CHAPTER FOUR

4 ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES OF NEWS AGENCIES: NICHE AREAS IN NEWS EXCHANGE

This chapter introduces the various levels of news agencies participating in the study. These included SAPA, AP, Reuters, AFP, DPA, PANA, and IPS. The chapter is largely descriptive of the various news agencies. It relates their adoption of specialised areas of news production, “niches,” and the influence of this on their operations and news exchange relationships. The chapter addresses the first two research questions posed in the introduction namely; why are news agencies important in global news flows? What characteristics distinguish various levels or types of news agencies?

This study defines “niche” as specialised foci in news production. It is a particular area of news that an agency is good at and the most competitive in producing. Niches represent the adapting role or function of news agencies in a changing news environment. It is a key ‘signature’ or identifier of an agency’s activities. The study identifies niches in news production as an important theme in proposing why news agencies are relevant and important, and their distinguishing features or characteristic. This theme also explains the structure of news agencies, how they relate to each other and in the global flow of news. SAPA, for example, specialises in the coverage of “domestic news” about South Africa for the South African media (SAPA Editor, 2005). Reuters specialises in “financial and economic news” on every continent, which has it integrated (and the other agencies less directly so) in the economic system of global capitalism because the news that it imparts assists business decisions globally (Reuters Bureau Chief, 2006). The IPS specialises in

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1 For clarity and simplification in reading the text, comments made by individual participants at the interviews are acknowledged by their position in the organisation and the year of the interview rather than by their last name. A list of all the interviewees by name, organisation, position within the organisation, and the date of each interview, is given in a separate section under the bibliography – in a “list of interviewees”.

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While investigating the news exchange relationships among the different news agencies in South Africa, various “adaptive strategies” in how they cope with external and internal pressures to their structures and operations emerge. In general, the study identifies adaptations at news agencies as their responses to a transforming global news environment. The chapter introduces other relevant and interrelated themes, which makes this the “grounding” empirical chapter for introducing the next three chapters. The adaptations (at agencies) include nurturing a “niche,” the ability to

2 Features are news stories with a specific theme and focus, and are usually longer news articles than the daily spot-news reports.
“compete in the news environment” or at least to become relevant in exchange relationships of news, the adaptive “regionalisation of news and of news agencies” as a strategy for competing and expanding, and the importance of developing “news sense” and employing “news values” in the selection of news.

Separate chapters expand on and critically discuss each of the themes, which are not mutually exclusive but overlap and are interrelated. This indicates the complex and dialectical\(^3\) nature of these media organisations in relation to the external social (global) news environment. Chapter 5 discusses competition and the regionalisation of news (bureaus). Chapter 6 explains the selection and gatekeeping process at news agencies and the emerging practice of “citizen” or “public journalism.” The latter term is said to be destabilizing conventional professional journalism, but it is also important in facilitating “global consciousness,” a description used in conjunction with the global public sphere (cf. Sparks, 1998). Chapter 7 brings all of these ideas in the foregoing chapters together.

4.1 Ownership, structure, and operations at the various news agencies

4.1.1 A brief history of ownership at SAPA

Before 1938, the main news agency operating in South Africa was the Reuters-South Africa bureau. The British news agency, Reuters, managed, controlled, and ran the South African operation as an extension of Reuters. This meant that Reuters controlled most of the news flowing into and out of South Africa at the time (SAPA Editor, 2005). For example, the Reuters news agency selected all domestic news supplied from the South African newspapers about South Africa that went out to the rest of the world. The South African newspapers had little if any control over information flows from the country.

\(^3\) Based on Hegel’s philosophy of the ‘dialectical method of argumentation’, a dialectical relationship between variables or phenomena indicates an evolutionary process in which by relating these variables, a combined outcome or a new phenomenon arises which is qualitatively different from its original parts, but nonetheless related to these parts for without them it cannot exist.
In the late 1930s, the South African newspaper groups therefore approached the Reuters’ agency with an offer to purchase its South African operation and to run the bureau as a purely domestic news agency. Part of the rationale for this was to meet the information needs of the local media, mainly the newspapers, at the time. According to SAPA Editor (2005), the rationale for an independent South African news agency was based on the newspaper owners in SA “and in the then colonial Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe] and South-West Africa [now Namibia] wanting their own news agency.” The explanation is that a purely South African news agency would focus on its own needs and news agenda and not have to rely on news from the British imperial agency. There was another reason, which was the cost implications for the SA newspapers, which paid separate subscription fees to the Reuters’ news bureau for foreign news (SAPA Editor). This early monopolistic style relationship between Reuters and the SA newspapers was “restrictive, cumbersome, and very expensive” (SAPA Editor).

Hence, in 1938, SAPA was formed, which meant that the control and management of news operations in SA were taken over by the South African newspaper groups. In those earlier years, up until the 1970s, SAPA operated as a cooperative of the newspapers, which then required a central distribution point for all domestic and foreign news flowing into South Africa (SAPA Deputy-editor, 2005). Ownership and control of SAPA was much like the American AP cooperative news agency (SAPA Editor, 2005).

The South African newspapers were at that time individually and privately owned. For example, “The Cape Times was a separate company, the Argus was a separate company, the Daily News was a separate company, [even] the Afrikaans newspapers

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4 According to Terhi Rantanen (2004: 304), in 2000 AP was forced to break its cooperative ownership tradition dating from 1848 when it began selling news to non-members. This was an adaptation strategy to compensate for financial pressures.

5 For a biographical overview of the history of newspaper ownership in South Africa, see Tomaselli et al 1987. This is also the sign of a business orientated, market model of media ownership in SA.
were separate companies” (SAPA Editor, 2005). This meant that there was “an entirely non-competitive need” for a central news distribution point like SAPA, which was then defined as “a news gatherer, processor and distributor of what [is] called ‘routine news’” (SAPA Editor, 2005).

Initially, the ownership of individual newspapers was a combination of family businesses and small industrial or company-based businesses (SAPA Editor, 2005). The history and pattern of ownership of the newspapers in South Africa also reflected the broader racial separation of the society. According to Tomaselli et al. (1987), newspaper ownership in South Africa presented a picture of racial monopolisation where the mainstream commercial press groups were almost exclusively white-owned and male-dominated. This was to change over the years with changes in the news industry, influenced by societal, historical, and political changes.

Mergers and takeovers between individual newspapers resulted in four main newspaper groups or privately owned companies emerging. The owners were mainly private businesses, and this meant that these groups were never state-owned. These newspaper groups, run by private businesses, were entirely business-orientated, competitive, and dividends seeking. The four main newspaper groups in South Africa before and up to 1994 included “the Argus group, owned essentially by the mining companies [Anglo American and Johannesburg Consolidated Investments, JCI], the South African Association of Newspapers [SAAN, later became the Times Media Limited group], the [Afrikaans] Perskor [and] Naspers groups. These were described as the original ‘big four’ media groups in SA” (SAPA Editor, 2005).

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6 Routine news is the daily run-of-the-mill news that journalists on a specific news beat would cover. News beats refer to a journalist’s regular or special area e.g. sports, politics, entertainment.

7 Tomaselli et al (1987) give a comprehensive historical and a political economy of press ownership in the Union of South Africa since 1910 (also see Jackson 1994).

8 See Joel Mervis (1989) on the acquisition and hostile take-over of the now defunct Rand Daily Mail as an example of changes in ownership patterns of newspapers in SA.
SAPA is the largest national news agency in South Africa providing news about the country to all retail media, but it is not the only source of news. Other smaller competitive news sources include mainly Internet-based sources such as the South African Civil Society Information Service (SACSI S), the AllAfrica.com service, and Media24 that emerged in the 1990s. SAPA is designated as a national agency because it fulfils a role of news reporting mainly about South Africa and its clients are mainly South African media, unlike the global news agencies whose clients are international.

SAPA is registered as a section twenty-one company (i.e., not-for-profit), and it still maintains that description (SAPA Deputy-editor, 2005). It is independent of government control and financing and has never been a nationalist\(^9\) news agency by definition of that term, as are its counterparts in the rest of Africa. In Africa, a long history of colonial ownership and control of media systems was extended, after their independence, to ownership and control of African news agencies by their respective governments (cf. Banda, 2003; Bourgault, 1995; Karikari, 2007). The argument that SAPA acted as a government news agency in the apartheid years was a belief held by many neighbouring African media and states, according to SAPA editor (2005; see also Karikari, 2007). Yet, the role of the mainstream press, especially the newspapers, in South Africa during the apartheid government’s rule was subject to vigorous debates in academia (Hepple, 1960; Jackson, 1994; Louw, 1991; Tomaselli et al., 1987; Tomaselli & Louw, 1993).\(^10\)

After the mid-to late-1990s, the ownership patterns at the SA newspaper groups began to change. Tomaselli (1997, p. 32) describes this as an “unbundling process” of ownership of the newspapers, especially those originally belonging to the SA mining

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\(^9\) The use of the term “nationalist” in media theory generally means government or state control and ownership of the media. The use of the phrase “national” news agency, however, becomes a contested one in that the opinions shared by the different participants in the study propose various interpretations than mere state ownership of the news agency. See also Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998:6, 8-9, 11-13) who state that definitions and descriptions of national news agencies, like the global agencies are evolving.

\(^10\) These sources are classical works on the history and political environment in the operations of the SA media under apartheid.
corporations (Anglo-American and JCI), which had mining as a core business operation. After 1994, with the democratisation of South Africa, Tomaselli sees the unbundling process of newspaper ownership as part of a strategy on the part of corporate business to protect their main asset, mining, by rationalizing their business operations and disassociating their core interests from their non-core activities (e.g., ownership of these newspapers). \(^{11}\)

Tomaselli (1997) states that “these companies [referring to Anglo American and the JCI] were redeploying capital in response to structurally determined local political and global economic changes” (p. 32). Big, private businesses in SA could not take the risk of political interference by the new SA government in their affairs and, according to Tomaselli (p. 32), they reorganised ownership of the newspaper industry\(^{12}\) by merely changing hands from white (capital) monopoly control to black (capital) monopoly control—that is, to the emerging Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) groups.

Other rationalisations in the SA newspaper industry, including at SAPA, included staff reductions. Over the years, cost cutting at SAPA resulted in staff numbers declining dramatically. At its peak in the 1950s, there were about 150 people working at SAPA who comprised a large contingent of telex operators, messengers, reporters,\(^{13}\) and other support staff (SAPA Editor, 2005). SAPA Editor (2005) maintains that when he joined SAPA in 1983, the staff complement at SAPA had already dramatically shrunk:

\(^{11}\) Although, Tomaselli (1997) does point out in the article that unbundling did not mean the end of monopoly control of the media environment but simply a changeover of hands from predominantly white capital to emerging black economic capital.

\(^{12}\) Unbundling of the newspaper industries may also have had the effect of maintaining the editorial practices and policies of private ownership of these media to avert possible government regulation in the ‘new SA’ (see Tomaselli 1997).

\(^{13}\) The terms ‘reporter’, ‘journalist’ and ‘correspondent’ are used interchangeably and refer to those involved in the activity of news production. News selection and editing is usually the role of the editor and sub-editor.
It must have been between eighty and one hundred people. When I took over as editor, I had a staff complement, in total, including my manager counterpart and his administrative staff; we still had quite a large technical staff then of about 85 people. We’ve had some serious cost-cutting over the years, and now we’re at a complement of about fifty people. One or two of those are on contract—not really on the complement, but being paid out of petty cash, and of that, the editorial complement is thirty-six including admin and back-up staff. The drop-in staff is the result of the owners’ insistence that we cut costs. We used to have four or five people in our Pretoria office; that is down to two and a trainee. Our parliamentary coverage used to have about ten or twelve people; it’s down to three. Our Durban office used to have three or four people; it’s down to one, which we currently have vacant. So, we’ve trimmed and trimmed. We used to cover lots of international news as well. . . . So, it was a continuous shrinking back to the basics of being a domestic news agency, [with] no delusions of being in the league of Reuters. (SAPA Editor, 2005)

At the SAPA newsroom, where interviews were conducted with individual reporters during their shift work, the researcher observed an overwhelmingly white male presence among journalists and editorial staff even though there were only eleven people present at the time of the field visit. SAPA Editor (2005) admits that the total staff complement is about 65 percent white, but that the gender differences were changing rapidly.

When the SAPA editor joined in 1983, there was “a policy in place from the war days or from the 1950s, which was the same as on Fleet Street.” He explains “all over the world [the view that persisted was that] women simply did not belong [not respondent’s view] in the press, that they were incapable of doing such a rigorous job” (SAPA Editor, 2005).

