under review within the theoretical framework. Important here is the fact that historical processes have played a role in how these newspapers have reached their contemporary form. In a nutshell the chapter highlights how these newspapers related to the apartheid government and how they relate to the democratic government. It also attempts to show how these newspapers have been drawn in the transition from apartheid to democracy.

2. *The Sowetan*

The Sowetan, grew out of the *Bantu World* which was founded in 1932 with the ANC leader Selope Thema as the editor. *Bantu World* was a product of the white capitalist conviction that there was money to be made out of blacks and "a belief in moulding native opinion so that political developments would follow the course of 'reasoned protest' with the ultimate aim of raising the masses to the 'civilised standards' of the white man" (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991:21).

In 1955 *Bantu World* changed its name to *The World* and was regarded as a widely read and influential black newspaper (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). Tomaselli and Louw (1991) argue that before Percy Qoboza's era (Qoboza joined *The World* in 1974), *The World's* editorial policy was less critical of apartheid policies especially in comparison to the *Rand Daily Mail* which also targeted black readers. Tomaselli (1987a: 48) points out that during the creation of the homelands by the apartheid regime, the *Rand Daily Mail* saw them (Bantustans) as a 'sham'. *The World* on the contrary approached them with an attitude that said "let us make positive apartheid work" even if it had some reservations about the policy (Tomaselli (1987a: 48).

Tomaselli et al (1987a) argue that in the first half of the 1970s, *The World's* white editorial director in consultation with the black editor decided on the content of *The World* but the views of the latter

were hardly reflected. The content was technically determined by the white director who avoided politics and international news but thought that black readers only wanted funeral, sport and crime news (Ibid). It is during that period that Njabulo Ndebele (a poet associated with the black consciousness movement at the time) criticised the content of *The World* for being captivated with capitalist values that encouraged black people's oppression. In his description of *The World's* journalists, Njabulo Ndebele said; "the journalist are worse… [they] make [only] feeble attacks on apartheid" (Tomaselli et al, 1987b: 52).

Ndebele's statement made journalists of *The World* to become antagonistic towards their newspaper's editorial policy. These journalists initiated the establishment of the Union of Black Journalists (UBJ) in 1973, which indicated the urgency for black newspapers owned by white capital to be more committed to black community's aspirations (Tomaselli et al, 1987b). The UBJ was described by many as being heavily influenced by the Black Consciousness movement for it aimed at engaging black journalists to ensure that their aspirations were congruent to those of the broader black community (Tomaselli et al, 1987b). A year after the establishment of UBJ, Percy Qoboza joined *The World* and immediately went to the US as a Niemann Fellow. He returned to South Africa in 1976 and was more determined to use *The World* to fight for the black cause, a decision which led to a perpetual conflict between him and the editorial director — which ended up with the latter being transferred to another newspaper (Tomaselli et al, 1987a). The editorial policy then resided in Qoboza's jurisdiction and he changed it to fit his objective (Tomaselli et al, 1987a).

Percy Qoboza cautiously embraced some of the fundamentals of black consciousness in the newspaper and the editorial policy switched "from co-operation to uncompromising rejection of the institutions of apartheid" (Tomaselli et al, 1987a: 54). Under his editorship, *The World* was respected for providing robust political coverage. It was during Qoboza's era that *The World*'s photographer, Sam Nzima, took the famous picture of Hector Pieterson that later became an icon of the 1976 Soweto uprising (Tyson, 1993). Tomaselli and Louw (1991) argue that even though *Sowetan* and its predecessors were never official affiliates of any political movements, for them to retain black audience they had to cover topics that were of interest to blacks at the time. These topics included resistance to apartheid.

Qoboza was among the first newsmen to interview the Soweto student leader Tsietsi Mashinini. Tomaselli (1987b: 54) argues even though *The World* covered the student riots of 1976 and interviewed Tsietsi Mashinini, it could not be argued that it had endorsed Mashinini's views because the article of the story was led by a caption that said: "all sort of people have been expressing their views and opinions on the student demonstrations…. But little has been heard from the people most concerned, the students themselves".

In 1977, *The World* was banned and Percy Qoboza was arrested for allegedly sympathising with the black students when covering the 1976 riots and for criticising apartheid policies. After 1977, *The Post Transvaal* replaced *The World* and in 1980 the government closed *The Post Transvaal.* The closing of *The Post Transvaal* came after its journalists had joined the workers on a three months wage strike, which was regarded as illegal by the apartheid authorities (Tomaselli et al, 1987a).

