CHAPTER ONE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 A contextual background on global news flows

An interest in global news flows was first visible in comparative cross-cultural and cross-national studies (Gudykunst & Mody, 2003; IPS, 1972; McBride, 1980; Nwosu et al., 1995; UNESCO 1953). The international governing body—the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)—mainly commissioned these studies in the interest of world peace (UNESCO Reports).

A ‘first wave’ of studies on mass media communications and news flows emerged from the 1930s to the 1960s from events precipitated by and following the Second World War (WWII). Nations attempting to rebuild their economies in the wake of the devastations of war and to cement political and economic relations that would prevent conditions giving rise to war formed the contextual background to such studies. Events such as the revamping of the League of Nations as the United Nations in 1945 and the development of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1974 that replaced the Bretton Woods\(^1\) system, framed the context for these studies on information and communication flows and the role of mass media in global development. The main critical foci in these studies tended to be on manipulation of information and the role of propaganda in disinformation during war times (cf. Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948; Lippman, 1922).

A ‘second wave’ of research overlapped with the first wave. It emerged from the 1950s to the 1980s against the background of Cold War\(^2\) politics (Boyd-Barrett, 2005).

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1 Bretton Woods was a meeting of world nations under the auspices of the United Nations that attempted to plan for future monetary, commercial and financial management amongst world nations (see Hamelink 1994, Golding & Harris, 1997, Gaddis 2005).

2 The Cold War between communist East and capitalist West was an ideological battle which sought to influence other world nations (i.e. newly independent post-colonial or ‘Third World’ nations). The latter are social territories that were neither entirely Western capitalist-based nor entirely communist. Member nations of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) comprised mainly of Third World nations at UNESCO, called for the abandonment of participation in Cold War politics. NAM wanted to engage with an alternative strategy for growth, independence, and self-development including the call for a
1980; Bray, 1965; Harris, 1981). Other authors, including Gudykunst and Mody (2002), and Vincent et al. (1999) document these studies. These studies focussed on propaganda and the “misuse” of mass media by power groups, but they also looked at international relations and public relations campaigns employed in the mass media. They described the process of “imaging”—that is, how the media present nations in news reports—for example. Relevant to such studies were concerns with ownership and who controls the media since those with power over the media can influence messages by means of giving a particular “spin” on the news, for instance, in political issues (see Bennett, 2003; Graber, 1990; Herman & Chomsky, 1994, 2002; also cf. Escobar, 1995).

An overlapping ‘third wave’ of research emerged from the 1960s onwards, mainly due to the de-colonisation of nations, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and Third World development. These studies came in the wake of newly independent nation-states in Africa, Asia, and South America (Bourgault, 1995; Faringer, 1991; Karikari, 2007; Nordenstreng & Griffin, 1999; Nwosu et al., 1995; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1997; Vincent et al., 1999). This third wave of research included many UNESCO-commissioned reports focussing on media communication as a tool in development, post-colonial liberation, and democratisation. All three waves of research overlap on a historical timeline and in a global context in political and economic flux, and each wave is explicable by adopting sociological analyses of the conditions/social environment in which they arose.4

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3 The term imaging relates to the issue of propaganda and to the concept of hegemony that was used by activist and Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, in his Prison Notebooks (1929-1935). Imaging in the media and in the context of this research refers to a deliberate ideological presentation of the impressions of image of a nation or of a particular group in order to persuade audiences to see that nation or group in a particular light.

4 See Gudykunst & Mody (2002) for a detailed discussion of the periodisation and foci of early studies on mass media, information, and communication.
From the 1990s and into the new millennium, a ‘fourth wave’ of research on global news flows has emerged. These studies critically focus on newly convergent forms of information and communication technology (or on media convergence). The manner in which the world is ordered is changing because of, for example, the speed, shortened distances, and the instantaneous movement of information and the role of technologies in relaying and exchanging information. These factors are influencing social relationships and transforming the news environment, making it different and distinct from the experiences in any other previous epochs (Maynard, 2000; Mattelart, 1994; Rantanen, 2005; Webster, 2004). Among these are also studies that focus on the rise of corporatist media enterprises and the monopolisation effect that multinational media corporations (MNCs) are having on information flows (Bagdikian, 1997, 2004; Herman & McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 1997; McChesney et al., 1998) and indeed on alternative forms of knowledge production (Curran, 2000a; Curran et al., 1996). Some of these studies explain such phenomena, in the 1990s, as either giving birth to, or as being the result of, ‘globalisation’ (Castells, 1996, 1997; Held & McGrew, 2003; Rantanen, 2005). This fourth wave of research, and indeed ‘globalisation’ in the new millennium, is congruent with a global social order that is neo-liberal in character and supportive of global market capitalism. Accordingly, neo-liberalism has gained full strength with the collapse of state socialism (Held & McGrew, 2003). The next chapter, which focuses on