So, for example, SAPA was almost exclusively a male-dominated organisation. Race didn’t come into it then [because of the apartheid laws]. They were all whites. Race was not even an issue. But that was SAPA then, almost exclusively [white] male. (SAPA Editor, 2005)

Over the years at SAPA, the demographics have changed quite significantly, according to SAPA Editor (2005). It began with his predecessor in the 1960s at SAPA, who persuaded the SAPA board at the time to recruit black reporters when the

14 Shift work refers to the twenty-four hour daily cycle in which journalists at a news agency, such as at SAPA, rotate the hours in and or days on which they work in the news room which includes keeping watch over the incoming news amongst other things.
15 This is a reference to the headquarters of the Reuters’ news agency in Fleet Street, London.
The political situation in SA in the 1970s and 1980s was very restrictive on the role of the privately owned newspapers, whereas broadcasting was firmly under the control of the apartheid state (Jackson, 1993; Jansen, 1993; Tomaselli et al., 1987). Two highly significant political events in SA history, the 1976 Soweto uprising and the 1961 Sharpeville incident, presented a challenge to both local and foreign journalists to report on during the apartheid years with the South African police monitoring their activities closely (cf. Hunter-Gault, 2006). SAPA is said to have been, in one sense, a front-runner in covering these events, according to SAPA Editor (2005). The strict policies and laws of the apartheid government meant that the media (journalists) were restricted in reporting any matters about the activities of the apartheid state or about the dissident and oppositional movements in the country at the time. Apartheid laws suppressed the privately owned media, and journalists were, for instance, banned from free expression or reporting ONLY on “restricted information” (Hepple, 1960; Jackson, 1994; Tomaselli & Louw, 1991).

People like Gilbert Zwalaka [reported for SAPA] in Umtata. But that was the sort of first breakaway from the stoere [conservative] white male only [policy] at SAPA. That was in the late 1960s, early 1970s, but really gaining sway. (SAPA Editor, 2005)

The homelands policy was introduced in the 1960s in order to have journalists who could report from out of the homelands on the situation in South Africa then. This action turned out to be “an opportunity to get black reporters (journalists) involved in news reporting” (SAPA Editor, 2005), despite the strict racist policies of apartheid that enacted several prohibitive laws on the SA media including, among those, the prohibition of movement of racial groups between racially classified areas under the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Hepple, 1960).

Homelands or so-called ‘bantustans’ were the independent or self-governing territories (states) that the then apartheid government in SA set up as a strategic measure to ensure the separation of blacks from participating in and having access to ‘white South Africa’. It was a racial policy in keeping with so called ‘separate development’, the translation of the term ‘apartheid’.

Soweto 1976 and Sharpeville 1961 refer to two historic dates and political incidents in South Africa, which were both landmark events in the resistance against apartheid laws and in the struggle for freedom and democracy in the country.
The attempt by SAPA to recruit black journalists in the so-called homelands eventually collapsed. Over the years, various cost-cutting and budgetary constraints at the news agency meant cutbacks in staff reporters (SAPA Editor, 2005). According to the SAPA Editor, SAPA recruited several black journalists, but they moved on to better paying jobs. “A lot of black reporters got their foot in the door and then they moved on and upwards. Ike Segola at the Sowetan [newspaper] is still there” (SAPA Editor).

As SAPA began to relax its own recruiting policies, more female reporters were hired. According to SAPA Editor (2005), “the will was there, but it was manifestly difficult under the conditions. . . . In my tenure, we have really tried. I don’t [sic] think we’ve succeeded to bring in a lot more black reporters, women reporters. . . . A number of black editors and female reporters have worked at SAPA and then moved on. [Many] of them would come through SAPA and be poached away from us again.” One of the things that attracts female journalists away from a news agency job, according to SAPA Editor, is career development. “[T]hey come through SAPA, they learn how wire agencies work and [then] they move on to what are more glamorous jobs and probably with much better pay in the newspapers and [in] broadcasting” (SAPA Editor).

As a central distribution point of news copy to all South African newspapers, the process of news distribution at SAPA consisted of all the member newspapers from around the country feeding their local news stories to SAPA. SAPA would then “sub”18 these up into a general news report format, give them headings19 and datelines,20 and then redistribute the news around the country (SAPA Deputy-editor, 2005). The actual content of the news reports from the newspapers cannot be altered at SAPA, apart from grammatical and spelling errors, and remains much the same as it was written by the journalist (SAPA reporter, 2006). This is why news distributed

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18 ‘Sub’ is a journalistic term referring to sub-editing text in a news report.
19 A heading is the title line of a news report, or news article. See also Shrivastava (1991)
20 A dateline is the date of origin and place of a news story.
by a news agency is referred to as “copy”\(^{21}\) or “news feed”;\(^{22}\) it is literally copied and then re-fed into the networks of member newspapers that subscribe to and are the clients of SAPA. In this cooperative style of operating, that newspaper receives stories, which it has not collected, from another member newspaper, and thus this cooperation built up this network of exchange.

The redistributive role and the cooperative distribution network at SAPA has largely fallen away over the years as the South African newspapers have had to rationalize their operations and turn more intently towards commercialising their news product because of increased competition. Apart from competing amongst themselves, the newspapers also compete with the broadcasting sector,\(^{23}\) including radio and television news, and with the new media technologies such as the Internet.\(^{24}\) The end of the cooperative function at SAPA as a central distribution network of the SA newspapers occurred towards the mid-1970s “around the time of the Soweto uprising” (SAPA Editor, 2005), but the South African newspapers remain the core clients and the owners of SAPA.

According to Leys (1999, pp. 317-322), the commercialisation of news has also led to changes in the nature of the product itself towards a more “tabloid” style of journalism (see also Herman & McChesney, 1997; Thussu, 1998). SAPA Editor (2005) mentioned that features and in-depth journalism is “a thing of the past” concerning news wires\(^{25}\) because speed and accuracy have replaced depth of content. SAPA Deputy-editor (2005) maintains that over the years, the operations at SAPA

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\(^{21}\) Copy is written or typewritten material. See Shrivastava (1991:291).

\(^{22}\) News feed is the same as saying news copy, or copy.

\(^{23}\) In August 2007, the South African Broadcasting Corporation launched its regional satellite news television bureaus in Kenya and Nigeria, and a further international bureau was launched in Washington, D.C. in December 2007.

\(^{24}\) Gudykunst and Mody (2002) explain that the computer is an instrument and technology initially devised by the US military in the 1960s. A network of communications was set-up for military and intelligence operations that resulted in the internet.

\(^{25}\) News wires are another name for news agencies which send and exchange news over the wire. In previous decades, before the intervention and use of computers, the telegraphic wire was used as the device to send and receive news copy.
have had to be streamlined because of, among other things, decreases in finances and cutbacks in staff.

These conditions have precipitated a different function at SAPA of largely generating its own news content. The Deputy-editor at SAPA (2005) describes its operations as “production line journalism.”\textsuperscript{26} The routine and repetitive tasks involved in producing and selecting news daily resembles a commodity production manufacturing line. SAPA still plays the role of a domestic (i.e., a national) news agency with a specific focus of its content on South African news. This focus has been described as “the SAPA niche” because SAPA specialises in providing domestic news about South Africa largely to South African media clients (SAPA Deputy-editor).

Overseeing the SAPA operations is a board of directors, which has the overall managerial and controlling task of the news agency. In the past, SAPA Editor (2007) explains, the board of directors used to be the registered member newspaper groups and the senior executives of their respective companies. The board of directors now comprises members from the four holding newspaper companies under the titles of the Independent Newspapers group,\textsuperscript{27} Media24,\textsuperscript{28} Johnnic Communications, and Avusa and Caxtons Limited (SAPA Editor, 2007).

According to SAPA Editor (2007), “these groups then, within their own collective, opt to register a certain number of their newspaper[s]. The more registrations, the more votes they have, should issues ever come to a vote.” In the event that newspapers owned by a specific group are not registered members with SAPA, but

\textsuperscript{26} A term used by the interviewee to describe the routine process news production, selection and distribution at the SAPA news agency.

\textsuperscript{27} Independent Newspapers (IN) is an international company owned by Irishman, Anthony O’Reilly who in January 1994 purchased thirty-one percent shares, and in 1995 increased this to fifty-eight percent shares, in the Argus group from Anglo American with all the newspaper titles under the Argus group now being controlled by IN. See Tomaselli (1997: 33-35). It was reported in the Business Day newspaper (Dec 10, 2007) that O’Reilly is being asked to step down as chief executive of IN, but Sunday Times (March 15, 2009) reports that O’Reilly’s son takes over the position from his father.

\textsuperscript{28} Media24 main controlling body is the Naspers group.
subscribe to SAPA services, these would be considered non-members. Non-members do not have voting privileges. This rule applies to all non-members including the broadcast media. The editors and manager at SAPA report to the board of directors on issues such as the budget, editorial policy, and administrative matters. The chief editor and manager at the news agency work closely together with regard to the financial budgeting of the agency. They also negotiate the annual subscription fee for new (and old) members and clients with the board of directors. The board members approve and disapprove budgets (SAPA Editor, 2005).

4.1.2 The Associated Press operations, ownership, and control
The American news agency, AP, has been in South Africa since the Second World War (AP Bureau Chief, 2006). Southern Africa is just one region in Africa from which AP covers news, and the region includes ten countries from below Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—namely Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and Madagascar (AP Bureau Chief). The AP Southern African bureau headquarters is in Johannesburg. The region in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is split between the Eastern DRC region, which is covered by the AP East Africa bureau based in Nairobi (Kenya), and the West DRC region, which is covered by the AP bureau in Dakar, Senegal (AP Bureau Chief). AP has news bureaus in over one hundred countries worldwide with over nine thousand subscribing members predominantly from every main newspaper in every country and from other nationally based news agencies (AP Bureau Chief).

Similar to SAPA, the newspapers in the United States own AP (AP Bureau Chief, 2006). The newspapers and broadcasting corporations in the USA are AP’s main clients. The AP Board of Directors is drawn from its members, and every year, it (along with AP management) decides what the subscription rates or fees to subscribers will be. AP Bureau Chief states that because AP is a “not-for-profit corporation,” the only way that they can generate revenue is through their
subscribers, and this is put back into running the organisation. Furthermore, AP Bureau Chief stated “the money we make goes back into the business. We are not, for tax purposes, a profit organisation. That means our money does not go to any investors.”

Before 2000, AP was a cooperative of independently owned American newspapers (AP Bureau Chief, 2006). Today, AP is still owned by the American newspapers, but it has restructured to become an operation that largely generates its own news content, pictures (still photographs), and video content. In addition, AP began selling this to “non-members” (i.e., other media outlets such as magazines and advertisers) (AP Bureau Chief). Rantanen (2004), who also documents this change, states that “this move allowed AP to keep costs down and fund new services for members; it also blunted the competitive edge between AP members and other news providers” (p. 304). A large part of AP funding comes from subscribers all over the world who use their photographs, graphic materials, websites, and “satellite time” that AP “rents out” for use of their satellite link-ups (AP Bureau Chief, 2006).

News distribution through video footage, including visuals and sound bites that are bought by various broadcasting networks and television stations around the world, is part of their more advanced operations (AP Bureau Chief, 2006). However, according to the AP bureau chief, “the core business is still selling your basic news, photos, graphics, and video to news organisations. Everything else is additional news revenue. Additional revenue may make a significant contribution in its entirety, but it doesn’t overcome what we get from the subscribers.”

AP does not subscribe to the other global news agencies (i.e., Reuters, AFP, and DPA) that are their competitors, but like all the other major global news agencies, AP also does not provide local news content to the national or domestic countries in which their bureaus are located and operate. The main purpose of global news

29 Also see Rantanen (2004: 304).
agencies based in South Africa for instance, and in Africa, is to extract news from these contexts that are of interest to their global clients. AP Bureau Chief (2006) holds the following position:

Obviously, when you’re working for an agency, you don’t cover a country in the same way that a [local] newspaper does. I mean, the news that’s interesting to us [AP] is news that somebody outside of South Africa would want. We’re not so interested in providing South Africa with South African news. We’re interested in providing the rest of the world with news from South Africa. So a story may be locally important, but not quite as important to the rest of the world. So we don’t do every sparrow that falls as part of journalism as an agency abroad, whereas the [local] newspapers and telecast does in that area. But our readers are all over the world. There’s no point in us writing a story to go to Japan and South America and North America and Europe that only has interest in South Africa.

The AP reporters collect important news stories from local contexts, those that are of interest to AP for their clients, but AP receives these “tip-off” news stories from other national contexts when they agree to enter contractual exchanges with the news agencies in these contexts. “Less interest stories,” news stories from South Africa that are of interest mainly to South Africans (e.g., road accident death tolls), are reported in the local context from the news feeds obtained from the local agency, SAPA (AP Bureau Chief, 2006).