The closing of *The Post Transvaal* led to the birth of *The Sowetan Mirror* in 1981 (Tyson, 1993). Later in that year, (1981) the *Sowetan Mirror* dropped the second half of its name to become *The Sowetan* and was converted from a weekly to a daily newspaper (Tyson, 1993). Tomaselli and Louw (1991) argue that banning and prohibitions that *Sowetan* and its predecessors suffered under the apartheid regime lent them political integrity among blacks.

After 1976, *The World* and later *The Post Transvaal,* became robust in their portrayal of apartheid and its policies (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). These newspapers have always been owned by the white-owned Argus Group of Newspapers which continued to own *The Sowetan* until the early 1990's (Tyson[25], 1993). Even though the initial aim of Argus in establishing this newspaper was commercial (to make money from blacks) this newspaper addressed the plight of blacks under apartheid. Tomaselli argues that before Qoboza's era there were contradictions at times between the interest of the newspaper owners and advertisers', and these resulted in the newspaper sending mixed messages, "some supportive, some critical of the existing order" (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991: 6).

25 Harvey, Tyson is the author of "Editors under Fire" and was the editor of *The Star* during the apartheid era. He was amongst the editors that covered the 1976 student riots as well as Steve Biko's death.

Tyson (1993) claims that the Argus Group was one of the few privately owned English newspaper groups in apartheid South Africa that embraced broad liberal values although they were also regarded as conservative in their views. Tyson further alleges that Argus Group prided itself “on non-political professionalism" (Tyson, 1993: 51). He maintains that the policy in some Argus newspapers was to recruit journalists of talent, irrespective of their political or cultural views; it mattered little whether they belonged to the Communist Party (as a Parliamentary Press Gallery correspondent of *The Star* once did) or the Black Consciousness Movement (as the first black reporter on *The Star*, the first on any mainstream newspaper, did), the ANC or the Pan African Congress (PAC).

According to Tyson (1993), the Argus Group was also known for its respect for the principle of editorial autonomy for they allowed their editors to have control over the content of their newspapers. He points out that in 1950, the Argus Group officially specified that the responsibility of each of its newspaper “will be jointly, equally and totally held by the manager and the editor"(379). The case of the *Sowetan*’s evolution indicates that sometimes there were confrontations between the manager and the editor and this is more evident during the time when Qoboza was the editor. Qoboza and the manager in charge had different views on the content.

Despite the good things that Tyson says about the Argus Group, critics such as Hachten (1984) have indicated that the group had also extended the apartheid policy of ‘division’ as Argus had different newspapers for different racial groups, for example, the *Sowetan* for Africans and *Cape Herald* for coloureds. Whatever the motives of Argus were for initiating and sustaining *Sowetan,* the fact remains that they backed a newspaper that evolved to the stage of giving voice to the then most oppressed group (blacks), and reflected some of their aspirations, views and frustrations under apartheid rule.

Tomaselli and Louw (1991) point out that during the late years of apartheid (from 1976), the *Sowetan* became a newspaper that reflected the lives and views of blacks under the hardships of

apartheid and consequently it (*Sowetan*) was associated with the Black Consciousness Movement ideology.[26] Black Consciousness as an ideology defined blacks as:

> those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations (Biko, 2005:52).

For Biko (1978 / 2005) "real black people are those who can manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the white man" (Biko, 1978/ 2005:52). The definition of BCM provided by Biko made it easier for people to associate the *Sowetan* with the BCM since the *Sowetan* at the time reflected the aspirations of black people and identified itself as part of the struggle towards liberation. BCM as an ideology was branded in the essence of "the realisation by the black[27] [person] of the need to rally together with his brothers [and sisters] around the cause of their operation ….. and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude" (Biko, 2005: 53). The definition provided indicates that the BCM propagated black pride, solidarity, and the determination of black people to rise and accomplish the confident self (Sono, 1993). The ideology emphasises psychological liberation for blacks and rejection of the sense of inferiority that characterises the slave mentality (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

The founders of BCM believed that black pride, solidarity and the perfect black subject could be achieved by awakening black people to their dignity as humans and by recognising their strength through solidarity. The ideology emphasised liberation of the mind, "a psychological revolution aimed at forging Black thought and feeling into an amalgam of black pride and ultimately Black unity," and that black people must identify with themselves completely (Arnold, 1978: xvii). BCM stresses that black people must overcome a negative sense of self and the psychological deprivation

26 The point was also raised in a Brief outline by *Sowetan* Managing editor, Mike Tissong (2002)

27 For Steve Biko 'black' was not a matter of just one's pigmentation but rather a reflection of one's attitude towards liberation and emancipation and a commitment to fight forces that wanted to use 'blackness' as a mark to describe blacks as "subservient" beings (Biko, 2005).

and excision that "stemmed from a systematic manipulation of Black minds by a government and a society that had long recognised the value of thought control" (Arnold, 1978: xvii).

