CHAPTER SEVEN
7 CONTINUITIES AND SHIFTS IN GLOBAL NEWS FLOWS: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

‘To discuss what is, to plan what should be, and to carry out these plans collectively requires formulating comprehensible messages and transmitting them to others’ ~ Doris Graber

This chapter consolidates the empirical information and discussion provided in chapters 4, 5 and 6. It integrates the theoretical arguments presented in the study with the empirical findings and produces, as an outcome, a focus on an emerging trend in global news flows; alternative forms of information production and distribution. Previous chapters identify news as information about daily events, produced by the labour of journalists, and disseminated around the world. News agencies, whose main business is news supply and distribution, produce and select the bulk of news that flows to retail media. In this ‘flow’ of information from news agencies, news creates ‘awareness’ of the conditions in various localities and between diverse social contexts. However, in a rapidly changing news environment, due in part to ‘globalisation’, news formats, the nature of news and the profession of journalism are also transforming.

The chapter critically discusses the ‘globalisation of news’ (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998), news agencies’ location in this (cf. Rantanen, 2005), and the emerging and unintended outcome in advancing a ‘global consciousness’.1 In chapter 2, ‘global consciousness’ is introduced as an outcome in the process of globalisation and in the intensifying relations amongst nations2 assisted by information flows (cf. Held & McGrew, 2003, pp. 1-4). Held and McGrew state

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1 The terms ‘global consciousness’ and ‘global social consciousness’ are used interchangeably and they refer to the same process.
2 Global consciousness does not mean that all peoples in the world think the same, but rather that people are globally becoming far more aware of the presences of others similar and different to themselves; an awareness unlikely in any previous historical periods before the First World War. The media which began emerging as a significant instrument of communication (and propaganda) plays a key role in this global consciousness. It is a state of awareness (in human beings) of their (juxta-) position in relation to the social world.
that, “Globalisation thereby engenders a cognitive shift expressed both in a growing public awareness of the ways in which distant events can affect local fortunes (and vice versa) as well as in public perceptions of shrinking time and geographical space” (p. 4) (own italics). Chapter 6 further elaborated on ‘global consciousness’ in the study, as the symbolic space in which a ‘global public sphere’ can emerge (Jacobson & Yang, 2002; Leys, 1999; Sparks, 1998; see also chapters 1 and 2 on the “global public sphere”, “public sphere”, and “global civil society”).

This chapter supports the argument that, while the purpose of news is to inform global social, economic, cultural and political processes, it instead furthers the interests of economic markets in a worldwide information network, through information exchanges and ‘flows’ (cf. Bennett, 2003). The result is that the intrinsic quality and nature of news transforms from in-depth and investigative reporting to sensationalist and tabloid journalism (Bennett, 2003, pp.12-15, 90-4, 100-104; Croteau & Hoynes, 2000, pp. 62-66). This happens as broader transformations take place at the global and local levels of society, referred to in conceptions such as ‘globalisation’ and “glocalisation” (cf. Robertson, 1992, pp. 1-2; Sreberny, 2000, pp.103-107).

Furthermore, the study proposes that industrial societies advance to the ‘post-industrial’ society with a shift in emphasis from ‘industrial manufacturing’ to ‘new knowledge-based systems.’ Taken together, these meet the information needs of the post-industrial society. As societies transform, the content and quality of news is also transformed (cf. Bennett, pp. 9-10, Croteau & Hoynes, pp. 194-196). This makes sense since news is about the social conditions and events in societies. The chapter explains these factors in contingency relationships. Since news is fundamentally the business of news agencies, news agencies are affected by transformations occurring at the global and local levels of societies. This chapter addresses two fundamental issues. Firstly, professional journalism cannot ignore the prevalent and significant emerging trend of “citizens” or “public journalism.” Secondly, this is because citizens journalism reflects a change
occurring not only in the production of news, but also in the nature of societies, and therefore their focus on news content would depart from the focus of news in mainstream accounts of reality.

Citizen journalism, in the 21st century, is characteristic of new communication technologies that result in the use of digitised communication instruments including, for instance, the computer, mobile cellular technology, and the Internet to create online blogging sites and alternative sources of transmitting information. Citizen journalism also reflects the term ‘global consciousness,’ in that, it is an example of the direct intervention from civil society in interfacing with the activity of news construction or the construction of information about society that directly affects peoples’ lives. If ‘global consciousness’ is the symbolic space for the emergence of a global public sphere, citizen journalism is, but, one expression of that emerging global public sphere. This statement provides a hypothesis for future ‘content-based’ investigations of citizens’ journalism.