5 Corporatist media enterprises emerged in the 20th century from the consolidation of capitalist business enterprises among media organisations, through consolidations and takeovers. See Bagdikian (1997), Herman & McChesney (1997), and McChesney (1997).

6 Neo-liberalism is an economic (and political) philosophy different, but evolved from the classical economics of liberalism. Liberalism is a set of social & political ideas that supports or advocates for individual rights and the role of the state to protect these rights; the ‘rule of law’ applies. It applies to political & economic protectionism of individual rights. These ideals are extended in neo-liberalism to advance the protectionism & rights of the free flow of capital, goods, labour, & services. Neo-liberalism requires the autonomy of capital from any state regulation. See http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/neoliberalism.html (Accessed 19/01/10). Treanor states that since the 1990's, activists use the word “neoliberalism” for global market-liberalism ('capitalism') and for free-trade policies. In this sense, it is widely used in South America. The term, “neoliberalism”, is often used interchangeably with “globalisation”. However, free markets and global free trade are not new, and this use of the word ignores developments in the advanced economies. Treanor compares neoliberalism with its historical predecessors. Neoliberalism is not just economics: it is a social and moral philosophy, in some aspects qualitatively different from liberalism (last changes 02 December 2005 - Paul Treanor).
reviewing relevant and related studies on news flows and news agencies, further contextualises this fourth wave of research.

What is important in reflecting on these distinct but overlapping “waves of research” are the conditions that prevailed at the time they were undertaken. These conditions provided the contextual background to these studies. Such conditions are open to sociological analysis and interpretations. They include social, economic, political, and cultural factors relevant to each of the identified waves of research. A contextual base influences the direction and the foci of studies on communication and media processes in relation to global news flows.

Oosthuizen (1989) has referred to the social environment influencing information flows as “the external framework” in which, he explains, “[b]roadly one could say that the fundamental values prevalent in a society form the basis of this external framework” (pp. 4-5). Essentially, news agencies have been rooted in the social fabric of the societies in which they develop and in which historical, cultural, economic, and political processes that shape the society, influences them (cf. Read, 1999).

Similarly, the positioning of this study is within a global social context described as the conditions resulting from or giving rise to ‘globalisation’. The study identifies a dialectical process that leads to contingency relationships (explained below). Globalisation frames the specific focus on news exchange among news agencies based in South Africa. The aim of this study, then, is to observe an aspect of global news flows—namely, the news exchange relationships among news agencies that are a specific form of media organisations. Furthermore, a focus on the exchange relationships requires an investigation into the nature, structure, and operations of news production at news agencies.

Briefly stating it here, globalisation is identified as a process that simultaneously consolidates and fragments social arrangements and relations between economies,
cultures, and political processes at the global and local levels. It is taken as the interconnectedness and interrelations between nations’ economies, political processes, and cultural systems. It is a condition that gives rise to a qualitatively ‘new’ world order at the turn of the 20th century. For example, a shift in the economic axis of power from one dominant nation to, for example, “Empire”, reveals a fragmenting of economic and political relations (cf. Hardt & Negri, 2000). On the other hand, events such as the unification of a European Union of states (EU), reveals a consolidation in socio-economic and political relations, as does the EU’s approach to the current world financial crisis. Furthermore, instantaneous communication across vast distances, and the speed of relaying information and travel attest to a new ‘type’ of ‘globalisation in the 21st century.’ Even if sceptics propose that the circumstances such as trade, international cooperation, and national exchanges are not “new,” with reference to the concept, globalist and transformationalist theorists argue that the concept indeed describes “new” and authentic changes in the world. Chapter 2 provides a full discussion on various theoretical positions on globalisation.

This world order—defined by different sets of socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions—supersedes and breaks with any other previous descriptions (Held & McGrew, 2003; Webster, 2004). For instance, the world as we experience it in the 21st century is qualitatively differently from the world experienced during the Cold War period or at the end of WWII, particularly with regard to economic arrangements and political relations (Gaddis, 2005). Globalisation7 is an evolving condition (and concept) because the world evolves.8 It is never static, and this evolutionary process can be long and slow, occurring over centuries.