AP does not sell individual news stories. When a subscriber subscribes to the AP network, they obtain access to the entire news wire. Like Reuters’, AFP’s, and DPA’s news wires, news collected at the AP news bureaus all over the world is fed into the AP network. AP operates in a manner similar to Reuters, AFP, and DPA in that it has a complex global network of exchange relationships with local media and uses the most sophisticated computerised digital and satellite technologies for accessing and directing news to its global clients.30

In this century, the world context is described as a “global order” in academic texts, in speeches by politicians, and even by media people. Events such as the end of the

30 Previous technologies used by the global news agencies included cables and telex systems and even before that the steam ship, the postal service, and pigeons in the case of Reuters (Read 1999).
Cold War and a unified economic system of capitalism abounding worldwide attest to this global character or world order. This context influences descriptions of the activities of news agencies. They are, or have become, global indeed, because they participate in and contribute to this quality of a global society in a similar manner that the “globalisation of capital” has produced a post-Cold War, dominant system in which all nations are suspended. The global news agencies AP, Reuters, AFP, DPA, and a few emerging agencies like the ANSA (Italian) and EFE (Spanish) are intricately woven into the global economic system, with their news network operations on every continent and reaching every nation. When news in one part of the world, such as the reports on the 2004 tsunami disaster, were reported, it had an effect on all parts of the worlds, such that governments responded to the crisis in a global effort. This indicates not just the international quality of news making the headlines, but the global character of news agencies in affecting a global response through reporting such events to a worldwide community.

4.1.3 Reuters’ structure, ownership, and news operation
Since its inception in 1851, the Reuters news agency has established itself as a dominant global player in the flow of news across all continents.31 To date, it remains the largest and the most competitive of all news agencies. Reuters, like AP (and AFP and DPA), covers the other regions in Africa where it has news bureaus set up strategically in the four main regions identified. Reuters’ main country of focus in Southern Africa is South Africa, but it covers news from the whole of the Southern African region (i.e., from SADC, the Southern African Development Community), including Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia, and Namibia (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). Reuters’ Bureau Chief in South Africa is also the Southern African regional and editorial manager of news for the whole SADC region (Reuters Bureau Chief).

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31 The most comprehensive biography commissioned on the development, operations and growth of the Reuters’ News Agency is that by Donald Read (1992, 1999).
According to Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), the global news agencies in Africa—namely, the other competitors of Reuters (i.e., AP, AFP, and to a lesser extent, DPA)—operate in much the same way that Reuters does in terms of general news coverage on the African continent. However, Reuters has developed a global reputation as a reliable, independent, and objective news service, according to him. “This reputation is guarded jealously by providing impartial, accurate, and speedy news to [Reuters’] subscribers” (Reuters’ Bureau Chief).

Reuters is an independent global news agency that is not government-controlled. According to Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), Reuters’ structure, management, and ownership prevents the global agency from passing into the hands of any one interest group: “That is why, when you hear people are buying companies, you never heard that someone is trying to take over Reuters because it has got what is called the trustees shares” (Reuters Bureau Chief). According to Reuters’ Bureau Chief, the trustees are independent and impartial, meaning that they have no particular interests at stake. They are described as “people who are chosen on the strength of their personal integrity” (Reuters’ Bureau Chief). One of the trustees is South African former Speaker of Parliament, Frene Ginwala (Reuters’ Bureau Chief). Accordingly, Reuters’ trustees have certain “powers” in the form of “veto power” of any interest group intending to take over the Reuters news agency (Reuters’ Bureau Chief).32

According to the Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), South Africa occupies a great deal of the local Reuters’ bureau time, in terms of financial reporting. Financial news reporting focuses on company reporting—what companies are doing and what their trading activities are like, for instance, on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). The financial news desk at the South African-based Reuters’ bureau in Johannesburg deals exclusively with the daily equity reporting with regard to companies in SA.

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(Reuters’ Bureau Chief). The Reuters’ Johannesburg bureau is also the Southern African regional headquarters for Reuters, and it receives all incoming news from that region (Reuters’ Bureau Chief).

The companies in SA, including corporate, financial, and other business enterprises, are not only listed on the JSE, but they are also active in the London and New York stock exchanges. This means that Reuters’ news clients in South Africa and abroad are interested in events taking place in these commercial and financial centres and in those of other regions around the world. Companies such as Anglo-American have a vested interest in knowing about what is happening in different parts of the world that might affect its business operations there. Likewise, banking institutions, brokers, and other such clients of Reuters in other parts of the world and in Africa have vested interests in knowing what social, political, and even cultural events are going on in various parts of the world that might influence and affect their business operations.

Hence, Reuters divides its news product for its client markets all over the world into two areas of news reporting. These areas include general and political news reporting and financial and economic news reporting. Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006) explains this “dual role” as part of the “contextualisation of news” that Reuters provides to its, mainly, “business orientated” clients (i.e., non-media clients). “We want the portfolio manager in New York who wants to trade in Anglo-American shares to know that South Africa is a stable country where they can put their money without worrying, for instance” (Reuters’ Bureau Chief).

Reuters’ primary source of news comes through its own network of journalists located all over the world. According to Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), Reuters has about ninety journalists in Africa working in the field. At the Johannesburg office in South Africa, there are fifteen news journalists including the Bureau Chief who is also the chief correspondent and who is originally from Nigeria. There is an
additional team of television journalists, producers, and camera-people (Reuters’ Bureau Chief).

The fifteen reporters at Reuters in Johannesburg make up what is called the “text journalists.” They are the journalists who write the news stories, according to Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006). Another addition to these journalists is an online editor based in the newsroom at Reuters who scans the Internet for news from other news sources. This brings the total number of Johannesburg bureau staff reporting for Reuters to sixteen people.

Of the sixteen text journalists, nine are dedicated to the financial aspect of news reporting or to covering “company news” and other economic news (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). The majority of Reuters’ correspondents are devoted to financial news reporting because that takes up more of their time and focus and because of the many companies listed on which they report (Reuters’ Bureau Chief). These sixteen reporters are split between various inter-sectors of reporting including retail, finance, mining, agriculture, energy, and companies like Eskom, the telecommunications companies, and banks. The remaining seven reporters cover general and political news. This includes the Bureau Chief and the deputy bureau correspondent (Reuters’ Bureau Chief).

The so-called “visuals” are an additional team of reporters. These are television and photojournalists. Reuters supplies pictures to newspaper clients around the world. Video footage and picture journalism is an expanding area of focus among the leading global news agencies, according to Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998). It is an area of additional income generation for news agencies, and it requires professionally trained staff and expensive technical equipment. The more financially strong an agency is, the more likely it is to be able to compete in this area of visual news production.
4.1.4. Agence France-Presse (AFP) operations

AFP initially had two news bureaus in the Southern Africa region, one in Harare, Zimbabwe, and the other in Johannesburg. The Harare office ceased operations when the politics in the country made it difficult to continue by curtailing foreign media access, and the Bureau Chief there left in 2000 (AFP Bureau Chief, 2005). The one AFP bureau based in Johannesburg now serves the Southern region of Africa. This bureau covers news from the following countries including Namibia, Botswana, Angola, Swaziland, South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (AFP Bureau Chief). “The Johannesburg office was merged with the original Harare regional bureau around the same time that the AFP Bureau Chief there had to leave Zimbabwe in 2000 because of the political turbulence in the country” (AFP Bureau Chief).

Some sources have raised the issue of the control and management of AFP because of its part financing by the French government (Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998; Nwosu et al., 1995). A news agency, especially of global status, wants to remain independent of any influence that might affect its news operations and news content. In the case of AFP, the Bureau Chief (2005) states adamantly that despite this government subsidy, which is now less than 50 percent, the organisation (AFP) is not controlled by the French government, and it is, in fact, an independent global news agency:

AFP is independent; I must insist on that. We are not a government agency, not at all. We have the support, financial support, from time to time, from the French government, but not directly. And I can tell you that on the side of AFP [that] more than fifty percent of our receipts are coming from our clients. The rest is coming from the sort of surplus from that, but it’s not a state agency. I must be, and want to be very clear on that. . . . I am not a state civil servant. I’m totally independent. . . . There’s no intervention from the direction in Paris from what you’re [the journalist is] writing. What I mean is that when [we] have a problem with the French government, we are always supported by the [chief] editor, which means we are totally (sic) independent from government. (AFP Bureau Chief)

According to the opinion of Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006) and chief rival agency of AFP in Africa, “AFP is independent of government control despite receiving subsidies from the French government.” While it is a given that AFP do receive part
government funding, their integrity of independence is visible in their news reporting and their operations, according to Reuters’ Bureau Chief. The competitiveness between Reuters and AFP operations was at least visible in the following expression:

Whether they are independent of government influence that is up to others to decide, to determine, but what we [Reuters] do know is that the French government does at least try, but how much they succeed is a different matter. But the French government do try to, let me say, get AFP on their side in a lot of things. There have been cases where the government and the Prime Minister in France have been furious about AFP, about how they have approached a story or whatever. And we also do know that when they operate in different countries, their relationship with the local French embassy is different from the relationship Reuters [has with] the British embassy, for instance. But they are an independent news organisation, no question about it. [And] they are partly government funded so…it’s left to the people to decide whether they are comfortable with that (Reuters’ Bureau Chief).

AFP has a total of seven text journalists or news writers in their Johannesburg bureau, with two photographers (or photojournalists). The Bureau Chief is a French male and the Deputy-editor is a Canadian woman who is bilingual in French and English and who writes mainly for the English news service of AFP. One other journalist, who is French, and another journalist, originally from India, were previously at the AFP office in Abidjan, in the Ivory Coast, before arriving in South Africa. The other AFP news reporters are all South African (AFP Bureau Chief, 2005). There are two Zimbabwean journalists covering the other Southern African countries as well as several stringers (freelance journalists) working for AFP. “Generally, it’s a local journalist working for a national newspaper in Angola or Namibia and writing news for AFP as well. So in each country in the region, we have someone working for us” (AFP Bureau Chief).

4.1.5 The Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA): ownership and structure
DPA shares the status of a “global” news agency with Reuters, AP, and AFP (cf. Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998). DPA has news bureaus located in Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Their clients subscribe to a particular language service. DPA has a network of information and news exchanges from various regions of the world. News travels along these networks, which are linked up by computer
terminals and, in the case of AP, Reuters, and AFP, also by satellites. At the global level in the flow of news, the global news wires filter news through their network of bureaus located on every major continent.

DPA has three regional news bureaus in Africa covering news about the African continent. These bureaus are each located in Cairo, Nairobi, and Johannesburg. DPA have media clients and subscribers all over the world, but this is particularly concentrated in Europe. Their news bureaus in Africa provide the basis for DPA covering news about Africa. DPA regional African bureaus provide an English-language service, an Arabic-language service, and a German-language service to their clients abroad (DPA Bureau Chief, 2007). The German service in Africa is linked directly to the main DPA headquarters in Hamburg, Germany, where news is sent from these African bureaus and edited there before being distributed to their main media clients in Europe, including Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Luxembourg (DPA Bureau Chief).

The DPA English news service from the African continent is relayed along a different editorial main office than that of the German news service. The English-language news service from Johannesburg is sent to Cork, Ireland for editing before being distributed to DPA clients (DPA Bureau Chief, 2007). The DPA news bureau in Cairo provides an Arabic-language service as well as an English-language service for DPA media clients, mainly in the Gulf area of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and for the Asian continent (DPA Bureau Chief). The main editorial desk for the Arabic-language news service is in Cairo, Egypt.

According to the DPA Bureau Chief (2007), the media clients in Germany are at the same time the shareholders of DPA. These include all the German media, both print and electronic (i.e., television and radio), who have shares in DPA, but these shares

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33 Satellite technology is especially relevant to news agencies supplying broadcast news and video footage to media clients.

34 A ‘news wire’ is the colloquial term for a news agency, and refers to an agency’s news service.
are restricted to “1.5 percent each” so that no one shareholder has the overall influence over the operations of the news agency (DPA Bureau Chief). The DPA Bureau Chief explains that limiting the ownership of shareholders is “to protect the objectivity of the news” coming from DPA and to allow many points of view to be covered so that there is diversity in DPA news content.

The German retail media, which are the main clients and shareholders of DPA, are a combination of privately- and publicly-owned organisations (public, meaning owned by the state). DPA is the largest news agency in Germany, but it is smaller than AP, AFP, and Reuters among the global news agencies (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998; see also Wilke, 1998 for a history of DPA after 1945 when it began operations). According to Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (2000, p. 89), in Europe, DPA is second only to AFP with regard to its annual turnover at 99.8 million euro, while the turnover for AFP is at 195 million euro.