BCM in South Africa emerged as black liberals counteracted some of the precepts of white political liberalism. The BCM was partly formed on a liberal basis but on the assumption that white liberals of South Africa failed their African counterparts. [28] In the words of Sono (1993:6), "black consciousness movement could be looked upon as a creation of 'black liberals' shorn of their 'white liberalism' and hinged on a newly acquired rhetorical radicalism (albeit fundamentally liberal. Notwithstanding Sono's analysis, it is worth noting that BCM in South Africa was also influenced by Marxist ideology. This was more prevalent after 1976 when BCM leaders argued that apartheid was " tied up with white supremacy, capitalist exploitation and deliberate oppression…To a large extent the evil-doers have succeeded in producing at the output end of their machines a kind of black man who is man only in form" (Biko, 2005: 30).

The basic category of BCM analysis was race[29], since class boundaries largely coincided with racial ones and because the movement believed that the oppressed group in the then apartheid South Africa was black (Leatt, et al, 1986). This research report takes the view that at the time, it was premature for BCM to focus on both race and class analyses as the main objective was to ensure that blacks were united against apartheid. An analysis that highlighted economic disparities within the black community could have divided blacks.

The advocates of the black consciousness ideology and the South African white liberals agreed on many issues such as the fact that apartheid was inhuman and that it needed to be eradicated. They also agreed on the need for freedom of speech, of the press, of association, of assembly and

28 BCM was formed partly on liberal basis as it was a reaction to the apartheid government's denial of political and civil rights to blacks. By blacks, the research refers to all that did not fit the description of whites under apartheid. These included Africans, coloureds and Indians.

29 Steve Biko used 'blackness' to highlight the dichotomy that existed between blacks and whites. To Biko, it was this dichotomy that whites used as a stamp that defined black people as "subservient" beings (Biko, 2005). Therefore the term 'blackness' was used to reflect the opposite of 'black' to whites' whiteness. The notion 'blackness' revolved around the depiction that when the "Self' attempts to define the "Other", the self is also subjected to the same criterion (Arnold, 1978). For Biko, black people needed to rally together to fight the cause of their oppression which was 'blackness' (Biko, 2005:53).

freedom from arbitrary arrest, but they differed on many issues such the notion of blackness and the role of white liberals in black politics (Sono, 1993; Biko, 2005). The BCM advocates believed in non-racialism[30] and white liberals believed in multi-racialism[31] co-existence. In addition, BCM leaders viewed white liberals as attempting to dominate black politics at the expense of blacks. For example, black students were part of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) but could not attain leadership positions because the power base of NUSAS was white campuses such as Natal, Rhodes, Cape Town and Wits universities (Steve, 1978/ 2005). Furthermore, black students believed that they were not accepted as equal partners in NUSAS, for example in the 1968 NUSAS Congress black student leaders believed that they were only there in name. After this Congress, black student leaders met and discussed the formation of a black student organisation. The idea led to the formation of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) in 1969. These differences separated BCM advocates from white liberals and the two decided to follow their separate paths (Sono, 1993).

After 1994, *Sowetan* continued to see itself as a newspaper that served the interests of the majority of the black people. When Aggrey Klaaste[32] became the editor of *Sowetan* in 1988, he established the "*Nation Building*" slogan, which aimed at restoring pride, promoting peace and the economic upliftment in the African communities.

The Pan African Congress (PAC) argued that the newspaper was going against the "tide of the anti - apartheid struggle", and was not in favour of the slogan (Thale, 2002). This party argued that the South African nation could not be rebuilt before the elimination of apartheid (Ibid). Irrespective of this attack, the "*Nation Building*" slogan survived and saw the birth of democratic South Africa. Without implying that *Sowetan* is or was a newspaper with BCM leanings, the research considers

30 'Non-racial' in BCM referred to an entirely race free society "just and egalitarian society in which colour, creed and race shall form no point of reference (Biko, 2005: 158).

31 'Multi-racialism' refers to a society where there is an acknowledgement that different racial groups exist but no racial group is more privileged over the other. The concept of the 'rainbow nation' is an illustration of a multi racial approach.