The chapter answers the following questions: What relevance do news agencies and global news flows in a transforming news environment have to ‘global consciousness’, and to a global public sphere? Imbalances in news flow, for example, are important in the conceptualisation of a ‘global consciousness’ because it reflects the importance of free and fair communication and information in civil societies. If free and fair information were not important, there would be no studies on so-called ‘imbalances’ in information flows. This chapter critically reviews and addresses this in developing an argument for a ‘global consciousness’. Imbalances were discussed in preceding chapters as the monopolisation of news flows, bias coverage of developing and developed nations in news, hierarchical relationships among global, national and continental news agencies, and the top-down flow in news exchange between global and national news agencies. This chapter proposes that the so-called post-industrial society has emerged (defined and discussed below), resulting from the changes identified with an ‘intermediary stage’ of ‘globalisation’ that has an impact on news agencies’ structures and operations.
7.1 Globalisation, news flow and the post-industrial society

In news construction (i.e. in selecting and reporting news), the media expose the actions, thoughts and ideas of global and local social actors, and structural processes and events in the public domain. There is, however, another important dimension in this, the shaping of a ‘global social consciousness’. In a globalising world, ‘global consciousness’ effects new forms of knowledge and the capacity to use and apply this knowledge. Knowledge is the pursuit of ‘truths’. The interfacing of technology with human action produces new knowledge, or new avenues for the pursuit of truth. An example of ‘new knowledge forms’ in relation to news flows, comes to the foreground with the emerging trend of ‘citizen journalism’ or ‘public journalism’. This trend coincides with changes taking place in the global news environment. It presents an even further challenge to news agencies, which are the original formal organisations of news production.

To give an idea of the evolution of ‘new forms of knowledge’, an analogy from Neuman’s (2006) distinction between “instrumental knowledge” and “reflexive knowledge” in conducting social research, is used (p. 32). “Instrumental knowledge,” according to Neuman, is the extension of old ideas or the invention of new techniques in social research (p. 32). It is the “basic” form of conducting research. “Reflexive knowledge,” on the other hand, “build[s] on specific moral commitments, consciously reflect[s] on the context and processes of knowledge creation, and emphasise the implications and uses of new knowledge” (p. 32). This latter form of reflexive knowledge, rather than instrumental knowledge, would appropriately describe the activities of, for instance, social movements interfacing with new technologies to produce “new knowledge” and “new investigative techniques” such as that adopted in advocacy research.

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3 The dualism of action and structure are not to be confused with Anthony Giddens’s structuration thesis (Giddens 1979, 1981, and 1984). There is, however, a relation with Giddens’s thesis. This will be drawn out in the subsequent discussion in the chapter. In this thesis, agency refers to the social actions of journalists as well as to the subject matter contained in news reports which are people-centered while structure refers to the organisations that disseminate news, news agencies. It also refers to organised structures (institutions) within society such as the state, the economy and the political arrangement. In Giddens’s structuration theory, he moves from the concrete to the sublime/transcendent or intangible as he describes the relationship between structure and agency.
In a similar manner to Neuman’s (2006) conceptual differentiations, the ‘new knowledge system’ emerging in the post-industrial society and in relation to news flows, results from the activities of for instance ‘citizens’ journalism’. Citizens’ journalism, itself, is regarded in the study as the outcome of various interrelated factors in a transforming news environment such as advancements in communications technology, convergences in technologies, and the disillusionment with mainstream sources of information. The former two factors would ‘fit’ with Neuman’s “instrumental knowledge” because they represent the extension of old ideas. Technology is, after all, the result of human experimentation and discoveries. The latter factor ‘fits’ with Neuman’s “reflexive knowledge” in that, it reflects a moral dimension with the possibility to act to change the situation for the better. To illustrate, as people become disillusioned with the type of news content that they are receiving from the usual mainstream sources about some issue, they seek alternative news sources to compensate in some way, in order to get to the ‘truth’ about an event.

Atton and Hamilton (2008) state that, because of the disillusionment by ordinary people (in democratic systems) with the reporting of and news content in mainstream media, alternative forms of journalism find expression (p. 1). Mainstream sources include news distributed by news agencies. The result is that citizens seek alternative means to become informed and look for alternative sources of news. This is apparent in a study conducted by Rantanen (2004) in which the mainstream reports and coverage of the war in Iraq, following the 11 September 2001 attacks, left many citizens ‘unfulfilled’ and seeking further ‘sources’ to learn the ‘truth’. The number of online and alternative information sources increased in the weeks following the attacks compared to users visiting online sites before the attacks (Rantanen, 2004: see also Bennett, 2003, p. 76). One could argue that trauma or shock led to this behaviour; however, Rantanen’s (2004) study compares coverage of the event in mainstream sources with what citizens felt were lacking. Rantanen also considered their reasons for looking for alternatives sources. Citizen journalism is an alternative form of journalism,
according to the definition by Atton and Hamilton (2008). This study describes it as the interfacing of human action with advanced media and communication technologies in the search for alternative truths or realities. Furthermore, it allows for self-expression.