7 This chapter introduces the concept of globalisation, while the theoretical framing of the study in chapter two, discusses globalisation at length. This is not a study on or about globalisation, but the concept is central to providing the context and background in its relation to the focus on news agencies and their exchange relationships.

8 The “glasnost” period of open communication and the uninhibited reporting from out of the previous USSR is a clear example of the dialectical relationship between information flows and social change. This is not a ‘causal’ explanation, but a contingency relationship, even though change in the USSR resulted from a move by the state to ‘free up’ control over communication and to ‘open up’ the society transforming it from socialist to capitalist. See McNair (2000).
The study therefore relates this concept of globalisation as pertaining to different ‘stages’ and in qualitative changes in world development. These stages include early, intermediary, and late ‘globalisation’ (cf. Rantanen, 2005). The study is contextualised within the ‘intermediary stage of globalisation,’ meaning that the so-called conditions giving rise to globalisation in the 21st century relate to a transitional phase in world growth. Qualitative changes in the economic, political, and cultural relations between nations and conditions in the new millennium are highly significant in explaining this intermediary stage (cf. Held & McGrew, 2003) as a late phase of neo-liberalist capitalism that started taking shape at the end of the Cold War (i.e., from the late 1980s onwards).

1.2 Background to the study

The study began in 2004 with a pilot study of the national news agencies in India, including the Press Trust of India (PTI) and the United News of India (UNI). During this time, the researcher observed that the national news agencies in India do not have news exchange agreements with the South African Press Association (SAPA), the national news agency in South Africa (SA), despite many similarities between the two countries including a significant diaspora of Indian immigrants in South Africa and trade relations.9 PTI and UNI do not receive news directly from the South African news agency, SAPA, or vice versa. They receive news content about SA from the global news agencies, such as Reuters and the Associated Press news agencies, and there tends to be, according to the pilot survey, no significant focus or quantity of news about South Africa in Indian media except that received from global news wires.

On a symbolic level, as will be seen in defining and specifying the concept of globalisation and from a culturalist position, news exchange agreements represent

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9 As argued in the study, news agencies feed news into the media systems of all nations. News is fundamental to influencing and shaping public opinion and in solidifying socio-economic and political relations among nations.
more than quantities of news exchanged among the different agencies. News exchange agreements are symbolic of broader social, economic, and political relations among nations experienced through the relationships of news agencies. Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998) stated the following:

The agencies were vital components in the armoury of the nation state; then as now agencies were among the range of institutions which new nation states came to feel they had to establish in order to be seen to be credible as nations and in order to project or to control the dissemination of their ‘national image’ on global markets. (p.5)

News agencies, after all, are involved in transnational economic and cultural relations of exchange. However, while news agencies (especially the global agencies) experienced their early beginnings in particular national contexts with their socio-economic, historical, political, and cultural traditions, the study shows that news agencies have evolved in becoming ‘globalised’ in their activities of news production and particularly in their relations of exchange, interaction, and negotiation in various social contexts (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen 1998).

For the purposes of the study, the basis of this initial survey culminated in a narrower focus on the exchange relationships among news agencies based in South Africa (SA), rather than on a cross-cultural and cross-national comparison of news agencies in the “South.” However, investigating the relationships among news agencies (albeit based in SA) required a ‘global outlook’. From 2005 to 2007, five global news agencies (including an “alternative” global agency), a national news agency, and a continental (pan African) news agency were observed in their relationships of news exchange and in the related activity of news production. The impact of a changing news environment (i.e., resulting from globalisation) on their operations and
structures was also examined. These news agencies included the Associated Press, Reuters, Agence France-Presse, the Deutsche Presse-Agentur, and the Inter Press Service (global agencies), the South African Press Association (national), and the Pan African News Agency (continental).

In contextualising this research, it has been necessary, to operate from an interdisciplinary framework drawing on sociology, communication and media studies, international relations, politics and political science, and journalism, but the analysis overall remains a sociological interpretation based on the researcher’s disciplinary background. According to Mowlana (1996, 1997; see also Gudykunst & Mody, 2002), no one discipline has made an independent or a significant contribution on its own to a unified understanding of global news flows. Adopting an integrated and cross-disciplinary approach, therefore, places this study within a growing international field of media research (cf. Curran & Park, 2000; Gudykunst & Mody, 2002; Mowlana, 1996, 1997).