The Johannesburg office has two main news writers, which include a male Bureau Chief from Germany and a female news editor from Ireland. The former writes for the German speaking news clients overseas and the latter for the English-language news clients. There is also one German male photojournalist in the Johannesburg office. Apart from their own permanent complement of journalists, all of the global news agencies with bureaus in Africa rely on hiring stringers who are part-time journalists originally from within the countries on which they are reporting. DPA news bureau in Southern Africa also uses stringers that are located in different areas in Africa to cover spot-news for DPA from these areas. Female editors head the other two DPA news bureaus in Cairo and Nairobi.

Similar to the other three global news agencies, the DPA news reports about the African continent need to be contextualised for their overseas clients. The DPA Bureau Chief (2007) illustrates this by an example of local South African news: The issue of the SA Minister of Health, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, being implicated in a
scandal in a report by a South African newspaper had to be contextualised for overseas audiences. The DPA news wires in SA picked up this story from SAPA, but then had to contextualise it for their German audience overseas. When they wrote about the incident for the overseas clients, the issue had to be explained (i.e., who Manto Tshabalala-Msimang was and what had happened), but in a very limited and condensed writing space (DPA Bureau Chief).

According to DPA Bureau Chief (2007), writing an article before it is “filed” often means very condensed writing with the most important information placed upfront in the report. This format is not necessarily followed by all the news agencies, however, particularly if they are reporting on the same event and taking a different angle or “spin” on the event reported (DPA Bureau Chief). According to the DPA Bureau Chief, in his experience, when he writes mainly for his German audience, “you have a lot of explanation work to do. . . . The knowledge that people have in Europe about Africa is [almost] next to nothing.” This means that a news wire correspondent (journalist) has to contextualise, but, at the same time, write very “condensed.” The DPA Bureau Chief stated that he is and always has to be aware of the “clichés” and the misperceptions or stereotypes that are in the minds of the audiences for which he writes (i.e., German-speaking media clients). In this, according to him, journalists writing the news must take perceptions and misperceptions into account (DPA Bureau Chief).

4.1.6 The Pan-African News Agency (PANA): a brief introduction
The OAU launched PANA in 1983 (PANA Deputy-editor, 2006). Its operations began to run into trouble soon after its launch, however, because of several factors. According to the PANA Deputy-editor (2006), the agency experienced “editorial and management problems in terms of the [inadequate] contributions [of news items] from member countries [or African national agencies].” Resulting from this, the agency “lacked credibility [since] members could not agree on policy” (PANA Deputy-editor). The main issue, therefore, had to do with the member national news
agencies in Africa not being able to agree on policy, such as how much (i.e., quantity) news each member should contribute. Other problems were with the quality of news reports, with some national African agencies not checking or verifying information (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992). Members were also not paying their subscriptions, and as a result of this, PANA staff would go without salaries for months (PANA Deputy-editor). Because of these problems and their ongoing financial struggles, the continental news agency ran into sustainability difficulties (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998).

The contribution of news items from members (the national news agencies) is fundamental and vital to the operations and survival of this news organisation. PANA is, in this sense, run by its members. For instance, SAPA and AP have managed the structural and operational changes they have had to make because of financial cost-cutting. PANA suffered from a lack of some members honouring their annual subscriptions and contributing news items that sustain the news agency operations. A news agency’s ability to contribute a significant amount of news stories daily (depending on the extent of its operations) puts it at a competitive advantage, and this advantage becomes the basis for news exchange and information flows. PANA lacked credibility outside of Africa, and with its internal operational problems, its decline began by the late-1980s and early-1990s (PANA Deputy-editor, 2006).

According to PANA Deputy-editor (2006), in 1999, a group of African national news agencies and some individual businesspersons, mainly from Libya, bought shares in the original (OAU) Pan African News Agency with the intention of turning the news agency around and making it a commercially run operation. Through this initiative, PANA privatised, and according to the PANA Deputy-editor, the idea was that through privatisation, the agency would alter its definition as a previously state-owned organisation. Fundamentally, however, it remained a government news agency because its ownership remained in the hands of African national news agencies that were themselves government-owned operations. In some respects, however, PANA is
in the position to be a leading African global agency because of its participation in the international debates at UNESCO and in its early cooperation with the NAM’s NANAP, with OANA in Asia, and with the South American CANA (Boyd-Barrett & Thusu, 1992).

Within its “new” structure, PANA produces about one hundred and eighty to two hundred news stories per day, in four main languages. These include French, English, Arabic, and Portuguese (PANA Deputy-editor, 2006). It has a translation service for each of these languages to meet the needs of its members and subscribers. Its members are predominantly other African national news agencies. PANA mainly covers general news about the African continent, for the African continent, under broad news categories including economic news, politics, culture, education, and sports news (PANA Deputy-editor).

PANA has close to one hundred and twelve reporters spread all over Africa except in Lesotho, according to the PANA Deputy-editor (2006). It has nine African regional bureaus in Kinshasha, Gaberone, Abuja, Lagos, Johannesburg, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Central Africa [Democratic Republic of the Congo], and North Africa [Tripoli, Libya] (PANA Deputy-editor).35 It also employs part-time stringers. PANA operates a twenty-four hour, seven days a week news agency service and, because of this, it is said to have a good technical support team, according to the PANA Deputy-editor.

4.1.7 The Inter Press Service (IPS)

IPS began as a cooperative, non-profit organisation by freelance journalists. IPS was the realisation of a few journalists who recognised the need for an alternative news source in a news environment overtaken by commercialism. IPS attempts to empower

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35 The participant from PANA, in the study, was not willing to give the contact details of the Johannesburg contact person, and all efforts to find the PANA Johannesburg news office through contact with all of the other news agencies, as well as the City Press newspaper, which uses PANA stories from time to time, failed. The PANAPRESS website was accessed to supplement information, at www.panapress.com on 20 January 2007.
journalists in emerging democratic nations, especially in the developing world. IPS has existed since 1964 and has a strong association with, and relevance to, the debates that emerged at UNESCO calling for a New World Information and Communication Order (IPS Regional Director, 2006).

Roberto Savio, an Italian freelance journalist, and Pablo Piacentini, an Argentinean political scientist and student in Rome (at the time), founded IPS. Savio served as the Director General of IPS up until 1999 and now serves as the agency's president emeritus. Piacentini served the organisation in various capacities and is currently editor of the columnist service (IPS Annual Report, 2004). According to Giffard (1998, p. 191), IPS began as an “information bridge” between Christian Democratic parties in South America and in Europe.

It was the influence of the Cold War, particularly the emergence of NAM, which broadened the IPS foci on social problems in developing nations (Giffard, 1998, p. 191). IPS then embraced an “alternative” philosophy to provide a voice to the developing nations and to prioritise information flows between South and South and South and North (Giffard). Most recently, at the end of the 1990s, that IPS philosophy extended to include issues related to “globalisation” taken as a socio-economic, cultural, and political phenomenon having an impact on relevant issues such as climate change, environmental pollution, human rights, and global interdependence (IPS Annual Report, 2004; also cf. Giffard).

The following information concerning its specialist focus is provided on the IPS website:36

With roughly 70% of its journalists reporting directly from the countries of the South, IPS has been in a unique position to analyse the impact of globalisation from Southern points of view. Exclusion and exploitation are a big part of the story, but South-South cooperation is an opportunity we are covering too. IPS editorial policy makes specific reference to ensuring that events and processes are globally contextualised to reach those marginalised by globalisation.

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A thematic news site, “Global Chaos / Global Order: Perspectives on an Inter-connected World”, pulls together the main stories on globalisation, and is complemented by our thematic sites about specific aspects like Economy, Finance and Trade, and Migration. In Africa, a continent often portrayed only as a helpless victim of the process of globalisation, IPS has sought to offer in-depth new perspectives through the “Africa – A Globalising Continent” thematic site. A three-year project focused on trade relations between Africa and Europe is another way in which the region has contributed to creating awareness about the benefits and risks of opening up the continent to more international trade.

IPS is an independent, global news provider that focuses on development issues in both the South and the North (IPS Regional Director, 2006). In that sense, it provides an alternative framework for defining news and information in its participation in global information flows. This is an unconventional alternative to the more traditional global news agencies with their focus on “spot-news”, since development news takes up far more time of IPS.

There was a universal concern amongst journalists of the developing South, in South America and in Asia, but also in Europe, regarding the global flow of information presented as news:

The information flows were mainly from North [western media] to South, that the North-based news and information organisations were monopolising the flows of information to the South and between the South nations [and that] information flowing from the South was also largely reported by journalists from the North who were based in the South. IPS was established to ensure that journalists in the South are able to report stories about their own countries in the way they see them and in the way they want those stories to be told. So IPS began as an organisation of journalists [both from the South and the North] who believed in this cause. It started out in North America and in Latin America, and then spread out to having bases in Asia, Africa, [and] in all the continents, at the United Nations Bureau and in Europe. (IPS Regional Director, 2006)

The IPS bureaus on the continents of Asia, Africa, and South America are sensitive to the dynamics in news reporting from these contexts. In this sense, their news portfolio, structure, operations, and ownership differs from the global news agencies, Reuters, AFP, AP, and DPA. The IPS focus in the regional bureaus in Africa, for instance, is on building the capacity of local journalists from these developing contexts. African journalists hired by IPS are trained to report on Africa without the need for foreign correspondents to do so (IPS Regional Director, 2006). Currently, on
the developing continents (named above), there is a mix of local and foreign correspondents represented at all the global news agencies, but there is still an overwhelming tendency for foreign, mainly Western, news journalists to report the developing world nations, according to IPS Regional Director. According to the IPS Regional Director who is a Zimbabwean woman, “Ideally we’ll have a continent where we just have African correspondents reporting for your AFP’s [and] BBC’s in Africa without the need for foreign journalists having to tell our own stories.”

Foreign correspondents reporting Africa is problematic for various reasons. One of the problems is with the news agenda, that is, Africa is perceived and presented by foreign correspondents from their own Western journalistic frames of reference, according to the IPS Regional Director (2006).37

According to Giffard (1998), funding for IPS comes from three different sources. These include sales from its news services to other media, grants and projects funded by international aid organisations, and from carrier services. However, global socio-economic and political changes, such as the end of the Cold War and the expansion of privatisation and deregulation related to the globalisation process, resulted in a severe funding crisis in IPS since the early 1990s. Giffard believes that “with the end of East-West rivalry, the notion of the Third World had become largely irrelevant; it was no longer of strategic importance” (p. 198). IPS projects and news services that were established for Third World development therefore felt the impact of the decline in aid towards Third World development. One of the strategies of IPS to stay operational, according to Giffard (p. 199), was to turn some of their bureaus into franchise operations, which meant that these regional bureaus would take over the financing of their own operations to cover their costs. This helped, largely, in maintaining the bureaus in certain regions that would otherwise have had to close down operations.

37 This issue of news selection and the related issue of news values are discussed at length in chapter six.
4.2 The significance of niche areas of news production in the exchange relationships among news agencies

4.2.1 A niche for SAPA and the relations of news exchange with the global news agencies

The identified focus or niche of SAPA is providing domestic news content to the local South African media (SAPA Editor, 2005). SAPA also provides its domestic news wire to all subscribers including the global news agencies that have news exchange agreements with SAPA (SAPA Editor).\(^{38}\)

In one sense, the global news agencies are dependent on domestic news agencies, whether in SA or elsewhere, because they receive the bulk of the local news content from the domestic news wire service. Were it not for news exchanges with the national news agencies, global news agencies would have to carry all of the costs of reporting on other domestic news contexts themselves, of which only a small proportion is relevant to their overseas markets (less than 10 percent from each local context). While global agencies do have their own reporters in these contexts, they do not cover all domestic news stories from these contexts.

In another sense, the relationship between global and national news agencies is a co-dependency relationship because the domestic news agencies are as dependent, if not more so, on the global news agencies for foreign news that is outside of their immediate location of news coverage. The domestic, national news agency is dependent on global agencies for news because, with their limited budgets and financial and human resources, they are unable to cover international news stories from all over the world. National news agencies therefore rely on the global agencies for these stories, and so they enter into news exchange agreements with them.

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\(^{38}\) It should be noted that SAPA, by definition of being a national news agency, could not practically compete with the global news agencies. Herein, to some extent is the problem with the issue of monopolisation of news flows. Compare Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998).
Previously, Rantanen (1998, p. 16, 37) described a “bi-directional dependency” relationship, which implied a two-way movement (of news) that reflects cooperation and the meeting of “equals.” This study proposes that news does indeed flow between the global and nationally based domestic news agencies, but that this “co-dependency” relationship is of unequal strength or it is asymmetrical. This means that national news agencies are more dependent on global news agencies for foreign news than the global news agencies are dependent on national agencies for domestic news.