Neuman (2006) also describes “reflexive knowledge” as “self-aware” and “value-orientated” (p. 32). What is particularly striking is his focus on self-awareness and value-orientation. This equates well with or characterises new social movements. In describing this awareness on a global scale and in relation to social movements, Held and McGrew (2003) state:

...contemporary reflexive political agents, subject to an extraordinary diversity of information and communication, can be influenced by images, concepts, lifestyles, and ideas from well beyond their immediate communities and can come to identify with groupings beyond their borders...It is perfectly possible, in addition, to identify closely with the aims and ambitions of a transnational social movement – whether concerned with environmental, gender, or human rights issues (p. 34).

Explaining new knowledge formations is useful here in helping to interrogate ‘global consciousness,’ or the symbolic space in which the phenomenon of the global public sphere emerges. Hence, the “reflexivity” manifested in new forms of knowledge production, more so than the “instrumentalist” forms of knowledge production, has the power and potential to inspire and mobilise public forums of expression grouped around specific social concerns and issues that affect their lives. The type of society in which these re-configurations are taking place under ‘globalisation,’ is proposed in the study as a society that goes ‘beyond’ the industrial type of society; a post-industrial society.

Castells (1996, 1998) refers to “informational societies” or “post-industrial societies”⁴ in which capital (or the system of capitalism) is re-structuring and transforming into “informational capital” (cf. Hoogvelt, 2001, pp. 126-131). These types of societies have been emerging since the 1980s, according to Castells (1996) and they are based predominantly on a global information

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⁴ Some refer to this post-industrial phase of human growth as the “third wave”, with the agricultural pre-industrial phase being the ‘first wave’, and the industrial phase and into the twentieth century being the ‘second wave’ (see Leadbeater, 2004, Dyson et al 2004, Toffler 1980).
economy, or are ‘linked’ to a global informational and capital network. The level of productivity and competitiveness exhibited in this type of society depends on its capacity to generate, process, and to apply new knowledge and information efficiently. It is assisted in its transformation and high-levels of productivity by information technology (IT) (Castells 1996, 1997, 1998). Castells suggests that IT in relationship to knowledge-based productivity is what separates and excludes societies from participating in “global informational capital” (see Muller et al., 2001, pp. 42-46, 55, 152-166). This ability to adapt or not to adapt, and therefore to become marginal in participating in the changing global social and economic landscape is visible even in the differences in activities between global news agencies and the ‘non-global’ (national and continental) news agencies.

Others (Dyson et al., 2004; Hardt & Negri 2000; Toffler, 1980; Webster, 2004) refer to this ‘new mode’ of post-industrial society, as a “third wave” and as the rise of “Empire” (Hardt & Negri, 2000). Essentially, a “third wave society” is global in reach characterised, in Dyson et al. (2004) as exhibiting the following:

“Cyberspace” relies on a diffused network of spatial relations, which is made possible through, mostly, electronic technology and the internet. Elsewhere, Hardt and Negri describe “the rule of Empire” as the new global order (p. xv). Empire operates without boundaries, “on all registers of the social order extending down to the depths of the social world. [It] not only manages territories and a population but also creates the very world it inhabits. It not only regulates human interactions but also seeks directly to rule over human nature” (Hardt & Negri, p. xv). Both these descriptions are clear about an emerging new world order that is taking form ever more clearly since the new millennium. It is an order more advanced not only in technical and in knowledge utility compared to previous world orders, but also in the ‘unintended outcomes’ as it evolves and takes shape. Even the language used to describe this new world order is encoded in ‘new’ (and odd) terms such as
“cyberspace,” “Empire,” “temporality,” “bioelectronics,” and “portals” (cf. Webster, 2004). Evolving conceptual schemes reflects a paradigm-shift in how we describe the ‘new world’ and in the nature of knowledge. Information technology is having a defining influence in this.