Gwinn-Wilkins (2002) states that “[s]cholars of development communication need to build on critical approaches to social change, grounded in multiple social science disciplines and varied methodological approaches . . . such as sociology, political science, anthropology, history, demography, and cultural studies” (p. 546). In her opinion, a multi-disciplinary framework that uses a variety of research tools would enhance an understanding of communication about and for development. This current research belongs to the sub-field of media sociology.

Generally, news agencies have been in existence for over fifty decades. In the case of Reuters, the Associated Press, and the previous Havas, now Agence France-Presse,

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10 Rantanen and Boyd-Barrett (1998:15) differentiate between “print-based” and “financial and television” news agencies. News agencies provide wholesale news (raw/uncut news feed) for different media formats. This study focuses on news agencies that are ‘print-based’ news agencies predominantly providing news for newspapers (i.e. news in print format, as opposed to video format for television, or sound bytes for radio). Traditionally, news agencies predominantly served the newspaper industries domestically and globally.
they have existed since the mid- to late-1800s. Changes to their structures and operations have therefore been slow and steady, occurring over several decades (Read, 1999). The observations in this study focus therefore on change at news agencies in relation to their news exchange contracts and to changes in the global news context.

In the 21st century, instabilities (or pressures) at these news organisations are linked to sociologically relevant themes such as a rapidly changing global news environment brought on by events described as ‘globalisation’ or as socio-economic, political, and cultural dynamics in world events and in the relations among nations. Taken together, these ‘internal’ and ‘external’ factors bring about change at these organisations more rapidly at the turn of this century than in previous ones.

1.3 Problem statement and rationale of the study

This qualitative sociological study observes various levels of news agencies based in South Africa and their relationships of news exchange. It is descriptive and explores changes at these organisations. News exchange relationships are important in describing, among other things, how localised news becomes global and how global news becomes localised or, in other words, ‘global news flows’. In short, the term ‘global news flows’ refers to the interconnected networks of news and information exchange and the directional flows of news, globally (see chapter 2). More importantly, investigating the relationships among news agencies uncovers how these media organisations operate behind-the-scenes in the flow of information and in their structures, ownership, and the influences of a changing global news environment.

Studying news agencies, has been a particularly neglected area firstly because of the difficulty (until quite recently in the 20th century) in gaining access to them (Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 2000; Rantanen, 2004; cf. Golding & Elliott, 1979 –a classical sociological study of newsrooms). Studies focussing specifically on news agencies are sporadic and recent, appearing in the last three
decades. Some relevant and comprehensive examples of these include Boyd-Barrett (1980), Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992), Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998, 2000), Harris (1981), Rantanen (2004, 2005), and Read (1992, 1999). Secondly, news agencies remain hidden from direct public scrutiny largely because they do not directly serve the public with news. However, this study explains why this is changing.

The foci in previous studies on “news flows” (including the first three “waves of research”) have been on news content in the operations at “newspapers” and on comparisons of newspaper content across nations (see also International Press Institute, 1972; Kayser, 1953; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985). This study focuses instead on the first point of access in news exchange and in the circulation of news; that is, news facilitated by news agencies. For example, South African newspapers, apart from their in-house reporters and stringers, rely significantly on news agencies for news. One need only pick up a local newspaper, page through its news story contents, and observe the by-line attached to news articles that credit news agencies as the source of that news. Some news stories credit the local SAPA, while other news stories credit the global news agencies’ news, obtained through SAPA (for instance, “SAPA-AFP”) in the by-line.

There have been several studies on the relationships of news agencies in relation to news flows. These previous studies (Boyd-Barrett, 1980; Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998; Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992; Harris, 1981; Nordenstreng & Griffin, 1999; Vincent et al., 1999) describe the global relationships among news agencies as uneven and as resulting in “imbalances in news flows.” This study problematises these arguments on imbalances in news flow in order to look at them anew in light of global social changes influencing the news environment, which in turn influences the relationships and structures at news agencies. This study asks

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11 A stringer is a freelance journalist usually working on contract or part-time and for a commission to a news organisation.