32 In 1976, the late Aggrey Klaaste was the editor of *Weekend World* and was arrested on several occasions for being critical of apartheid policies. It is difficult to locate his ideology (whether he belonged to BCM or not). Media scholars such as; Tomaselli and Louw, 1991; Sparks 2003 and Tyson, 1993 have said much in their writings about Aggrey Klaaste as a journalist but none of them is explicit on whether he belonged to BCM or not.

the *"Nation Building"* slogan as a possible extension of BCM ideology and doctrine. This stems from the fact that one of BCM's conviction was to awaken black people of the sense of their infinite value and worth, and to sensitise them that their worth is inherent to who they are and not dependent on biological irrelevancies such as race. BCM would therefore see reconciliation as deeply personal issue "between those who acknowledge their unique personhood and who have it acknowledged by others" (Preface by Desmond Tutu in Biko, 2005). Considering that when the *"Nation Building*" slogan was introduced there were conflicts between Xhosas and Zulus in Kwa–Zulu Natal and blacks were killing each other. On this subject, Archbishop Desmond Tutu said that:

> I think Black Consciousness has in fact not quite completed its task. So called black-on-black violence would not have occurred (even if, as it seems more and more to be the case, it was instigated and fuelled by an unscrupulous and sinister Third Force) had we said we respected one another and would not permit anyone, for whatever the reward, to manipulate us or inveigle us into slaughtering one another, as happened just before our historic elections of [27th April] 1994 – particularly in KwaZulu-Natal where violence has become so tragically endemic. We would have said that each of us is too precious to become a pawn in a bloody game (Archbishop Desmond Tutu quoted in Biko, 1978/ 2005: x).

In 1992, the then editor of the *Sowetan,* the late Aggrey Klaaste indicated the position that *Sowetan* intended to take in the transitional era as that of being an honest and independent newspaper that intends to discontinue its mode of struggle. He said that the *Sowetan* has "… come to realise that being 'part of the struggle' does not always help [and] need[s] to be aggressively honest, take no sides and brazen out any opposition" (Tyson, 1993:170).

This editorial position suggests that while *Sowetan* was part of the struggle during the years of apartheid, in the post-apartheid era the newspaper decided to move on to grapple with contemporary challenges. The statement was made in 1992, the era of the demise of apartheid and the dawn of democracy. It also suggests that *Sowetan* intends to offer neutral and honest reporting: "to be aggressively honest, and take no sides…" (Tyson, 1993:170).

The history of the *Sowetan* depicts a publication that has evolved from serving the commercial interests of white capital (Argus) to a newspaper that also served the black people of South Africa (especially during apartheid) and has steadily developed from a tolerant critic of apartheid to an anti apartheid newspaper and ultimately to a relatively less critical and more tolerant critic of the democratic government.[33] Even though *Sowetan* was at times critical of apartheid policies, it is worth noting that it was not as consistent as the alternative press (discussed in the Literature Review Chapter). The concept of *Sowetan* being a more tolerant critic of the democratic government will be explored fully in the chapter dealing with how it has reported the arms deal corruption by senior government officials.

It is significant to note that during the 1999–2000 South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) Inquiry into media racism, when *Sunday Times* was accused of racial stereotyping, the editor of *Sunday Times* explicitly and perhaps rightly argued that if racial difference equates to racism, then *Sowetan*[34] would be more racist than *Sunday Times* (SAHRC, 2000). Although the *Sunday Times* editor did not elaborate much on whether catering to audiences on racial lines is racist, perhaps the question that we need to ask is 'Is it well thought for newspapers to continue catering for and classify themselves along [particularly] racial and class outlooks in a society where people are trying to heal the pain caused by a long history of racial prejudice? [35] This research will not attempt to answer this question as it is a multifaceted question that requires a triangulation of hypotheses.

Regardless of this research report's epigrammatic reference to the SAHRC Report, the research is aware of the controversy that the Report stirred in media circles. Berger (2001: 26 – 27) notes that the SAHRC Report provides a contradictory mix of race-essentialism and racism-subjectivity and

33 In 2004, *Sowetan* was bought by Johnnic from Nail and its daily circulation was 225, 9867 and is still popular among black communities.

34 In 2001 (Jan–Dec) *Sowetan* had 183 900 readers per issue (SAARF). The living Standard Measure (LSM) of this readership is discussed in the conclusion of this chapter.