Dyson et al. (2004, pp. 31-41) make the further distinction between the requirements in a “third wave” global society that differs significantly from previous “old worlds” of the first wave. First wave societies were characterised by agriculturally based societies and the second wave societies, by industrial activity. The second wave industrial societies are characterised, by Dyson et al. (2004, pp. 34, 36) as static, dominated by mass-production, standardisation, mass institutions and institutional conformity. The third wave ushers in societies that are dynamic, not fixed to any specific geo-political place, relies on new information technologies that drive information capital, that “demassify” institutions and cultures and accelerate the potential for increased human freedom and participation (Dyson et al., 2004, p. 33). According to them,

[a] more sophisticated approach starts with recognising how the Third Wave has fundamentally altered the nature of knowledge as a ‘good’, and the operative effect is not technology per se (the shift from printed books to electronic storage and retrieval systems), but rather the shift from a mass production, mass-media, mass-culture civilization to a demassified civilization. (p. 34)

The developed and emerging post-industrial societies of western Europe, the United States, and Japan are knowledge-based societies that generate knowledge-based information required for the functioning mainly of their economies. They still operate, however, on a “second wave” level, in the mass accumulation of wealth. It is not as yet clear where emerging ‘giants’ such as China and parts of East Asian territories (e.g., Singapore) will be located within the informational network and post-industrial society. The former mentioned have advanced technologically and economically, and have acquired a higher-level specialisation in IT knowledge and use. These societies essentially possess the required skills and the capacity to use IT and apply that knowledge to the main aspects of their development (see Castells 1997, 1998; Dyson et al., 2004). The unseen and unintended outcome is the facilitation in their civil societies of a more active and
participating public sphere, in the use of technologies, and also in possessing the potential, and in some instances, the ability to use technology to challenge the status quo, for instance.

Masuda (2004:15) believes that the future post-industrial society is predominantly an information society and takes its form from the developmental pattern of industrial society. He states that, “the past developmental pattern of human society can be used as a historical analogical model for future society”. It makes sense that any future society will of necessity move away from past actions of social actors, structures and institutional frameworks, but the coming transition will be a dialectical one. This means that the society in the future will emerge from the contradictions in the old social order and from ‘passing’ social processes and structures, but the final transformation will be something quite different. Furthermore, with the world transforming (as it always is), it makes sense to say that traditional social institutions, structures and relationships, too, must transform. The implication of this on the structures of news agencies is considered below.

The post-industrial society is therefore primarily a communicative society (Habermas 1979) and an informational society. If machinery, factories and a division of labour led the ‘second wave’ of industrial development, the society of the ‘third wave’ is empowered by new knowledge, freedom and ‘post-materialism’. It is emerging, taking shape. Masuda (2004, p. 15) describes the information society as a “new type of human society, completely different from the present industrial society.” The assertion for making this claim, according to Masuda (2004: 15), is that “the production of information values and not material values [is] the driving force behind the formation and development of [this new] society” (italics in original text).5

The main distinguishing features of the information society in comparison to the industrial society, according to Masuda, include:

5 The problem with this differentiation is that information in hard format is material and, it is difficult to separate information from the material world.
[a transition from] the technology of the steam engine amplifying physical labour, to computer technology amplifying mental labour; from mass production of goods and services and rapid transportation of goods, to the mass production of cognitive, systematized information technology and knowledge; from the discovery of new continents and the acquisition of colonies, to the “knowledge frontier” as the potential market; from an economic structure characterised by a sales-orientated commodity economy, specialisations of production using a division of labour and the division of production and consumption, to an economy with information as the axis of socioeconomic development, where self-production of information by users will increase, and the expansion of this accumulated information, through synergetic production and shared utilization. (pp. 16-17)

He states that, “the economy will change structurally from an exchange economy to a synergetic economy” (Masuda, 2004, p. 17). We are already witnessing changes with innovations in computerised and other technologies, and comparisons between the ‘old way’ of doing things, as we embrace different and new ways of doing things. Others, sceptical of these changes as offering a new and different society or social order, point out the dangers and limitations of a so-called post-industrial society. Winner (2004), a critic and a sceptic of the future-orientated techno-information society proposes that

To invent a new technology requires that (...) society also invents the kinds of people who will use it: older practices, relationships, and ways of defining people’s identities fall by the wayside; new practices, relationships, and identities take root. (p. 46).

The idea that knowledge is superseding the ability to process, utilize and to internalise that new knowledge is a reality that challenges ‘citizens of the future’ to adapt or be left out or, left behind. Wary that this can trigger mass, social hysteria to keep up to date with ‘change’, Winner cautions that the following set of questions should be addressed as primarily important before considerations of the economic consequences of the changing world order. He asks, what kinds of bonds, attachments and obligations are in the making around these changes? To whom or to what are people connected or dependent on? Do ordinary people see themselves as having a crucial role in what is taking shape? Do they see themselves as competent and able to make decisions? Do they feel that their

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6 Masuda does not explain or discuss this term, but it is taken to mean a transformation of economic production and economic activity perhaps from ‘materialism’ to non-material, ‘informationalism’.
voices matter in the decisions that will affect family, workplace, community and nation? Will they feel fairly treated? (p. 46). Winner is alluding to the importance and centrality of keeping the ordinary person involved and informed before celebrating technological advances in improving economy, political development, and future society. He is unconvinced.