12 A by-line in a news story gives the author or credits the original source of the news story.
whether at the end of the Cold War and in describing globalisation in the 21st century as the fluidity (i.e., as the fragmentation and consolidation) of boundaries and relationships, one can still justifiably maintain an argument of imbalances. Imbalances pertain mainly to the monopolisation and bias or “bad news” coverage of developing nations compared to developed nations in news flows. It asks whether imbalances still exist in the relationships among news agencies and in their facilitation of global news flows. The study shows that global events and social change influence the relationships among news agencies, which in turn influences global news flows. These factors—globalisation, relationships among news agencies, and news flows—are described in contingency relationships.

News agencies distribute, exchange, and, since the last century, produce their own news content. They are an important link in promoting and facilitating news flows within and across all socio-economic, cultural, political, and geographical contexts. However, in the last decade, and at the turn of the 20th century, news agencies have been facing threats to their ongoing utilisation given significant changes in the global news environment. Arguably, improvements in digital technology and the introduction of news production on the Internet are placing the future of newspapers, globally, in a precarious situation.13 If newspapers are rendered obsolete in the not too distant future, this will have a compounded effect on the future of news agencies. Other challenges to news agencies include increased competition from independent multinational broadcasting corporations14 that put pressure on the operations of news agencies. Another important factor is that news agencies are subsumed under a commercialised and ‘globalising capitalist news industry’ (discussed below). A crisis in this system will inevitably affect all other structures linked to that system. These changes coincide with a ‘globalising’ world.

13 The point is debatable and the prospects are alarming since newspapers are, as Anderson (1980) describes them, functional in consolidating national identities. Reading a newspaper has become a social ritual worldwide. It remains the cheaper means of news distribution in modern nation-states.
14 Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen (2000) and Rantanen (2004) offer examples of multinational media corporations such as CNN (Central News Network), the BBC and Al Jazeera to mention a few.
Various social factors account in some way for changes taking place at news agencies, albeit indirectly. These include, but are not limited to, the current global financial and economic crisis since 2007, ironically\(^{15}\) ‘making headlines’ since late-2008, as well as other external factors, such as rapid developments in information and communication technologies at the end of the Cold War. Vast improvements in computerised, satellite, and digital technologies since the 1990s contribute as ‘external factors.’ Towards the conclusion of this study in 2008, changes in the news environment have intensified. This influences changes at news agencies and required redefining their activities and re-evaluating their exchange relationships.

Other technologically relevant factors include greater and easier access to communication sources. For example, since the invention of the Internet, the reduction in distances and in time in relaying large quantities of information and the facilitation of news-making for non-professionals have been revolutionizing the information industry. Mobile cellular phone technology has the ability to capture an event, upload this information to the Internet, and then distribute it widely within minutes of the event occurring. This happened, for example, after the national elections in Kenya in 2008, when civil unrest broke out because of various factions challenging the election outcome. Civilians with cellular phones immediately captured incidences of violence, and the pictures, some with text, were distributed outside of Kenya (Ayodi, 2008; also cf. Rantanen, 2004).

In the new millennium, the prevalence of ordinary citizens practicing ‘pseudo-journalism,’ is a further issue that places pressure on professional journalists. For instance, in the example above on events following the election outcome in Kenya in 2008, “citizen journalism” or “public journalism” challenges journalists and news agencies in getting the facts and news stories already out in the public eye (cf. Atton

\(^{15}\) This is ironic because the economic crisis that is causing pressure on news agencies and influencing changes in their structures that threaten their futures is the very thing that they are reporting on.
& Hamilton, 2008). The lack of expertise in laypeople reporting on events places extra pressures on news media professionals who may be covering certain stories that the public want or are covering these stories but in a manner that leaves the public dissatisfied (Rantanen, 2004, p. 301). For instance, Rantanen (2004) states that coverage of the Iraqi war (2002) left audiences dissatisfied with mainstream news sources. This resulted in them seeking alternative sources (mostly from the Internet) that brought in different perspectives on the war.

Citizen journalism or public journalism is seen as a positive response in the actions of citizens or the members of civil society who are left wanting from the manner in which stories are covered in mainstream news media and who therefore seek to find alternative perspectives (Rantanen, 2004, p. 301). On the other hand, the main problem with “citizen journalism” is its lack of verifiable and credible sources of information. However, citizen journalism is a phenomenon related to the growing interest and use of the Internet and other communication technologies. Chapters 4, 7, and 8 discuss and give further perspective on this growing phenomenon. As a closing remark, modern technologies have increased the capacity of and the prevalence of citizen or public journalism. Hence, this study revisits debates on the public sphere and the emerging “global public sphere” (Jacobson & Jang, 2002; cf. Leys, 1999; Sparks, 1998) in relation to news flow.