35 'Particularly' is used to indicate that racism is not the only social ill that the SA society is confronted with. Class prejudices is one of these social ills. Bertelsen (2000) argues that the compilers and researchers of the SAHRC Report correlated race into certain reportage when class differences appear to have been the advanced factor.

therefore undermines the definition of racism it aimed to support and that it fails to "help journalists change the way they represent reality in the media …[as it falls short to engage them] in a practically-useful way with regard to combating racism". According to Berger (2001), the SAHRC Report failed to offer a solution to racism which it aimed to address as its researchers did not have a clear concept of racism hence its failure to provide a consistent account of what constitutes racism and establish accountability for media racism.

3. The *Mail & Guardian*

On the 30th day of April 1985, the *Rand Daily Mail*[36] closed shop and its former employees could not find employment in other commercial newspapers since owners of these newspapers saw these journalists as "a bunch of political activists" (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991:13). During its existence, the *Rand Daily Mail* was outspoken in its opposition to the apartheid system. It is the first newspaper to label the apartheid creation of Bantustans as a 'shame' (Tomaselli, 1987b). The *Rand Daily Mail*'s editorial policy is often quoted as the prime reason why the paper experienced financial problems that culminated into its subsequent closure (Hachten, 1984). Tomaselli and Louw (1991) also relate the closure of the *Rand Daily Mail* to its attempt in 1984 to attract mainly black readers most of whom could not afford advertisers' products. Former political reporter of the *Rand Daily Mail,* Anton Harber does not believe that economic factors played a role in the closure of the *Rand Daily Mail.* Quoted in Tomaselli (1987a: 83) Anton Harber said that:

> ... there can only be two reasons why they (SAAN) chose to throw the *Rand Daily Mail* title out of the window and start from scratch (with *Business Day*). First, they wanted to clear out the *Rand Daily Mail* staff and give the new *Business Day* editor, Ken Owen, a free hand to build up a staff from nothing. The only other possible reason is to get rid of the political and journalistic tradition of the *Rand Daily Mail*. Neither of these are economic reasons. Both point to a desire to get rid of the *Rand Daily Mail* tradition and form a more conservative newspaper.

36 *Rand Daily Mail* was an English Language newspaper owned by Anglo American. It was seen to be the most critical of the apartheid government. Some of the reasons related to its closure are linked to its methods of reporting which annoyed the advertisers and shareholders. Sparks (2003) argues that 'it reported what was at odds with the 'elite consensus' and that advertisers disliked it because it appealed more to blacks than rich whites" (2003:92).

During its existence, the *Rand Daily Mail* was regarded as an anti-apartheid newspaper which irritated the apartheid government, supported the opponents of apartheid and gingered up stumbling liberals, thus making more enemies than friends among advertisers, newspapers and the government (Tyson, 1993; Sparks, 2003; Tomaselli and Louw, 1991; Hachten, 1984). Due to reduced chances of being employed again by other mainstream newspapers most former *Rand Daily Mail* journalists, led by Irwin Manoim and Anton Harber, grouped together and established a politicised weekly newspaper called the *Weekly Mail*[37](Hachten, 1984; Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

Even though *The Weekly Mail* emerged as part of the same 1980s political agitation that led to the booming of the 'alternative press' in general, it fell within the category of what Tomaselli and Louw (1991) termed 'the independent social democrat press'. The 'independent social democrat press' appeared as an amalgamation of both the progressive-alternative[38] and traditional libertarian media customs (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). This type differed from the conventional 'alternative press' in the sense that the conventional alternative press was totally supportive of the left movements[39] and at times consulting these movements on editorial policy (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). On the contrary, *The Weekly Mail* "refused to consult with left political movements or affiliates regarding 'appropriate' editorial content" (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991:7). Its social democratic string was more apparent in the fact that it (*Weekly Mail*) endeavoured for financial and political autonomy (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

Even though it supported the left-wing objectives of attaining democracy, *The Weekly Mail* remained autonomous of political association and strived to adhere to balanced journalistic practices (such as well researched articles, checking of facts and soliciting opposing opinions) (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). It criticised both the apartheid policies and the left-wing movements alike. This occasionally produced tensions between the newspaper, the apartheid regime, and the left wing activists (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

37 A survey in 1986 revealed that *Weekly Mail* was very popular amongst journalists and that almost every editor including those of the English conservative Press in SA read it despite the government's attempts to suppress it (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

38 Progressive alternative press refers to the press that was lenient to as well as critical of the liberation movements (Tomaselli 1987a and b,. This type of press like the conventional alternative press was dependent on donor funding for survival.