To explain this, it was established during interviews that global news agencies have their own reporters in SA reporting on this context, but that the SAPA news agency is entirely dependent on global agencies for foreign news. SAPA, in fact, had to close down its foreign news bureau in London (on Fleet Street) in 1989 or in the early 1990s, according to SAPA Editor, therefore cutting back on their foreign correspondent staff. They scaled down their foreign news coverage due to financial constraints. According to SAPA Editor (2007), SAPA, to a limited extent, sends their own journalists overseas to cover certain international news stories. Usually, this is when it is news of significant interest to the SAPA client.

Generally, SAPA’s international reach is limited to the African continent (SAPA Editor, 2007). SAPA news that is fed to the global news agencies reaches overseas clients via the global news agencies rather than directly from SAPA. In other words, SAPA chiefly provides news about and in the context of South Africa and mainly for the local SA media rather than for overseas media and audiences. This is what makes SAPA a national, and not a global, news agency. The extent of coverage of news at SAPA does not compare with the level of production of news at the global news agencies.

39 This situation prevails at most other national news agencies for example, in India, where UNI and PTI do not have their own foreign news correspondents based in overseas territories (pilot study: UNI and PTI, 2004).
The finding of an asymmetrical co-dependency relationship extends previous descriptions in earlier studies of a hierarchical arrangement in which global agencies were said to dominate global news flows, and that news flows moved directionally, from top to bottom, with extractions of news from national news agencies. However, to more finely tune that argument, it should be noted that a hierarchy “of sorts” persists, in that the co-dependency relationship outlined above weighs in favour of global news agencies and less in favour of the national news agencies (as explained in the example of SAPA and the global agencies). A hierarchical relationship is one in which one party (or several of the same kind) has an upper hand in the relationship. It further describes the “capabilities” or capacities (of these organisations) in performing tasks such as collecting and distributing news. Global news agencies outdo national news agencies in these tasks (in terms of both volume of news stories on their news wires and in their subscription markets) and are therefore more “higher level” types of news agencies than national news agencies.

As pointed out in previous studies, the exchange agreements or contracts between national and global agencies where different sets of external and internal conditions prevailed reveal that global news agencies may not enter into direct news exchange agreements with the local retail media since this would mean that they would compete with these domestic news agencies (see chapter 5). As the AFP Bureau Chief (2005) stated, having to go via SAPA in order to reach other domestic news media in South Africa is frustrating to global agencies like AFP. However, this condition prevents the global agencies from monopolizing local news markets for the exchange of foreign news. According to their contracts with the global agencies, domestic news agencies are prevented from reproducing foreign news. Only news that SAPA obtains from global media, according to their contract, is put out on the SAPA wire.

The news exchange agreements between SAPA and the global news agencies are, in part, based on the global news agencies not encroaching on the niche of “local news
production” at SAPA. All of the global news agency participants confirmed this. They stated that their operations are not run in competition with SAPA because the SA news agency provides news to a different news market than the global agencies’ operations and, at the same time, SAPA provides a service to them. Furthermore, because SAPA is limited in global outreach, it cannot compete with the global players at the level of foreign news production and distribution. This evidence confirms both a co-dependency and hierarchical relationship of news agencies that differs from descriptions in previous findings.

The “clause” of non-competition within domestic news markets is changing, however, especially as competition between retail media in domestic contexts increases. For example, the broadcasting sector, SABC, has direct news exchange contracts with Reuters and AP, as do some of the independent newspapers in SA. SABC does not receive news from SAPA, and in fact competes with SAPA, as does the privately owned media channel, M-Net. This means that the global agencies, in their relationships of news exchange with other retail media in SA, indirectly compete with SAPA; they provide news to SAPA competitors.

In South Africa, SAPA is the main distributor of international/foreign news content to local South African media. This means that SAPA has a privileged or dominant position in the domestic news market as the main distributor of international news copy. SAPA therefore has a competitive edge over domestic (retail) media as a reliable source of foreign and domestic news. SAPA does not however, produce and sell its news directly to the public, but this is slowly beginning to change as technologies encroach upon the processes of news production and distribution at agencies. SAPA, like all of the participating news agencies, also faces financial constraints, as they are a “non-profit” organisation. In the future, the need may arise, as it is already strongly felt, for SAPA to commercialise (SAPA Editor, 2005) and provide news directly to the public. However, as long as the domestic newspaper
groups own SAPA, it is unlikely that SAPA will compete with the owners (SAPA Editor).

According to SAPA Editor (2007), the redistribution of foreign news by SAPA has undergone changes in recent years. According to him, “the international agencies all do, and continue to try to, sell directly to other media platforms in South Africa” and bypass SAPA (SAPA Editor, 2005; see also Boyd-Barrett, 2000). Where SAPA previously “monopolised” international news flowing into the domestic South African news market, this situation is increasingly changing. Other media, including newspapers and broadcasting services, have direct news agreements with some of the global news agencies, as do some of the local newspapers such as City Press, The Citizen, and the Mail & Guardian newspaper.

*The Associated Press exchange relationships in SA*

According to the AP Bureau Chief (2006), the cost of a subscription to AP is different for different subscribers, depending on the “news package” that the client wants. Depending on the so-called package that they receive, subscribers pay different rates. SAPA, for instance, pays a higher rate to receive AP news than an American domestic newspaper does because payment is rationalised based on SAPA receiving more news from around the world than the American newspaper would. SAPA also has the right to redistribute the news that they receive from AP to the local newspapers, which means, in a sense, they have a “monopoly” over their domestic news market. The SA newspapers are, however, also the owners of SAPA, so the arrangement that SAPA has with AP works out cheaper than if individual SA newspapers subscribed directly to the AP news agency. Furthermore, AP supplies foreign news, which is news that is not the focus of the local SA newspapers.

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40 This means that the SA newspapers had to subscribe to SAPA in order to receive the news wire of the global news agencies, but since the 1990s, this is changing.
According to the AP Bureau Chief (2006), there are certain “economies of scale” operating because the AP package varies from place to place according to individual clients’ needs. A subscriber, such as SAPA, has more of a say in what they want and on what level of service they want it; they can negotiate their contract with AP (AP Bureau Chief, 2006). SAPA tends to pay more than an individual (American) newspaper subscriber does to AP because SAPA also obtains the rights to redistribute AP news to the South African media and news market (AP Bureau Chief, 2006). The only way in which most South African newspapers can obtain the foreign news wire of AP is through subscribing to SAPA. Therefore, in a sense, SAPA has a local monopoly over foreign news distribution in SA.41

The arrangement of global news agencies not selling news directly to local (retail) media in a domestic context (as mentioned above) goes back to that “original clause” in the news exchange agreements among global and national news agencies. The purpose is that the global agencies do not encroach on the operations of national news agencies in their domestic arrangement. SAPA negotiates a contract with AP in which SAPA has sole distribution rights of the AP news wire, which the individual SA newspapers do not have. Setting different rates for the exchange of news between AP and the domestic news agency, SAPA suggests a grey area in which news exchanges significantly influence the relationships among agencies. In response to the question of news exchange agreements among the national and global news agencies, it appears that these contracts are fluid and change from year to year depending on the “package of news” that an agency subscribes to receive.

*Reuters and SAPA’s relationship*

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41 SAPA does not necessarily monopolise “news flows” in SA because its exchanges with the global agencies works in favour of the SA newspapers who are both media clients and owners of SAPA. SAPA negotiates an exchange agreement with the global news agencies on behalf of their clients, the SA newspapers. However, the newspaper groups in SA are a monopoly because it has been difficult for “alternative” newsprints to break into that fray, and compete and diversify information sources in the newspaper industry.
According to the Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), Reuters does not receive SAPA news, but SAPA subscribes to receive Reuters’ news. The SAPA Editor (2005) stated that SAPA, since the 1990s, no longer subscribes to Reuters since Reuters competes with SAPA in their domestic market by selling news to SAPA competitors. Since the takeover of the Reuters-South African bureau, the relationship between Reuters and SAPA appears strained. Reuters does not cover news specifically for a South African market even though they do have subscriptions directly with retail media in SA that are not subscribers to SAPA. However, most of the SA newspapers (who own SAPA) obtain foreign news from SAPA. SAPA also subscribes to AP, AFP, and DPA, all of which are Reuters’ competitors. Reuters does not monopolise news in South Africa.

Although retail media outlets are important subscribers to Reuters’ operations, Reuters’ core clients are the financial and economic communities and businesses such as banks, trading houses, commodity houses, insurance brokers of all types, and investment companies (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). The significance of this in terms of Reuters being the largest of the global news agencies is that their core clients reflect how Reuters’ news has adapted to a changing global environment.

The AFP and SAPA exchange relationship

AFP Bureau Chief (2005) described the relationship with SAPA as “good.” SAPA receives the AFP news wire, and AFP subscribes to SAPA. However, AFP relies predominantly on its own news bureaus throughout Africa for news about the continent (AFP Bureau Chief). SAPA does not have exchange relationships with other African national news agencies in Africa, and instead receives news about Africa mainly from the global news agencies, especially AFP. SAPA Editor (2005) explained that after South Africa’s isolation in Africa and the world ended with the demise of the apartheid state, there were attempts to include SAPA in the rest of Africa. The problem was the incongruent, liberal “news values” of SAPA. Their operations more closely resembled those of the Western global news agencies than those of the African nationalised news agencies. There were also translation and
language problems between the Southern African and francophone-based agencies in North and Central Africa.

The DPA and SAPA relationship
DPA and SAPA have an exchange contract between them. SAPA Editor (2005) stated that SAPA picks up the “quirkier” news stories from DPA. The DPA Bureau Chief (2007) stated that DPA and SAPA relations are amicable, and that DPA relies on SAPA as a “tip-off,” that is, to alert the German news agency to important events taking place in South Africa. With the World Cup hosted in South Africa in 2010, South Africa is an important context of interest to DPA. Such news issues are significant to DPA (DPA Bureau Chief).

SAPA and PANA
SAPA Editor (2005) stated that there is no news exchange agreement with PANA. The PANA Deputy-editor (2006) confirmed this. The reason has to do, partly, with the perceptions that other African news agencies have had about SAPA, as well as the SAPA perception of other African news agencies. SAPA Editor explained that after the end of apartheid, SAPA tried to reintegrate with the rest of the continent’s news agencies. However, “the fundamental clash comes in where they are ideologically based and government funded, government staffed, and we [SAPA] are private in the sense of being owned by the newspapers” (SAPA Editor). From the early 1990s, between 1992 and 1993, South Africa had put aside a percentage share towards the PANA (SAPA Editor). However, because of apartheid, South Africa was banned from the Commonwealth and that share was “held on a shelf somewhere.” Post 1992, there were attempts to “rejuvenate PANA as a proper news agency, by taking input from SAPA.

But then, the francophone Africans became upset about this because PANA is based in Senegal, in Dakar. They did not want the South Africans to re-colonise their news agency. So, Gaddafi and others pumped a whole lot of money in and told SAPA to [back off]. The last we [SAPA] heard was that they wanted us to buy them [their news wire] for sixty thousand dollars per year, and we declined. (SAPA Editor, 2005)
The PANA Deputy-editor (2005) could not comment any further about the relationship with SAPA and stated that the chief editor was in a better position to answer this question. Numerous attempts were made; however, the researcher was met with difficulties in making any significant contact with PANA representatives. The reason for their unwillingness to participate remains unclear.

4.2.2 The ‘success’ of the global news agencies in developing niche areas of news production and their adaptive tendencies

The Associated Press
The AP niche is their “general news focus” worldwide; they are strong on “hard news,” collected and distributed from around the world (AP Bureau Chief, 2006). According to the AP Bureau Chief, AP is the “largest general news operation” of all the global news agencies because its operation is geared towards this. While AP does not sell their services mainly to stockbrokers or banks, as Reuters does, next to Reuters, AP is the largest and the strongest general news-producing agency in the world. Reuters’ specialisation area is financial news reporting, and that is what they are leading toward (AP Bureau Chief; cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998, p. 8, p. 15, pp. 19-22).

According to the AP Bureau Chief (2006), Reuters’ main revenue comes from selling news to banks, stockbrokers, and brokerage firms, and only about 7 percent of their revenue comes from traditional news media. In his view, this is the focus of Reuters’ “business model.” AP, on the other hand, generates its income by selling news mainly to media outlets (newspapers and broadcasters), and they cover hard news from politics to sports. They also cover business and financial news, but not on the same scale as Reuters’ news. Furthermore, AP do not have a financial screen service\(^\text{42}\) as

\[^{42}\text{This refers to online financial stocks, indicators and trading figures that clients receive.}\]
Reuters and Bloomberg do (AP Bureau Chief), but the central operation of AP is being a producer and distributor of general news to media clients.