1.3.1 The importance of news flows in the development of the (global) public sphere

The concept of a “public sphere” was first made popular by Jürgen Habermas’s (1984, 1987, 1989) thesis on “communicative (inter-) action” (Jansen, 1995, pp. 36-38, 47-52; cf. Sparks, 1998), and describes the public ‘formation’ or a congregation of citizens, engaged in informal yet critical discussions on an array of issues and current topics of interest and significance to them. In Habermas’ usage, the public sphere referred to ordinary citizens, meeting informally in public places such as cafés,

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16 Sparks (1998) discusses critically the main defects of Habermas’s usage of the term and offers insightful application of the term in his discussion on whether a “global public sphere” exists in relation to the phenomenon of globalisation.
country clubs and salons, and engaging in conversations about issues of political importance (Leys, 1999; cf. Sparks, 1998, p. 110-111). Sparks (1998) states “the public sphere is a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed,” (p. 110). In the 21st century, we perhaps see this formation taking shape in its ‘postmodern version’ such as in ‘Internet chat rooms’, but, the conventional idea of people voluntarily associating and socialising, and conversing about public issues, is fundamental to explaining what a public sphere is.

A well-informed and critical citizenry has the ability and the potential to exercise democratic rights and choices (Curran & Leys, 2000; Leys, 1999). News media, particularly in democracies, provide information that allows for critical debate. Some authors suggest the importance of news as information that provides the context and space for lively debates and discussions that are central to democratic formation and in fostering the public sphere (Leys, 1999; Sparks, 1998; see also Jansen 1993, 1995). Bennett (2003) states, “[N]ews remains the primary source of information about society, politics, and the degree to which government is representing our [sic] interests. Information is so basic to government – particularly to democratic government” (p. 1). In essence, news is not simply about the daily and ongoing routine of presenting some facts about an event or an issue; it is about the ongoing dimensions of power relations on a worldwide scale. As such, news is not neutral, as some journalists would have us believe.

In producing, selecting, and making news available and accessible to people on a continuous basis, media organisations and the “news” itself have become institutionalised. This means that news of mass media (i.e., mainstream news) adopts the particular and dominant cultures and political references of the social contexts in which they are produced (Bennett, 2003; Glasgow Media Group, 1995; Jansen, 1993; Marris & Thornham, 1996; Read, 1999). This institutionalisation occurs at the localised level of news production and at the globalised level as well. This latter allows us to use the phrase “global news flows.” Global news agencies operations
extend in a network of relationships with national and regional news agencies and, as Jacobson and Jang (2002) state: “[c]ertainly, the global media are often associated with the notion of a global public sphere” (p. 343). A global public sphere represents growing public awareness of issues and matters of concern, not just to their own localities, but to other localities as well. The current global financial crisis, broadcast and read in news reports, indicates the phenomenon of an emerging global public sphere in which, people all over the world become sensitised to occurrences and how events shape the lives of people dissimilar to themselves. Similarly, Jacobson and Jang (2002) too, speak about a “global civil society that might bring about a growing public opinion” (p. 343).

In the preface to Gaye Tuchman’s (1978) classical sociological study on *Making News*, she discusses the “latent structure of news” that questions how the media frame and structure events, decide on which items to cover and which to exclude, and what they (the media) perceive is interesting news that the public want. In short, Tuchman’s study reveals that news is a construction of social reality seen through the choices of media people. However, civil society—from social analysts, media critics, academics, and public figures—actively engages with social reality and in the construction of reality. Some authors are sensitised to the process of globalisation as an added dimension in both global-local relations made visible in constructing meanings and in reconstructing these events in news (Sreberny, 2000).

### 1.4 Objectives of the study

This study aims to:

- Investigate the relationships of news exchange among various ‘levels’ of news agencies in South Africa.
Describe and discuss their relationships of news exchange in relation to a changing global news environment, described under the concept of globalisation.

Describe the importance of these news organisations in global news flows.

Revisit arguments of “imbalances in news flows” in previous studies with the intention of extending and/or updating arguments in these studies.

Observe external and internal influences on the structures, relationships, and operations of news agencies.

Describe and discuss emerging trends in news flows.

This study aims to show that despite news media and news agencies claiming to be independent in their operations and production of news, these media organisations are, indeed, closely linked to—and, in fact, mirror—the broader socio-economic and political relations under the system of global market capitalism. The study aims to account for external and internal pressures influencing news agencies by observing the relationships among them, including their production and selection of news practices.