These future orientations towards a new world order, hinges on the ‘intermediary’ changes and transformation brought about by ‘globalisation’. Globalisation is said to be interrupting (and disrupting) national territories, identities, and the role of the nation-state (described also by the term, ‘heterogenisation’). ‘Globalist’ theorists, including Giddens (1990), Castells (1998, 2000), Hoogvelt (2001), and Rantanen (2005), especially hold this view. In another sense, globalist theorists also believe that globalisation is a new phenomenon that is reconfiguring and reintegrating the world in new global relations and social interactions and thus impacting, albeit unequally, upon nationhood, economies, the polity and cultures (see also Held & McGrew, 2003, pp. 1-2, 8-14, 17-19).

On the other hand, the interconnectedness and interdependency of nations is evident in actions stretched across the globe, through politics and economics and in cultural exchanges. In a single concept, globalisation describes the complex transforming and re-generation in relationships between individual activity and structural processes. The study applies this perception to the relationships among news agencies, with particular emphasis on their news exchange agreements. In the 21st century, the product from the labour of journalists and of news organisations (with their rules, policies, and procedures) is caught up in ‘globalisation’ (cf. Rantanen 2005; Thompson 2003).

There is a sense that throughout the world in symbolic spaces and virtual and geographical places there is growing awareness amongst peoples of their

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8 The opposing view of the ‘sceptics’ on globalisation is dealt with in the section critically evaluating the role of the media and news agencies. See for example, Hirst and Thompson (1999), Hoogvelt (2001), Callinicos (2002).
orientations within these spaces and places (cf. Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998; Mattelart, 1979, 1994; Meyrowitz, 1985). This awareness can serve either to promote acceptance and understanding or to produce comparisons, competition, wars and further exclusions. This ‘sense’ is reflected in an emerging global consciousness, visible in a more direct and positive way in the cultural exchanges of products including music, art, crafts, and literature, and services. Global consciousness is, however, also exhibited in a destructive manner in ethnopolitical wars, nationalisms, in genocides and extreme in-group behaviour that exclude or aim to eradicate the (different) other (Miyoshi 1998, Jameson and Miyoshi 1998).

Chapter 2 already provided a few examples illustrating the term, global consciousness, however, a more recent example is the awareness of the global economic crisis that has affected both local and foreign economies. The crisis has resulted in nations becoming more aware of their global interdependencies, partnerships and the interconnectedness between their nation-states and in the economic decisions that they make. This is best illustrated in the example of the European integrated nation-states, the EU. The effects of this financial crisis and the related interconnectivity between nations is, at least in part, made possible through media reports of the crisis and its continuing effects. This awareness and understanding is made possible because of information about the crisis disseminated in news reports, and it allows actors across the globe to make informed decisions based on this “knowledge.” How nation-states deal with the crisis and find solutions is another matter, but also reflected in media coverage.

Amin et al (1982) already foresaw or spoke of an emerging global economic crisis as arising from the contradictions of the capitalist world system. However, one could question whether this crisis is really of ‘global’ magnitude. Whether it

9 Indeed the end of the Cold War saw the swing of the pendulum in the direction of euphoric celebration in the West (mainly) of the dominance of the market and the success of ‘the neo-liberal project’. It can be argued that the recent crisis in economic markets has been mounting in the latter 20th C. with the unabated global financial flows and the logic of ‘free’ enterprise, maybe even before then because the seed of market forces had been sown much earlier. But, this would require a separate and detailed historical account and a systematic analysis. See Martin and Schumann’s ‘The global trap’ (1997) for instance.
affects all nations in the same way, and whether or not it damages developing nations as much as it is doing damage in developed nations. What would news reports have ‘the masses’ believe could include the manner in which the crisis is reported. If imbalances of news content persist, as previous studies first indicated, then surely the economic crisis would be downplayed in the mainstream media. This would make an interesting further contribution to a content-based study of the representations of the scale of the economic crisis and how it is represented in affecting developed nations in comparison to developing nations.

Diawara (1998, pp. 104-105) takes a sceptical position. Sceptics, for instance believe that the conditions of economic integration are not “new,” therefore, the problems such as economic crisis, too, should not be seen as something new. Diawara argues that African countries have already been a prolonged economic recession (of sorts) brought on by historical processes such as colonialism, the slave trade, and in the 1990s the devaluation of African currency, by structural adjustment programmes initiated by the IMF and World Bank. He states this was done “in the interest of re-connecting Africa with the global economy” (Diawara, 1998, p. 104). In other words, poverty, extreme economic deprivation leading to unemployment, and other social problems, are nothing ‘new’ to the developing nations since the ‘modernisation’ of the world. In that sense, the ‘global’ economic crisis affects more harshly the centres of global capital, even though the ‘aftershocks’ as such, including increased food and fuel prices, reverse trade agreements, increases in travel and accommodation costs, to mention a few, are harshly affecting the developing nations. The world is no longer as ‘splintered’ as the expressions “First World” and “Third World” suggest. Climate change is one example of how effects in so-called First Worlds have as much devastation on Third Worlds, and vice versa. People, globally, are more aware, because of information, that peoples similar and dissimilar to them inhabit one planet.