**Reuters’s niche – global financial and economic news reporting**

Reuters divides its news function and news operations into two focal areas or foci. On the one hand, Reuters reports on “general and political news” like all the other news agencies do, which would be the daily “run-of-the-mill” type of news. On the other hand, Reuters focuses more exclusively than the other participating news agencies on “financial and economic news” reporting (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). At the Southern African Reuters headquarters in Johannesburg, their offices are actually split between two office levels. Their purely financial news operations are located on the top level, while Reuters’ general, political, and sports news operations (where the interview was conducted in the general newsroom) are located on the bottom floor. Reuters’ focus and specialisation is financial and economic reporting.

When Reuters reports on political stories from South Africa, or local contexts in other countries, Reuters “explains” and frames this news in the context of what is occurring in the country at the time so that their (mainly business) clients know exactly what is going on there and the impact of these events for the future (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). Reuters’ news offers an analysis of where a particular country is headed (Reuters’ Bureau Chief). To illustrate what this means, Reuters’ Bureau Chief provided the following example:

> Whether we are reporting about Jacob Zuma’s problems [recently elected ANC president in 2007 involved in the controversial arms deal corruption scandal] we have to put [that] in context in terms of South African politics. How does this affect South African politics? What is the future for South Africa with this “Zuma issue” causing problems within the ruling party? Does it bode well for the stability of SA in the future? So we have to give the context. It’s not just to say Zuma appeared in court today. We have to give the context of what that means for SA. Basically, that’s what we do. (Reuters’ Bureau Chief)

At Reuters, the production of financial news works in tandem with the general political news reporting. The process is explained as follows: while general political
news reporting provides much of the context in which events are occurring. Reuters’ financial correspondents watch, monitor, and follow the daily activities of commercial companies very carefully with regard to these companies’ investments and other business activities (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). They watch the portfolios of companies and how they are doing, and this forms part of the basis for financial news reporting (Reuters’ Bureau Chief). Reuters’ news correspondents therefore also fall in either one of the two focal areas of reporting, that is, in general political or financial and economic news reporting.

The day of the interview with the Bureau Chief at Reuters’ Johannesburg office, an illustration of the above operations on the financial news focus side coincided with the long-term budget speech that the South African Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel, was to make in Parliament that day. According to Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), who is also the chief correspondent (main writer of political news) of the Southern Africa region, the news bureau would follow this event carefully by sending its reporters out to the actual event at Parliament. They would then cover the event as it unfolded directly from Parliament:

Around one o’clock today, all our focus will turn to the budget speech that Trevor Manuel will make in Parliament today. If you want to see exactly how Reuters goes into action . . . I will show you when Trevor Manuel starts his budget speech. You will see precisely what we are going to do. We have a team in Cape Town, but even here [in Johannesburg], you will see what goes into action and what we do on a big story like this. (Reuters Bureau Chief)

On returning to Reuters’ news bureau offices that same afternoon to observe the process of how Reuters’ financial news operations are put into action on the SA Finance Minister’s budget speech at Parliament, the following was explained:

Let me tell you how it works. Since six o’clock this morning, reporters have been in what we call a lock-up. They have already got Trevor Manuel’s speech, [that is] the speech that Trevor Manuel is going to make at two o’clock. They have had it since six a.m., but they are locked up in a room. They cannot communicate with anybody; their cell phones have been taken away from them; there’s no telephones in that room. All they have is what they will just really [use to] prepare their stories. They will prepare the alerts. The alert is the story that flashes on the wire just to alert because there are clients who want to know what’s going on; it’s just a headline. So we put out the alert. So they [reporters] prepare all those. So at about one
o’clock, they [monitors] will allow them [the reporters] to send those alerts to us. We will store them in our terminal [the online wire terminal]. We will not put them out until Trevor Manuel starts to speak. So at one o’clock, we will get those alerts, and we will store them on our system and will release them when Trevor Manuel starts to speak. The moment he says, “Madam Speaker. . .” (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006, italics added for emphasis)

News agencies and news media that are in competition with Reuters for this financial news piece, which is called a “set piece,” are also part of the “lock-up” situation. They all have access to the budget speech before the actual presentation of the speech in Parliament. According to Reuters Bureau Chief (2006), all these news media work the same on a set piece, but their emphasis and focus will differ. They will not necessarily all be focussing on the same aspects of the budget speech for the news that they will produce, but according to Reuters’ Bureau Chief, “The playing ground is the same.”

While the final news report is based on the judgement of the particular reporter covering the event on the ground, the client market for which the set piece is being written also has an influence over the focus of the news item (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). Usually, senior reporters are sent out into the field to cover this on-the-spot news. SAPA Editor (2005) raised a similar point, that the role of senior reporters involves using their judgement in selecting events based on their “news sense.” Chapter 6 provides a discussion on the theme of news values and the selection process of news, as well as the client markets’ indirect influence in the production process of news.

With the ascendancy and transformations in global market capitalism (since the end of the Cold War) and the increasing economic, political, and cultural integration among nations (globalisation), this dual role and service offered by the Reuters’ news agency has led to its becoming a uniquely competitive global news agency. Bloomberg, which is Reuters’ archrival and main competitor in this area of news

43 Bloomberg is a privately owned independent company mainly providing financial, business and general news to media clients all over the world. The bureau in South Africa declined to participate in this study. According to Kay (2004: 11), Bloomberg’s primary focus is the provision of financial
production in the world, also specialises in financial news reporting. Bloomberg has its headquarters in New York and has a regional office in Johannesburg. No other news service provider apart from Bloomberg is said to rival Reuters’s financial news operations (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). In this sense, like no other news agency, Reuters has fully adapted to the changed global economic (and political) environment since its inception in 1851 (cf. Read, 1999). In general news production worldwide, AP is the only competitor to challenge (and equal) that of Reuters’ general news production and distribution.

Agence France-Presse niche area

According to Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), in Africa, AFP is Reuters’ main general news competitor. AFP has maintained its niche area of general news production and, in Africa, African political news (AFP Bureau Chief, 2005). AFP is also quite competitive with Reuters in Asia and Latin America in general and political news (Reuters’ Bureau Chief). AFP picks up many of the stories that Reuters considers marginal to their clients and files them on their news wires. This consistency and initiative makes AFP more competitive with Reuters than the other global news agencies on these continents, with the exception of the AP operations, simply because AP is, globally, larger (i.e., sells more news stories) than AFP. Furthermore, in general, the AFP news service in Africa (i.e., their subscription fee) is cheaper than Reuters’ news service because Reuters offers a specialised product for a specialist market of subscribers, whereas the general and political news of AFP is required mainly by retail media clients around the world.

44 Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998: 2) state that Reuters has come into its own being ranked 48th of Europe’s top 500 companies and it is the 12th most valuable company listed on the London Stock Exchange (in the year 1998). A later article by Terhi Rantanen (2004) states that international news agencies are in decline as they face intense competition from other media, e.g. internet and blogging sites and are losing their previously dominant positions in global news provisions. This point is debatable because global agencies are still the front-runners in the provision of news and as trusted news sources (cf. Boyd-Barrett 2000). The question is whether they still enjoy a monopoly over global news flows given the prevalence of new media and information technologies that are revolutionizing the exclusive control over news flows by news agencies.
The DPA niche area

The DPA niche is similar to that of AFP because DPA also predominantly covers general, political, and sports news. SAPA Editor (2005), who states that SAPA and DPA have news agreements, tends to take the “quirkier” news stories, that is, the more unusual stories that DPA cover. This “news value” is different from sensationalist news stories that aim to give an “entertaining edge” to reporting news including soft news. However, one can argue that it is a fine line. News agencies, however, as stated earlier, do not aim to produce sensationalised news.

DPA covers some financial news reporting, but not as a specialisation area. According to the DPA Bureau Chief (2007), since DPA is a much smaller competitive global agency in comparison to Reuters, AP, and AFP, the speed of getting news out is not necessarily as important as it is to its competitors. Instead, DPA relies on accuracy and reliability in its news content and it will wait for the facts before filing a news story. For example, rather than settle on an estimate figure of the number of lives lost in a natural disaster, DPA will wait for the facts to emerge before filing the story. Therefore, they prize accuracy above speed (DPA Bureau Chief).

4.2.3 A niche for PANA and its news exchange in Africa

According to the PANA Deputy-editor (2006), PANA attempts to compete, in Africa, with the larger global news agencies. It tries to emulate Reuters and the French global news agency, AFP, in its mode of operation (PANA Deputy-editor). PANA, however, has not yet reached proportions of worldwide news distribution comparable to those of these global news agencies. A study by Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992) showed the same result, that PANA had not reached a level of growth comparable to the global news agencies then. This situation abounds. However, Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992) state that “however limited may have been its impact on international
media, PANA has helped improve South-South flow of news and widened the possibilities for South-North flow of news” (p. 100). According to PANA Deputy-editor (2006), PANA receives international news from Paris, London, New York, and Brussels. They hire local staff in these places to cover news that would be of interest to PANA and the African continent. PANA also translates its news into French, Portuguese and Arabic languages (PANA Deputy-editor).

According to Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992, p. 30), PANA has a very clear African news focus and is a major source of news about Africa for the African media. The PANA Deputy-editor (2006) reiterated this view. PANA has a strong presence regarding news flows among the national news agencies in several parts of Africa (in North and West Africa), which are among its main subscribers and participating members in news exchanges (PANA Deputy-editor, 2006). The direct contribution of PANA news to African retail media (including both print and broadcast media) requires further investigation once African news agencies (and retail media) grant access in this area for future research purposes. Furthermore, it is not clear from the interviews with the PANA participant just how dependent the African national news agencies are on PANA in comparison to their use of the global news agencies for news outside of Africa. PANA, on the other hand, is vitally dependent on African national news agencies for contributions of news about the continent as well as for subscription fees to assist in running its operations (PANA Deputy-editor).

According to the Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006), the potential does exist for PANA to become a strong contender for news production in Africa to international clients because of its continental focus. If PANA could, for instance, supply the international news agencies with news that these latter are unable to acquire on the African continent, because of a lack of access to some locations (due to local laws regarding foreign media), this will greatly enhance PANA as an African and international regional agency, according to the Reuters’ Bureau Chief. Specializing on the African continent, as a whole, is what “can become” the PANA niche, but it has not proven
itself in this area according to the global news agency participants and the local SAPA agency.

The news provided by PANA has to be news that is credible and not simply the official governments’ spin-offs and news that the global news agencies cannot produce themselves on the African continent, according to Reuters’ Bureau Chief (2006). A keener and sharper focus in providing news about Africa would develop and expand their operations and give PANA a competitive edge by obtaining news that the global news agencies (i.e., Reuters, AFP, DPA, and AP) find difficult to access in Africa (Reuters’ Bureau Chief). Reuters’ Bureau Chief identified this as the potential niche of PANA.

The reality is that PANA cannot compete with the Western news agencies, Reuters, AP, AFP, or DPA. The Deputy-editor (2006) at PANA identifies its niche area as “development” news. Western agencies appear not to have that much interest in news stories with a development focus, supposedly because they serve a market of clients who are not interested in those kinds of stories (PANA Deputy-editor). This area of special interest at PANA was confirmed at the interview with IPS regional director who stated that PANA actually now competes with IPS in news features and stories about Africa. According to Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992), PANA’s early beginning as a region-wide agency has been “to correct distortions in the portrayal of Africa resulting from partial and negative information published by foreign press agencies” (p. 99). In this sense, the PANA objective has been to operate as an “alternative and additional” news source in Africa, about Africa (p. 99).

Its development focus has been further explained as highlighting economic news received from the national news agency members. This means that its focus is on environmental issues and weather conditions, such as countries vulnerable to droughts. They also focus on the role of women in African development and organisations and their achievements. In addition, features on “ECOWAS [Economic
Community of West African States, SADCC [sic] [Southern African Development Community], science and technology, agricultural economics, rural development [and] political issues such as liberation movements” are of interest (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992, p. 81). PANA Deputy-editor (2006) confirmed most of these items as the PANA foci and interests. In fact, because of this news focus, mainly on features, PANA Deputy-editor stated that IPS is their main competitors in Africa.

Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992, pp. 42-3, p. 58) stated that PANA news reached other international destinations, especially in Asia and South America, because of its exchange agreements between NANAP and the intergovernmental agency, ASIN [National Information Systems Network – Spanish], based in South America, as well as an exchange agreement with IPS. These arrangements were prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s. However, in the 1990s, when PANA was in decline and faced structural and financial crises, these agreements apparently dissolved. IPS Regional Director (2006) for instance, mentions that IPS and PANA are now competitors for news in Africa and from Africa and, therefore, IPS does not have a news exchange agreement with the Pan African news organisation.

Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992, p. 30) identified the main problem that PANA faces— which restricts its potential to become a worldwide, recognised African continental news agency— as its political leanings towards the OAU (now the African Union). The AU remains the “official voice” for news about Africa, and because PANA’s main contributors are the national news agencies in Africa (PANA Deputy-editor, 2006), their African governments still influence them and, as a result, PANA. All of the participants from the global news agencies, and the SAPA news agency, reiterated this reasoning for not entering into exchanges with PANA.

PANA Deputy-editor (2006) confirmed that a shortage of resources and technology particularly affect its member news agencies. The news that they send is late and generally inadequate in quality. Furthermore, its member news agencies default on
the membership fees, which means that PANA news staff goes without pay during some intervals (PANA Deputy-editor). According to the AFP Bureau Chief (2006), AFP did have an exchange agreement with PANA at some point, but the PANA subscription was not renewed in later years because they were unable to pay their subscription fee to AFP.

4.2.4 Development: a key focus and niche of IPS

IPS uses the term “development” broadly and generally to include all or most aspects relating to development news. However, IPS also uses the term to qualify its central principle in its operations and structure. This means that it takes its focus on development as involving both process and concrete organisational planning. IPS views information as a “tool” in the development processes and in advancing relations between civil society, the media, and policy-makers (IPS Regional Director, 2006). Development extends across issues such as human rights, gender justice, children’s rights, and such where clear communication on each of these issues is necessary in order to make a difference in peoples’ lives (IPS Regional Director).

So, communication to me, is central [and] key to development. I think the [mainstream] media play a big role in that . . . maybe not as big a role as it should be playing. This is why having an organisation such as IPS is important, although I would hesitate and say that your traditional news agencies, like your BBC’s and AFP’s, are also quite development-orientated now. Whilst they cover other things, they also look at development if you look at the Millennium Development Goals. That’s something that never used to happen before . . . But really pay attention, and you will see that it is a strategic decision for an organisation such as the BBC to actually say, “We’re going to follow the Millennium Development Goals, and we want to see how much resources . . . and what is being done about it.” (IPS Regional Director)

As an aspect of their developmental focus, IPS does in-depth journalism, in other words, more detailed journalism that the mainstream media are finding more and more difficult to do primarily because of the lack of resources and finances, but also because their primary role is providing “spot-news” (IPS Regional Director, 2006). According to IPS Regional Director, the IPS news focus goes beyond daily news coverage to investigate and offer a broader contextual focus. The IPS Regional Director used the incident of rape charges brought against the dismissed South
African Deputy-President, Jacob Zuma, as an illustration of how IPS would look beyond the event and explain it in the broader context in which it has occurred. According to IPS Regional Director, when the verdict of “not guilty” was passed in the above case of rape, the news focus for IPS was on how the court had reached its ruling and what issues guided the final outcome of the ruling. IPS focussed on what the implications of the court meant for issues around gender (IPS Regional Director). This investigative stance and in-depth enquiry is the approach taken by IPS in comparison with the mainstream media which, in the above example, all tended to give the same “superficial” coverage of the “Jacob Zuma trial”, according to the IPS Regional Director.

When IPS wrote up a story on the issue regarding the outcome of the rape charges against Jacob Zuma, the IPS Regional Director was of the opinion that even more could have been done in reporting on this story because there were still questions unanswered about the final verdict (IPS Regional Director, 2006). In her opinion, there was a limitation of space in reporting on the many details about the court ruling even though IPS looked at the broader implications in their framing of the issue.

Another aspect of the IPS development focus relates to media development. IPS, for instance, is instrumental in providing training, education, and skills development to journalists in developing countries including those on the African continent. The idea is to build capacity of local journalists so that they can effectively report on their own social contexts. An explanation of this was as follows:

It is one thing to say [there should be] more stories on violence against women, but if someone does not know that gender is as a basic issue, [they] would not be able to write that story effectively. So IPS has done training [with] journalists to [enable them to] just understand the basics of what gender is all about, to understand what [is] meant by violence against women, because there are different forms of violence, what is domestic violence, what is rape, all these things. We’ve done training around these issues. . . . [One] also needs to understand what the factors are [that contribute to violence], the cultural aspect, religion, and so on. So that journalist, when she or he is reporting about this, when she or he is doing the analysis, they [should] understand all the different issues and how they impact on the issue they are reporting on. (IPS Regional Director, 2006)
According to the IPS Regional Director (2006), globalisation, which she defined as the global interdependence of nations, has become a central focus in IPS reporting, particularly in the context of developing nations. IPS is sensitive in their training of journalists in how they define globalisation in relation to the interdependencies of nations, for instance (see also Giffard, 1998). According to Giffard (p. 193), the IPS news service has a focus on global processes affecting economic, social, and political development especially in developing regions. Furthermore, reporting on stories around the issue of globalisation is a focus of IPS in terms of the inequalities associated with globalisation (IPS Regional Director).

The IPS Regional Director (2006) used two examples to illustrate the issue of globalisation as a focus of IPS. Firstly, IPS news focused on the textile industry in Southern Africa, why it fell apart, and the apparent growing presence of Chinese investment in the region. Secondly, she gave the example of what SADC is in Africa, and why it was formed (IPS Regional Director). In both the examples, the journalists are trained to understand the association between seemingly unrelated phenomena. In the one example, journalists are trained to see the relevance of HIV and AIDS and the SADC response. In the other example, they are trained to see the potential for large overseas markets to tap into the resources and materials of countries elsewhere (developing countries, for instance). They are trained to see the impact of this on the relations between these countries as well as the impact on their own development (whether it has a positive or negative impact based on observed outcomes) (IPS Regional Director).

“Media development,” for IPS, also encompasses the improvements in technologies and the equipment that media organisations need in order to be functional and do what they do. IPS Regional Director (2006) mentioned that beyond South Africa, in other African countries, the equipment most needed by many media organisations is lacking or outdated. Therefore, in Africa, media development includes such things as
building capacity of training journalists to become professional journalists as well as acquiring the technology that allows these journalists and media organisations to best do their tasks in reporting news (IPS Regional Director).

IPS does not subscribe to SAPA, but they are a news source for SAPA. In other words, SAPA takes news and information from IPS in the form of a contract agreement with IPS. IPS is a content provider to SAPA (IPS Regional Director, 2006). The primary clients (subscribers) of IPS are all media looking for an alternative focus, including newspapers, radio stations, and online web media. News and information are also specially packaged for non-governmental organisations (NGO’s), which are active in civil society particularly with a focus on development news and processes (IPS Regional Director). Diplomatic missions and the United Nations organisation (UN) are said to be prominent amongst the clients of IPS news (IPS Regional Director).

Other non-media clients include academia. According to the IPS Regional Director, “A couple of our stories have been used as case studies [and] also as a basis for examinations. They have been used even in school textbooks. So it’s a broad range of users, but primarily it is media, newspapers, and radio and then online news media” (2006). The IPS news service goes out to the subscribers before it goes out on the Internet where non-subscribers can access it, according to IPS Regional Director.

Some subscribers pay a subscription fee, while others do not. In Africa, for instance, people rarely want to subscribe because of a lack of finances. Africa has many media organisations, but many of these do not survive because of a lack of resources and funding, according to IPS Regional Director (2006). They cannot sustain themselves or pay their reporters to do reporting (IPS Regional Director). Donor organisations who want “alternative content” in reporting from the sub-regions in Africa fund the IPS, according to the IPS Regional Director. They are interested in the in-depth
reporting and feature stories of IPS. The IPS also extends its service, free of charge, to specific and “special cases”:

So we give IPS on a payment basis to other media, but for those who we know maybe don’t have capacity . . . if we don’t give [it to] them, they will not access this information; they will not have access to good news. So we are working also towards helping the development of media in Africa. So we allow people to use our news. (IPS Regional Director)

In other words, IPS conducts a profile of its users who are most in need of information and news flows, but who cannot afford this. Others that can afford to pay for the services have to subscribe for these.

4.3 An analysis and conclusion

The chapter began with a discussion of SAPA and the South African newspapers in relationship to the British news agency, Reuters. For a while, Reuters enjoyed a monopoly of news flowing in to and out of South Africa. Relinquishing control of the bureau to the South African newspaper groups also later resulted in strained relations, up until the 1980s, between SAPA and Reuters, as the latter attempted to compete with the local news agency for news in its own “territory.”

During this time, there were no news agreements between SAPA and Reuters, and it is clear from this that the nature of exchange contracts between agencies in fact protects the smaller agencies from being exploited and overpowered in the domestic context of news collection and distribution. Without such contracts, there is nothing to stop global news agencies from entering into direct news exchanges with domestic retail media (i.e., newspapers and broadcasting). For the moment, at least, most retail media in South Africa obtain foreign news from SAPA, but this is changing as the global agencies are seeking to exchange news directly with retail media in the domestic context, as indicated by both Reuters and AFP.
Having entered into news exchange agreements with the national news agency, SAPA, the Bureau Chief of the AP news agency puts into perspective his opinion on SAPA:

SAPA is actually not a “national” news agency. It’s a private news agency just for South Africa. It’s South African, but it’s not owned by the government. Our structure is fundamentally like SAPA’s. We’re a lot bigger and we do a lot more things, but our beginning is a lot like SAPA’s. We have all these newspapers that are together in one country and we [AP] are one association. (AP Bureau Chief, 2006)

The DPA Bureau Chief (2007) defined SAPA differently, as a “national news agency.” According to the DPA Bureau Chief, SAPA is a national news agency, not in the sense that it is government-owned, but rather that its reach is limited to its national context, in comparison to “global” agencies that have a worldwide client reach and distribution market. The difference in these two definitions of a “national” news agency, expressed by the bureau chiefs at two global news agencies, depicts the importance and focus of each of their operations. For the DPA participant, the use of the term “national” denotes geographical representation, reach of news flows, and access to news markets (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998). For the AP participant, the term “national,” has connotations of government or state control of the media (cf. Curran, 2000b).

The differences in conceptualisation at the two global news agencies, AP and DPA, may be reflective of the deeper values that they each place on the role of media and of news in different geo-political contexts. A “free” media system is central to the Anglo-American and, generally, the libertarian style of journalism (Curran, 2000b). In this tradition, the press (and all media) should be free of any form of government interference. It resonates with the principle of “free information flows,” the basis

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45 Compare with Couldry and Curran (2003) on contesting media power and the freedom of the media in democratic societies. Curran (2000b) offers several case studies of how proprietors of media willingly intervene in the role of the media when this intervention furthers their own business interests. Curran and Leys (2000) give further evidence of government (political) interference in the free (liberal) media in Britain evident especially during socio-economic and political changes in the country and as a result of the impact of global market-related changes (analysed further in chapter seven).
for argument during UNESCO-related debates on information and communication in the 1970s (see chapter 2). The issue of media freedom is, however, a debatable one, as Couldry and Curran (2003) and, elsewhere, Thussu and Freedman (2003) point out that the media in the USA and even in Britain are not as ‘free’ from either government (political) influence or from market (private business) intervention as they would like to believe (see also Curran & Leys, 2000).

It is clear from the experiences of cost cutting and staff reductions at SAPA over the years that various rationalisations and constraints on the owners of SAPA, the newspaper groups, have been a direct result of the capitalist interests of the business owners of the various SA newspaper groups. The collection of newspaper groups and private broadcasting companies in SA, who also comprise the board of directors overseeing important operations and policy at SAPA, own SAPA. Problems with the newspapers can mean problems with the functioning and running of the SAPA agency. This was visible when SAPA had to downscale its operations as newspapers faced increasing financial pressures as well as the turning of the agency from a cooperative to one that produced its own news content. A similar predicament faced the AP operations and structure (due to external financial pressures on USA newspapers), which saw AP extend their services to non-members and non-media as part of financial rationalisation. These examples clearly show the link between capitalist production in the news industry and that a crisis in the system of capital accumulation would influence the operations of news agencies.

However, at no other news agency than at Reuters is the link between news production and the global capitalist economy more relevant or directly associated. Reuters has been in existence since 1851 when Julius Reuters (born of Jewish German descent) started it in London (Read, 1999). Thus, this news agency has been in existence over one and a half centuries. In this time, Reuters has been second to no other news agency, even though competition with other news producers has been steep (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006). In this time, Reuters has become the world’s
leading global news provider of general political news and financial news. Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998, p. 2) stated, then, that Reuters was rated forty-eighth of Europe’s top 500 companies and the twelfth most valuable company reported on London’s stock exchange. Reuters’ success as a news agency is accredited to its news and operational “business model,” which divides news content between general and financial reporting, but Reuters has become better established as a financial and economic news specialist. This is its niche, which no news agency (apart from the New York-based Bloomberg, at times) has been able to match. Yet, even Reuters faces steep competition from the likes of Bloomberg, Dow Jones, and some other financial and economic news indicator companies.