The study questions whether the relationships of news exchange among news agencies are an important indicator of, and closely tied to, external social and internal structural pressures bearing on these organisations. Furthermore, it questions the significance of changes at news agencies, which have occurred slowly, over centuries in the case of Reuters, AFP, and AP, based on previous studies. However, it also questions whether events and conditions at the turn of the 20th century and in the 21st century, described as ‘globalisation’, have indeed quickened the pace of change at these news organisations relative to previous centuries, leading to certain ‘adaptive strategies’ or tendencies.

1.5 Research questions
The study addresses the following questions, which also guide the research focus:
- Why are news agencies still relevant and important in global news flows?
- What evidence distinguishes various levels or types of news agencies?
- What are news exchange relationships, and how are news exchange relationships among news agencies defined?
- Can we still speak of imbalances in news flows and a monopoly by the global news agencies over news flows and in the relationships of news exchange?
- Are news agencies facing threats to their continued operations? If so, what are the sources of these threats?
- Are news agencies—particularly those serving print-based media, such as newspapers—becoming redundant in a globalising world described under globalisation and under certain sociological conditions?
- In Africa, what is the extent of the participation of the national news agency, SAPA, and the continental Pan African News Agency, PANA, in news flows, compared to the global news agencies?

In the context of the current research, these questions collectively expand on the problems identified by various authors.

1.6 Theoretical approach

The study frames the theoretical approach in relation to the methodological design. A critical political economy approach (Golding & Murdock, 2000) incorporates a cultural studies and a historical and political economic approach (based on neo-Marxism). The thrust of cultural studies, for example, includes analysis of competing value frameworks of news production and the implications of what some see as an increasingly commercialised global news environment (Herman & McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 1997; Thussu & Freedman, 2003; cf. Castells, 1996, 1997). Cultural studies—in the neo-Marxist tradition of Hall et al. (1978), Nuttall and Michael (2000), and Williams (1962) —critically seek to understand meanings generated in social and other relationships.
The concept of power is central to these relationships. In this study, “hegemonic” power (based on Antonio Gramsci’s [1891-1937] use of the term in the *Prison Notebooks*, ©1971) is displaced by a diffused kind of power eminent from within the “public sphere” (power based on conceptions by Michel Foucault) in relation to the symbolic structuring of the world in news production (Hall et al., 1978, 1980). According to Hettne (2003), “Hegemony is a special kind of power, based on different but mutually supportive dimensions. . . . A [sic] hegemony is primarily a consensual order” (p. 366). Foucauldian use of power assists in explaining the subliminal and effective diffusion of power away from political organisation to civil society (decentralisation of power).

1.7 Methodological design

A qualitative framework for the study fulfils several basic functions. It is interpretive rather than positivistic. It focuses on contingency relationships rather than on testing linear relationships between variables (discussed in chapter 3). It aims at generating, rather than testing, theory, and it relies predominantly on the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ verbal inputs rather than on positivistic content analysis of news (Babbie, 2007; Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 1994; Punch, 2004). What this study does is provide further conceptual and theoretical schemes from which further content-based studies can be conducted.

A “collective-case studies” approach (Baxter & Babbie; 2004, p. 304)\(^\text{17}\) is used in the study with the aim of extending previous case study findings (Burawoy, 1991, 1998). The study interrogates the relationships among different levels of news agencies and reveals that they tend towards adaptation under changing conditions in the social environment in which they operate.

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\(^{17}\) Referring to Stake (1994), Baxter and Babbie (2004: 304) explain that ‘collective-case studies’ are different from the ‘single-case study’ in that in the former method the researcher studies several or a number of cases and then typically describes separately each case in detail before doing a thematic analysis across cases, known as a cross-case analysis. See chapter three.
The methods of in-depth interviews and observation are conducted at the various news agencies based in South Africa. Interviews were conducted at the following global news agencies: Reuters, AFP, AP, DPA, IPS, and the national news agency, SAPA, and two telephone interviews were conducted with the continental news agency, PANA. PANA headquarters is located in Dakar, Senegal (North Africa) and proved inaccessible to the researcher given resource constraints.