Global consciousness as it evolves may also create the potential for nations to act in unison, to foster inclusive relations not based merely on their comparative wealth, and to negotiate and affect the collective realities of ordinary people.
(citizens) worldwide. Still, the sceptics would say, this does not explain why the majority of the most populated nations live under conditions of poverty, deprivation, ignorance and, largely are excluded from global participation (cf. Hoogvelt 2001). Globalists too, share in these concerns. They do not propose that the global social inequalities automatically disappear with a new world order, but the conditions that give rise to them become more clearer in order to tackle because of the way in which the world is transforming largely due to ‘globalisation’ and its associated ‘effects’.

Power is an important element in this study because the ‘images’ (or representations) of nations as portrayed through media messages for instance, encourages the comparison with and the inclinations towards the adoption and the imitation of those who possess (economic) power by those who do not. The need for some nations to imitate other nations, for example, results in the loss of intrinsic identity and in the re-construction (i.e. homogenisation and hybridisation) of different cultural traditions: ‘difference’ is lost. An informational, post-industrial society, on the other hand, demassifies power relations.

The use of power, in the media, through a process of constructing ideas and influencing and shaping knowledge goes beyond simple explanations of ideology and propaganda, although these are relevant. The process of constructing ‘knowledge systems’ that ultimately leads to control, is far more complex than reducing such a system to a description of a direct link between the ‘source (sender), the recipient (receiver)’ and the outcome (effect). This sense is conveyed in the writings of Michel Foucault on power, that in the postmodern society, the exercise of power will be diffused, ubiquitous, no longer the exclusive domain of the nation-state, that it will preside in the public domain as well. According to Foucault (....), power will become pervasive and permeate all social structures and relationships and this diffusive power will be an unobtrusive (hardly noticeable) occurrence as societies proceed to becoming highly advanced (postmodern) societies.
With the introduction and use of advanced technologies in societies, the concept of ‘global consciousness’ operates in a similar manner as Foucault’s notion of the diffusiveness of power throughout societies. A ‘mass conscientisation’ is taking shape from the connecting (networking) of different and diverse peoples through accessing information and communications technology. Put briefly, conscientisation is the active engagement (a form of ‘praxis’) taking place within the public domain of ordinary citizens (Jansen, 1995 on Paulo Freire’s use of conscientisation). Conscientisation reflects the critical and reflexive activities of public groups and of social movements, at the local and at the global level as it applies here to “global consciousness” (cf. Leys, 1999; Sparks 1998). ‘Praxis’ is reflected most clearly in the activities of organised global social movements that have taken up the ‘causes’ (but not only of the Left) (cf. Leys, 1999), of lobbyist groups, and of the marginalised and the subaltern (see Appardurai, 1996).

In the 21st century, a new ‘cycle’ of global change is presenting itself. Yet, as critical political economy states, such change is steeped in history and based on a critique of “late capitalism,” the period spanning the second half of the 20th century (Golding & Murdock, 2000, p. 72). The options in social change may not always be the choices of nations and citizens, as Winner (2004) cautions, but of technocrats, futurists and demagogues of the time. The questions that Winner (2004, p. 46) raises are important because they remind one of the ordinary citizen’s ‘place’ in social change and reflections on where it ought to be. Advocates of a post-industrial society (cf. Bell, 1973; Toffler, 1980; Touraine, 1971) celebrate it as a new information and knowledge-based society, but they fail to address the content or structure and relevance of that information and knowledge base on the lives of ordinary people. They also fail to address who will be in charge of that new knowledge, the guardians, or whether it will be self-regulating. There is little clarity on what basis people will ‘self-produce’ forms of knowledge that all can subscribe to, or how it will be dispersed and diffused (especially if traditional institutions like the education, family, and even the state
will be re-structured or even eradicated). The advocates are in a hurry to get to a world order that they envision, but do not completely comprehend.

Finally and significantly, younger generations are seemingly more quickly absorbed into and adapting faster to a computer-driven world. Relationships in this world are experienced more as networks and networking than as traditional face-to-face interactions. Changes addressed above (and the other contradictions in the system) are unequivocally bringing in a new global society, but in some ways it appears to be one that is more conscious and reflexive than previous epochs may have been. An important contributing factor to this ‘openness’ and conscientisation is the role of the media and media technology.