Some of the *Weekly Mail's* stories that activated the confrontation between the newspaper and the apartheid regime included a 1985 (the year it was founded) report by Janet Wilhelm. Wilhelm's report was on the involvement of the South African police in the recruitment of Mozambican refugees to be trained as RENAMO guerrillas (*Weekly Mail*, June 14, 1985). In the year following the formation of the *Weekly Mail* (1986), Anton Harber exposed the secretive National Security Management System, an alliance of the South African military, police and local officials that attempted to win the support of black South Africans (*Weekly Mail*, October 3, 1986). In the same year, Eddie Koch revealed that the apartheid police were funding Inkatha rallies (Manoim, 1996).

The type of reporting that distinguished *Weekly Mail* from other mainstream English newspapers was that it reported "real news even where the news could cause discomfort" (*Weekly Mail*, June 14, 1985). The *Weekly Mail* was the first newspaper to put a human face on the banned ANC leaders and provided balanced accounts of its activities and policies when most newspapers labelled the ANC as a terrorist movement (Manoim, 1996). It is also the first newspaper in South Africa to sympathetically discuss gay liberation. This was the first newspaper whose news selection was colour-blind; all South African newspapers of the 1980s were aimed at racially defined markets, either black (*Sowetan*) or white *(Business Day* (Tyson, 1993). Some of the newspapers that reached both black and white audiences such as *The Star* and the *Rand Daily Mail* provided separate 'white' and 'township' editions, but this was not the case with the *Weekly Mail* (Tyson, 1993).

Although the *Weekly Mail* signalled South Africa's first ever commercially viable alternative press, its move to change to a daily in April 1990 proved untimely as the daily version (known as the *Daily Mail*) only appeared for few months until its 1991 financial collapse. This left the *Weekly Mail* with a huge debt to Caxton (a subsidiary of Argus which had printed the daily version – *Daily Mail*) (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). The arrangement to pay Caxton resulted in the *Weekly Mail* relinquishing its independence to Argus from September 1990 to April 1991 (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). When it regained its autonomy in 1991, the *Weekly Mail* continued to operate at a loss, something which Tomaselli and Louw (1991: 225) attribute to the newspaper shifting "from its

39 Left movements refer to the then liberation movements such as the UDF, ANC and PAC.

cheeky and combative approach to a more reasoned and constructive tone". It was later rescued by the *Guardian Weekly*[40] of Manchester, England (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

The *Guardian Weekly* bought shares in the *Weekly Mail* because it wanted to print its international edition in South Africa. After the merger of these two newspapers, the *Weekly Mail*'s name changed to *The Weekly Mail & Guardian* (Manoim, 1996). *The Weekly Mail & Guardian* continued to perform badly in the market until it received advice from an American consultant that it should rather establish a specific readership than to focus on the mass market (Manoim, 1996).

Since 1990, the *M&G* went through restructuring with the Guardian Group taking its shares to 70%. The restructuring of the *Weekly Mail & Guardian* led to it targeting a small, relatively well-educated middle class and highly politicised readership (Manoim, 1996). The content of *M&G* is known to be robust and critically interrogative and this will be discussed fully in the chapter dealing with how it covered the alleged corruption in the arms deal.

In 1994 when the ANC government took power, media observers and political analysts (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991; Hachtem, 1984; Manoim, 1996) expected that *M&G* and the ANC government would be forged into marriage of convenience, because the two had a common objective of seeing the apartheid regime collapse. These two enjoyed a temporary amicable relationship just after the 1994 election. The then political editor of *M&G*, Drew Forest, equated this relationship to a 'brief honeymoon' (*Mail Guardian*, September 7-13, 2001). In 1998, 'this brief honeymoon' scenario changed drastically with the inception of the Human Rights Commission of Inquiry on Racism (HRC) in the Media, 1998-2000. *M&G* and other newspapers strongly accused the Commission as the ANC-led government's attempt to interfere with the freedom of the press (*Mail & Guardian*, March 9-15, 2001).

Months after the HRC Inquiry into Racism in the Media, *M&G* was accused of being very critical of the ANC-led government. *M&G* described the HRC Inquiry into Racism in the Media as a

40 *Guardian Weekly* is also known as social democratic or a left wing newspaper in Britain.

"witch hunt mission" on the part of the ANC, which it saw as interested in absolute political power and thus in the suppression of truth and reason (*Mail & Guardian*, March 9-15, 2001). The then state President, Nelson Mandela, referred to the media, in particular the *M&G* as "part of the … counter - revolutionary conspiracy against transformation in South Africa" (*Mail & Guardian*, March 9-15, 2001).