This study provides a critical departure from previous studies on news flows in two important respects. Firstly, with regard to the methods that are used to collect the data, and secondly, with regard to the methodological paradigm of analysis of the data. In previous studies, the methods of investigation and analysis relied on a mixed approach using a quantitative and qualitative analytical framework (Babbie, 2007; Mayring, 2000). The focus of data collection was mainly on making a quantitative comparison of news content by comparing and drawing on news content produced in different geo-political regions (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992; Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985; Sreberny & Stevenson, 1999). These studies were conducted across continents and comprised small teams of researchers in each of the regions under investigation. They tended to be longitudinal, spread over several years (Boyd-Barrett & Thussu, 1992; International Press Institute, 1972; Sreberny & Stevenson, 1997).

In comparison, this study uses the method of in-depth qualitative interviews with personnel at news agencies. It focuses on the news agency itself and on the production and selection processes of news at news agencies, rather than on the content of news reports on which previous studies focussed. The method of analysis also differs. It relies on detailed qualitative coding and thematic analysis adapted from the grounded theory method of induction (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1999; Wilbraham, 1995). The study is limited in its comparative scope and in the time taken for its execution and completion compared to previous studies, hence a focus across regions was not possible.
1.8 Outline of chapters

In chapter 2, the study presents a theoretical review of previous relevant and related studies. It draws on significant and relevant themes such as the current global economic crisis, convergences in information and communication technology (ICTs), the significance and imbalances in cross-cultural exchanges of information and media products such as news, and recent shifts in the ownership patterns at news agencies. Chapter 2 discusses the integration of the political economy and cultural studies approaches, adapted from Golding and Murdock’s (2000) “critical political economy” approach. Several relevant theorists include Golding and Murdock, Mosco (1996), and Schudson (2000). Essentially, this integrated theoretical approach frames arguments from a neo-Marxist perspective.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodological paradigm and methods used in the study. A “qualitative” research design explores and investigates the changing operational role and relationships of news agencies in global news flows. Given the inductive nature of the data, which seeks to generate information, various levels of qualitative coding are used to process, structure, and analyse the data. Qualitative data coding is an analytical method first associated with the grounded theory method of Glaser and Strauss (1967). Burawoy et al. (1991) and Burawoy (1998) conceptualise the “extended case study” method of applying coding procedures to induce new information in research that extends the findings of previous similar cases. The researcher has adopted this principle by critically relating findings in the study to the findings in other related studies.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the actual findings from the empirical undertaking of the research and relate these to previous studies’ foci. Chapter 4 introduces each of the news agencies that participated in the study and gives a brief history of their changing ownership patterns and (internal and external) forces that are influencing them. It describes the development of niche areas in news production as a specific adaptation that enables news agencies to compete and expand their subscriber base. Chapter 4
gives a comparative discussion of the participation of news agencies (in the study) in Africa. It proposes that the IPS, with its development news focus, is a critical media model for an emerging culture of journalism in Africa.

The study maintains that changes in the operations and structures at these news agencies and in their relationships of news exchange is the outcome of external and internal pressures, particularly the changing global news environment, its competitive-drive, and the interdependence among news agencies. Chapter 5 therefore sets out to describe and discuss the tendencies for news agencies, influenced by the system of global capitalism and market expansionism, to expand their operations. They have regionalised bureaus in locations all over the world. A co-dependent relationship describes the global and national news agencies, with the potential threat that global agencies will have a “localised monopolistic” effect on relationships of news exchange in national contexts. The study notes that because of their politicised development during the Cold War period (1945 to 1980s), continental news agencies play a marginal role in news flows, particularly with the receding of the Non-aligned Movement in the 1990s. Global agencies compete globally and locally with each other, as the main sources of news in foreign contexts, and the debates on their monopolistic tendencies are revisited. Chapter 5 concludes with how the relationships between news agencies are evolving.

Internal pressures also influence the operations and structures of news agencies—that is, how they operate and produce news. Ultimately, this influences their relationships of news exchange. The events that news agencies report on as “news” are events arising within the constraints of social contexts. Chapter 6, therefore, compares news selection practices at the news agencies. It focuses on the role of journalists and editors in the “construction of social reality” and as “gatekeepers” of information flows.
Chapter 7 attempts to consolidate the discussions in the foregoing chapters and critically integrates arguments from previous studies. It focuses on the future of news agencies and on emerging patterns in news production. It aims to update what was previously identified as global imbalances in news flows. Chapter 8 concludes the study with a discussion of the limitations and some recommendations for future research in the area of news flows, particularly on the African continent.