In previous studies, the relationships of the global news agencies with the national and other smaller agencies have been described as hierarchical arrangements or relationships of domination with a top-down movement (flow) of news between the largest and smallest (see chapter 2). These descriptions are challenged on the basis of the news exchange agreements (or contracts) among the various levels of news agencies. For instance, it is clear that the global news agencies are at an advantage of being larger and financially more diversified in their operations and structures than smaller national news agencies. The larger agencies sell video footage, graphics and picture services, and even (as in the case of AP) satellite time or usage of their satellites, which national agencies do not as yet (except for PTI and UNI, as mentioned at interviews in the pilot study). However, global news agencies rely, largely, on news exchanges with domestically located, national-based news agencies such as SAPA. If these exchanges did not exist, the global agencies would incur high costs of setting up their own news journalists to cover all domestic news from these contexts. Instead, their own reporters notice, or are “alerted” by the local media on, news stories on which they then follow up. This is a less expensive operation and option than the former. The relationship then may be reciprocal to an extent, with the global agencies as dependent on the national agencies as the latter is on the former.
The chapter discussed PANA as an example of a “continental” news agency serving Africa with news. PANA has a “shadow” presence in South Africa. After the PANA-Senegal representative refused to offer information in this regard, several attempts to locate the PANA representative in SA proved unsuccessful. There was no success from contacting various local newspapers or the global and the national news agencies in this regard. Even the national news agency, SAPA, and all the global news agencies, were unable to contact the PANA person, said to be in SA (by PANA the interviewee), and in fact were unsure that such a person existed at all. Given PANA’s history on the continent of Africa, it is interesting that they want to remain elusive, not voluntarily participating in investigative studies on their activities. PANA is not a member of the SADC and is far more active in the North and West African regions than in Southern Africa, according to the little information provided by the PANA Deputy-editor (2006).

The significance of the IPS, as discussed as an example of an “alternative” global news operation, is its different and unique niche area in “developmental journalism.” Since the 1990s, the IPS has been engaged more with in-depth issues relating to “development and globalisation” (IPS Regional Director, 2006). The IPS Regional Director describes globalisation as “the unequal integration of world nations in the 21st century.” This is relevant to the study because of the focus on investigating the external news environment’s influence on a news agency.

In the case of IPS, this external influence appears to be more directly observable than in the case of the other news agencies (even though their operations also have a different focus and so the interfacing with the external social reality is discernable). IPS began operating directly because of the disillusionment among professional journalists with the reporting of the traditional news agencies and news media, globally. The problem was the Western bias of defining news values, as well as the overwhelming influence of the capitalist system on news production and on “commoditisation of news.”
The result was an “alternative” focus for a globally constructed news agency based on all continents and “serving” a special function of presenting investigative news stories and features with a developmental focus. This is the IPS “genre” or “signature,” developmental journalism. It extends beyond their news reporting to their activities of facilitating the training of and capacity strengthening of local journalists in domestic contexts, especially in developing Third World nations. IPS “news strategy” on the African continent is therefore quite different from that of the other participating news agencies.

In the so-called “news business,” competition among news agencies affects their survival and their ability to maintain and satisfy their client markets. In an above scenario, where one event is being covered by several news agencies simultaneously, different aspects of the event would be “framed as news.” In other words, any one particular event reported as news is indeed reported from a particular angle and, as one participant stated, this news media, including agency reporting, gives the news story a “spin”\(^{46}\) (DPA Bureau Chief, 2007). This is relevant to supporting arguments on the “homogenisation” of information found in the literature. This means that even though various “frames” and different takes are given on a particular story, it is still the same event that is being reported on (e.g., a natural disaster or financial crash). This tendency increases competitiveness all the more, and news agencies unable to “keep up” or compete, will face threats to their continued operations.

The “framing of news”\(^{47}\) is a related aspect in the above argument and central to debates about the “objectivity” in news reporting (Lichtenberg, 2000). According to

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\(^{46}\) DPA Bureau Chief referred to a specific way of framing a news story as giving it a “spin”. This is apparently used differently in the world of journalists in comparison with politicians and media critics. To media critics, giving a story a particular “spin” would mean giving it a bias or slant, which is usually perceived negatively. The jargon and concepts used by media critics and journalists may often be interpreted entirely differently.

\(^{47}\) See arguments in classic work of Gaye Tuchman (1971) about the “framing of news”. See the Glasgow Media Group (1981) on bias in British television news. See Herman and Chomsky (1994) on
Read (1999, p. 49, p. 452), Reuters tends to give an overwhelmingly “British point of view” in framing news stories. Similarly, it can be argued that AP would give a point of view in news coverage resonant with American culture or “ways of seeing and interpreting,” as would an Arab news agency give a point of view congruent with an Arab perspective. This is another way of talking about how news is “framed.” It also reflects the contingency relationship between the social context and news agencies’ production and selection of news stories, which are relevant to “particular realities,” or what they see as important. This may explain why there is a predominance of First World leaders and focus on First World nations in much of international news reporting, based on the findings of previous studies (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992; Kayser, 1953; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985; UNESCO, 1972). These studies were not inaccurate, but they were undertaken during a time of Cold War politics and when nations were far less “integrated” in global relations than what they have now become as evidenced in this concept of “global consciousness.”

Contrary to news homogenisation, however, is also the fragmentation of news, which receives an in-depth analysis in the next chapter. The DPA Bureau Chief (2007) for instance, stated that much of the work of any foreign correspondent whose clients are based overseas requires that they provide details if the context of a news report on another, different national context (than that of the audience for whom they write). At the same time, news wires have very limited space in which to write a news report and do have to condense that report to a few lines and in a limited number of words. This will inevitably mean that a lot of the context in which a story evolves will be lost, as this would logically happen in condensing a news story.

In previous studies that showed Third World or developing nations always seen in a negative light in news reports of Western media, this “fragmentation effect” can, in some part at least, explain that bias. When foreign news correspondents are writing propaganda and filtering tactics in American journalism. See Tomaselli, et al (1989) on media propaganda in the South African media under apartheid, and also see Bennett (2003) on spin-doctors and American political reporting.
about a national context different from their own, for an overseas audience (i.e., retail media that further contextualise stories in their own formats), it makes sense that the story will shed much of the original contextual base. To achieve a fully contextualised news story (including the history or events leading up to the reported on event) within a very limited space and with a limited amount of time, there are going to be extraneous circumstances in how that story about a foreign context will be “framed.” The intention is truth, but the actual reality is “constraints” on the job.

Since they are training and building the capacity of local journalists as opposed to “foreign correspondents” with less lived experience in the contexts in which they report on from “overseas,” IPS has an idea of “why” bias enters news reporting. This was a part of the reason for IPS emerging as an alternative to the mainstream and increasingly commercialising news agencies. As the DPA Bureau Chief (2007) put it, clients overseas do not always have a broad overview and understanding of the specific geo-political context from which news reports emerge. This can obviously disadvantage foreign news agencies reporting on local contexts, which make exchange agreements even more important, in that the local media frame news reports largely with the context and experience of the local journalists in these contexts.

Taking a specific focus may not necessarily mean that the news is slanted or untrue, but it does draw a very fine line between “imaging” and objectivity. On the other hand, the DPA Bureau Chief (2007) believes that perspectives and perceptions are already formed in the minds of audiences and, in his opinion, much of the media work that journalists do on the ground is an attempt to inform and educate these perceptions with the possibility of changing them. He used the following example:

When I was in Paris and wanted to describe to my German readership that . . . the cliche of Monsieur Dupont (the typical caricature of a Frenchman) with his beret and his baguette and his 2CV-car doesn’t exist anymore, it was difficult, because the readers, in their heads, think of “ooh la la,” of l’amour, of the Eiffel Tower. . . . The problem is that the reader, in his head, already has a perception, and if you want to change this perception, you have to take it up and then gradually tell him [that], in the meantime, things have changed. (DPA Bureau Chief)
A further issue raised within the context of the above discussion is the standardisation of news. This aspect will be discussed in detail in chapter 6, on news values and news selection (cf. Schudson, 2000; see also Thussu & Freedman, 2003). Briefly put, standardisation refers to a set norm or standard that has been acquired through habitual and routine practices across newsrooms. Apparently, this is why a news sense develops because individual journalists acquire a standard by which to judge the newsworthiness of an event. Standardisation is also a benchmark by which journalists operating within the so-called liberal tradition of news values\(^{48}\) follow the same or similar formats in the news selection process.

Information plays a functional and fundamental role in the process of capital flows (as pointed out and discussed in earlier chapters). Reuters’ news agency has been able to adapt to the kinds of information that is said to drive markets (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1998; cf. Poster, 1996; Webster, 2004). This has given it the competitive edge over other global news agencies operating in a capitalist world system. The description of its core market of clients as mainly financial and economic enterprises also signifies the centrality of the economic sector as a main, if not the core, component in a globalised world and in the global relations of exchange even at the level of news flows. Information flows are a central aspect in global economic activity.

A further explanation of why and how Reuters has developed a core market of international economic clients that rely on the Reuters’ financial and economic news is given:

> Why are they [the financial and economic community] our core clients? Because a lot of those people need our information to take decisions, investment decisions, whether it is to put money in this or that company. . . . So when brokers on the stock exchange want to buy a share or shares in say SA Breweries (SAB), they will want to be informed as to whether they are making

\(^{48}\) The liberal tradition in journalism refers to the Anglo-American or Western media model in which values such as freedom of information, free flow of information, objectivity, and so on are favoured in defining the role of journalists and the function of news. Curran (2000) gives a critical evaluation of the liberal tradition of journalism.
the right choice [regarding] where SA Breweries is going, what type of company it is going to be in the next year, the next three months, the next two years, the next five years. The people who can provide them with that information about the company are Reuters’ journalists because we follow them on a daily basis. If you want to buy shares in SAB today, you want those shares to give you returns, so you want to know where the company is going. So Reuters follows the company thoroughly. . . . This is what Reuters’ bureaus all over the world do (Reuters’ Bureau Chief, 2006).

Since its inception, the structure and operations at Reuters have consistently evolved and adapted to broader contextual, political, and economic changes, particularly as these have influenced its news operations. On the other hand, improvements in technology and growing its human capacity and financial resources, accrued over several decades has also enabled Reuters’ news service to adapt and transform with the changing times. Reuters also relies on newsroom policies that enable the values mentioned above: fast, accurate, informed, and reliable journalism (Reuters Bureau Chief, 2006). In another sense, this adaptation tendency displayed by Reuters reflects the importance of and indeed the interfacing with the (global) social context. The social context influences the role of the news organisation, which has equally responded to meeting certain changes required in its operations.

The chapter reveals that news agencies are organisations that seek to operate independently, but that they are influenced by the external social environment and by their own internal managerial structures. The external social environment is described, largely, as influenced by the socio-economic and political system of capitalism. However, the African continent presents an anomaly because their respective governments own the majority of African news agencies whereas African retail media are a mixture of private and government ownership. In SA, SAPA is independent of government and owned by the privately run newspapers

At SAPA, white male journalists and editors have dominated the staffing quota. This situation has largely reflected the divisions and the political and cultural aspect of the apartheid society. Female reporters are few at this news organisation and fewer in management positions. SAPA Editor said that there have been attempts to alter the
staffing arrangement at SAPA to make it more inclusive of both race and gender, but that the job as a news agency reporter is not that glamorous and so other (retail) media that offer more opportunities tend to attract women and other race groups. Furthermore, he stated that people may join SAPA for the experience of working at a news agency wire service and then move on to better paying jobs.

The global news agencies have been more adaptive in their staffing policies to reflect a modern and changed world wherein women reporters, for instance, are in management positions. While men still predominate in positions at these news agencies, there is a growing presence of women reporters and management staff. At AFP, the chief editor after the bureau chief is a female Canadian, at IPS, the Regional Director is a Zimbabwean female, and at AP, the chief editor since 2008 is an American female.

The chapter discussed the necessity of developing a specialised area of news production, or a niche, in a competitive news environment. News agencies are better able to negotiate the terms of their exchange contracts with other news agencies when they have developed a niche. The chapter revealed that in the evolution of relationships among news agencies, regarding their exchange contracts that a co-dependency rather than a dependent relationship exists particularly between the global and national news agencies. This co-dependency for news remains largely asymmetrical because the smaller national news agency, SAPA, is more dependent on the global news agencies for international news than the global news agencies (with their local contingent of journalists) are dependent on SAPA for domestic news. The next chapter further explores and discusses various adaptations at news agencies that influence their news exchange relationships. It further reveals the dialectical relationship between the social environment and the news organisation.