The history of *M&G* reveals a newspaper that emerged from an anti - establishment tradition, that claimed to be practicing a balanced and objective reporting. Some of the original shareholders of the *Weekly Mail* included David Sainsbury, the owner of British Sainsbury supermarket chain. David Sainsbury is known as an advocate of liberal causes. Other shareholders were Helen Suzman, known as a liberalist activist, David Sussman and Nadine Gordimer. Nadine Gordimer is considered a left wing author and an ANC supporter.

In South Africa, there is a tendency to associate the liberal tradition to those who opposed apartheid policies and with white English South Africans, albeit there are liberals from all races of South Africa. Although the ANC's formation was influenced by diverse ideologies particularly those from 'radical (Marxist) perspectives', it (the ANC) was partly formed on the basis of liberal ideologies. The latter is more apparent bearing in mind that it was formed as a reaction to the apartheid government's denial of political and civil rights to people especially people of colour as they were the ones that were not recognised as rational beings by that government. The ANC's Freedom Charter of 1955 also reaffirmed the party's fundamental liberal goals (Leatt, 1986).

The liberal ideology is the most multifaceted and across-the-board of ideologies and therefore difficult to define. Leatt (1986: 51) says the following about the liberal ideology:

> [It] is not easy to describe, because it is elusive and non dogmatic [in] character… But historically it is the tradition which has expressed an 'individual ethic' as opposed to Afrikaner nationalism and has sought to uphold individual liberty against the alternatives of socialism and ethnic or racial nationalism.

In South Africa it (liberalism) has pervaded the political domain so deeply that it is so difficult to separate liberals from non-liberals. The term was initially adopted to mean people with broad, over-arching political attitudes, which typified generalised optimistic beliefs about human nature, constitutional government, free institutions, free trade, limited democracy, social justice and the freedom of worship, the speech, and the press (Vincent, 1995). It is worth noting that one can be a political liberal without being an economic liberal, a social liberal without being political liberal and so on.

Political liberals believe that every adult must have a voice and the right to vote and that government should have a limited power. To ensure this, they reason that power should be distributed between functionally separate structures: the executive, judiciary and the legislature (Leatt, 1986). In most countries such as England and South Africa this method resulted in Constitutional democracy. Liberals believe that authoritarian government can be countered by multi-party democracy since majority rule guarantees no liberty; they also recognise that the public system should be free of corruption (Leatt, 1986).

Liberal economics supports free enterprise in an exchange economy where there is division of labour aimed at enhancing the whole economy and society. Its presupposition is that the free market "is a democracy in which every penny gives the right to vote" (Leatt et al, 1986:52). It believes that gains should be maximised and costs minimised and that private property is significant for economic development and that it is the responsibility of government to protect it.

The social liberals[41] on the other hand believe in the formation of power clusters outside business and government and better distribution of rewards by two approaches: "the evolution of the welfare state with its range of social services…paid for by a system of differential taxation" and an organised labour force and consumers with bargaining powers to bargain collectively with employers and producers (Leatt et al, 1986:54). Social liberals take the view that individual freedom and liberty should be concurrent with the emancipation of disadvantaged groups and with the autonomy of the nation state.

41 Social liberals hold similar views to those of social democrats.

Historically and theoretically, the relationship between apartheid and the liberals is complex and controversial. In the then apartheid South Africa there was a distinction between liberals whose values were rooted in human rights and those that were more concerned with the economic theory of liberalism. In all of these, critics have accused the South African white liberals for failing to address the relationship between race, state and capitalism in South Africa (Leatt, 1986). During the apartheid era, human rights liberals were better respected by the left movements and there was a tendency to associate the economic ones with the apartheid cause. The left movements argued that "both [economic liberals] and apartheid… have common features, the most important of which [was] their support of capitalism resting on the exploitation of black labour" (Leatt, 1986:62).

It is worth noting that, although the ANC was partially born out of liberal ideologies, the relationship between the ANC and liberal newspapers during the apartheid era was discomfited as the ANC accused these newspapers of complying with the apartheid system mainly because they advocated non violent struggle against the regime. It is also worth stressing that even within the ANC, there were individuals who were committed to the use of legal, non-violent means to attain change (Leatt, 1986).

This research report does not associate the *M&G* with any political party and it argues that *M&G* is part of South African society, a society where different ideologies exist making it preposterous to believe and expect any newspaper to be ideology-free. Rather, newspapers are expected to be judicious enough to maintain principles of fairness and balance.