7.1.1 Global consciousness as the symbolic space for identity formation and knowledge production: Issues of power

Castells’s (1996, 1998) trilogy, ‘The information age: economy, society and culture’, best describes the phenomenon of a global consciousness (although Castells does not use the term). He states that new social configurations are resulting in the emergence of an “informational (network) society”. Even earlier than this, Canadian scholar, Marshall McLuhan (1962, 1989), already devised a description for the intensifying interdependencies among nations and the conscious awareness that the diffusion of information through new media technologies are creating, in his conception of “global village”.

McLuhan’s formulation of the global village may be understood as the interfacing of technologies with human societies (and with various cultures). Castells’s “informational societies”, on the other hand, describes the consequences of the influence of modern technologies in relation to its application with knowledge as fundamentally altering societies. Neither theorist are implying that the world, comprising diverse cultures, is being collapsed into a singular dominant (Western)

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10 There has to be an entirely new psycho-social impact in this emerging advanced techno-youth culture which may deserve further investigation in future research.

11 It is a misconception to think that the world is becoming one or singular, or homogenised culturally, economically, politically or otherwise, and the conceptions by Castells and before him, McLuhan are not meant to imply this.
culture, nor does the conception of global consciousness in this study indicate a collapse of cultures (cf. Jameson & Miyoshi 1998, Hardt and Negri 2000). Instead, global consciousness is put forward as facilitating a democratisation process, globally. In the application and use of new media technologies with emerging forms of knowledge, ‘global consciousness’ is unobtrusively present, but in constant motion. It arises in communication and cultural exchanges, and in economic and political relations among nations. Information, knowledge, and the instruments of technology are each and together, contributing factors in enabling global social consciousness. In the discussion above, these elements taken together, developed and discussed in a ‘synergetic’ and dialectical relationship, and in advancing an ‘alternative world order’. Understanding how power ‘works’ is relevant to understanding global consciousness and its evolution.

Foucault’s application of the concept of power in society, more so than the Gramscian concept of hegemony (see chapter 2), conveys the subtleties of how dominant discourses and entrenched systems of knowledge ‘objectify’ human freedom (i.e. turn the subjective person into an objectified ‘thing’). Whereas ‘hegemony’ describes the exertion of power through ‘consent’, especially the exercise of state power, for example, Foucauldian analysis of power goes beyond this to show that the human subject is now the responsible party for ‘administering’ consensus in society by constraining him/her self and exercising power over him/her self. The significance of Foucauldian thought reveals tensions in the emerging transitional social forms and relationships such that the transitional process appears almost completely chaotic, anarchic and unstable.

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12 Hardt and Negri, in their *Empire* (2000) see a shift in the centre(s) of power and dominance. To them, power, unlike previous and earlier epochs where it was easier to identify a particular state, ethnic, national or cultural group as possessing power over other states, nations and groups, has been de-centred in a transforming global order.

13 The idea of democracy is highlighted here as an open process yielding voluntary contact and social relations. It is used generally and broadly to describe the fluidity of interaction, rather than as merely a form of governance. Global consciousness, like individual consciousness may be inferred by actions, responses and interactions, by the formation of group ideas and practices, and by reflective, resolute and critically informed choices.

14 Croteau and Hoynes (2000: 46) describe synergy as a process of integration of parts in a system that work together to produce a far more beneficial outcome than if these parts were to operate separately from each other.
Foucault (1967, 1976, 1979, 1980, 1989) using a genealogical trace of the historical evolution of practices (behaviour) and concepts, such as ‘punishment’, ‘sexuality’ and ‘madness’, observes throughout modern and pre-modern history, the application of power in its various forms and guises. The ultimate exercise (in the genealogical tracing of a concept) is to observe various forms of control over and objectification of the human subject. Ultimately, the most ‘civilized’ and advanced modern societies exercise a form of power that, according to Foucault, controls individual freedom, and will take the form of self-induced discipline, self-constraint and self-regulation that emerges not from forces/authorities external to the individual such as the state, the expert, the scientist, but from the individual him/her self. The individual person in the advanced modern society no longer has need for external or institutionalised forms of control over his/her behaviour, but willingly submits his/her freedom to the social group (Foucault 1967, 1980, 1981).