The *M&G* continues to sell itself as an anti-establishment newspaper and also contains features that signify that. One example of this was Sipho Seepe's Column "No Blows Barred" literally meaning, 'intense hammering'. The column was consistently critical of President Thabo Mbeki and his government. This column challenged the status quo and revealed the rebelliousness of the *M&G* towards the ANC-led government. Challenging the status quo does not mean one hates it, but rather that one disagrees with it. In 2001 (January - December) the readership of *M&G* was 246 000 per issue (SAARF). The LSMs of this readership is discussed below and indication is made as to how this readership could have impacted on the content and the language of the newspaper.

Currently, Newtrust Company Botswana Limited, the company owned by the Zimbabwean newspaper publisher, Trevor Ncube, owns 87, 5 % of *M&G* shares. 10 % of the shares are still owned by the London-based Guardian Newspaper Limited. It has a circulation of just more than 41 000 per issue (weekly) and has won many awards for its in-depth, investigative journalism.

4. The LSM of the *M&G* and *Sowetan*

In terms of the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) Living Standards Measure (LSM), the *Mail and Guardian* and *Sowetan* audiences are people from different if not opposite backgrounds, namely, geographical locations such as 'metropolitan' cities, villages and rural areas, education level, wealth status, etc (SAARF). SAARF segments the population in this manner to help marketers define markets better. This research believes that SAARF did not have the intention to classify these communities in class and racial terms but the LSMs may be a better tool which may enable one to deduce one's class and race. The latter is more apparent in the fact that despite the growing black middle class, the majority of people still living under dire poverty and in squatter camps are still blacks. There is a growing number of poor whites but the number is still small. SAARF indicates that LSMs are based on the standard of living rather than the income.

In 2001 (the period under review) SAARF Universal LSMs descriptors, the population continuum was divided into ten groups, from one at the bottom end, to ten at the top (SU- LSMs, 2001). The LSMs were then calculated using 29 adjustables / variables taken directly from the SAARF All Media and Product Survey (AMPS) (SAARF AMP Products – Activities – Services, 2001-). The adjustables determined if the group sampled had, amongst others, running water, PC in home, home security service, dishwasher, motor vehicle, washing machine, microwave oven, traditional hut, home telephone, etc,. In addition, the adjustable looked at whether the sampled group stays in rural, urban or in metropolitan areas. (The table below indicates SAARF Universal LSM Descriptors for the *M&G* and *Sowetan* in 2001 (also see Appendix C).

SAARF Universal LSM Descriptors for the *M&G* and *Sowetan* in 2001

No	**Education level**	**Geographical location**	***Sowetan***	***M&G***
1	Illiterate to matric	Kwazulu Natal and Eastern Cape	1.5 %	0%
2	Illiterate to matric	Kwazulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo Province	5.1%	0%
3	Illiterate to matric	Kwazulu Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo Province	13.8%	0.3%
4	Illiterate to matric	All over South Africa but most live in squatter camps, backyard rooms and hostels	18%	4.8%
5	Illiterate to post matric qualification	Home ownership of cheap homes stands at 77% across the country, 4% in squatter camps 3 % in hostels and 2% in backyard rooms.	19.3%	8.6%
6	No illiteracy, 36% has matric and 2% has university degrees.	18% live in Western Cape, 30% in Gauteng and the remaining ones in other provinces	24.4%	19.8%
7	99% possess matric and post matric qualifications	Urban areas and metropoles	9.2%	12.4%
8	Same as group 7	Strong presence in Gauteng and the Western Cape	4.5%	13.1%
9	77% have matric and better (university degrees, etc)	Townhouses, cluster and houses in metropoles	3.2%	20.4%
10	54% are English speakers, 40% Afrikaans speakers. Four in ten have post matric studies. Most are employed as professionals, 22% are self employed and 80% of this group employ live-in domestic workers.	80% of this group live in metro city areas, 43% in Gauteng, and 21% in the Western Cape. 92% of this group owns conventional houses with swimming pools and 3% owns townhouses and flats	1%	20.6%

The above column indicates that almost 80% of the *Sowetan* readers are in group 2–6 and *M&G* has more that 85% of readers in group 6–10. The two newspapers have a strong overlap between groups 6–7 where approximately one third of both newspapers' readers are located. However, the implication of these LSMs is that *Sowetan* readers are less educated compared to the more educated groups that read the *M&G*. Even though both of these newspapers are English

newspapers, it is obvious from the educational level of their readers that *Sowetan* will use a simpler, more straightforward language that will be easier to read and understandable to its readers. On the contrary, *M&G* may want to use the language that is more sophisticated to ensure that it does not bore its educated readers. This issue is explored further in the chapters that explore the content of articles used by the *Sowetan* and the *M&G* to report the arms deal corruption in November 2001.