Foucault identifies the subliminal and pervasive effects of power in theorizing the “objectifying [of] the human subject” (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982:208-226). This form of power espouses a ‘false freedom’ because even more than previous forms of power indicated throughout history, the exercise of power will advance toward an ‘ultra-surveillance’ type of society. What Foucault reveals is how the human subject (i.e. individual) becomes a disempowered object. It quells subjective freedom. The ‘control of self’ or ‘the use of power over oneself’, occurs through the diffusion of certain values and beliefs constructed in the knowledge system with the concomitant effect of subjecting or breaking-down (deconstructing) the human person. The individual wilfully, knowingly silences his/her self and allows others ‘dominant’ in society to speak for him/her. Individuals willingly submit their subjective control to external sources of control such as the nation-state, or to the doctor, the specialist, the expert, the scientist because these authorities wield power through claims to specialised knowledge.

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15 This surveillance and control over the human subject is a paradox, because human beings are social creatures, that survive better in groups, associations, communities and rely on interaction and communication, but this very dependence subjects the person to obeying rules, constraining self, and the ultimate loss of freedom.
On the other hand, modern technologies interrupt this self-inflicted power over the individual, equips the individual with freedom, firstly, to make choices than have them made, and secondly, to give self-expression or to express him/her self. As societies emerge beyond the modern, previous historical epochs or conditions, their structures and the use and application of knowledge and information are converted to becoming a self-regulating process.\(^\text{16}\)

This constraint of the human subject is found in almost all systems of modernity and modern institutional knowledge such as in medicine, law, psychiatry, cartography, and even in journalism (see Foucault 1967, 1972, 1979, 1980). While Foucault takes to the extremes in describing the manner in which control (power) is passively dispersed throughout societies through knowledge-constructions in ‘democratic’ social systems, his ideas are applicable in the study to explain and analyse the transition taking place from modern systems of control to postmodern forms of ‘freedom’ or release. In the dissemination of information and ideas from the realm of the ‘formal organisation’ to the realm of ‘informal participation’, we see a similar transitional process taking form or shape.

The news media do construct ideas and facilitate knowledge through the information that they gather, select, produce and disseminate when events are transformed into ‘news’. Audiences, however, are no longer seen as passive receivers of news (hypodermic model), but active interpreters of news content and exercising critical choice and judgements in their social realities in relation to news reports (cf. Bennett 2003:218-223, Croteau & Hoynes 2000:24-5)). News

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\(^{16}\) It is interesting that the internet has been invented in a time (point in history) that we refer to as the postmodern era (i.e. beyond modernity). In its usage, the internet requires and leads to the total absorption of the individual user in his/her capacity to extract knowledge only by possessing knowledge about that which he/she seeks ‘on the net’. As a simple example: To know the meaning of a word, one must identify/know the word in question. This sounds contradictory, and in some ways the idea does convey a circular, but also a dialectical process of knowledge generation and re-generation. ‘Old knowledge’ as it were is constantly being replaced by ‘new (or different) knowledge’. Foucault is not impressed at all by knowledge production and he takes a philosophical position of the destructive effect of knowledge and any other self-contained and totalizing systems as the objectifying and therefore constraining element over the individual, or a process akin to régime du savoir [regime of knowledge, or the exercise of ‘knowledge- power’ over the human subject] (see Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982: 212).
discourses are intrinsically relevant to various ‘systems of knowledge’\textsuperscript{17}. News discourses provide a way of ‘speaking about’ the daily events within the life of a nation or of social groups. On the other hand, media are also simply the conduits, the vehicles through which already formed ideas, knowledge-con structs pass from ideologues and others to the rest of society (see Couldry & Curran 2003). For example, political ‘spin doctors’ are people who use the media for image construction or to get across a particular message to sway public opinion on political and other matters.

Croteau and Hoynes (2000, pp. 346-357) have challenged “the traditional cultural imperialism thesis” that suggests one dominant (Western) culture is taking over the world. Drawing on Barnet and Cavanagh (1994), Croteau and Hoynes (2000, pp. 450-1) state that while different nationalities, cultures and groups may be exposed to the same information in the mass media, this does not mean that the interpretations by dissimilar cultures will be the same, or that the message will have the same effects in various contexts. Their statement can be used to demonstrate that an intimate and growing conscientisation amongst diverse global populations is taking place partly through the facilitation and intervention of new media technologies and cultural transmission or exchanges and diverse peoples’ awareness of these developments. People in any one locality are conscious of the existences and quality of lives of people in other localities, outside of their immediate realities and experiences through the exposure to media messages, and they are equally aware that modern media instruments bring them these images. This social reality is depicted in the use of such terms as ‘global’ and ‘local’\textsuperscript{18}.

\textsuperscript{17} A system of knowledge may be described as any social, cultural and symbolic construct that purports to explain social reality in relation to the human person, or ‘how we locate ourselves’ in this or that or some other ‘reality’.

\textsuperscript{18} The use of media technology presents a paradox: communication via media is intermediary, not necessarily face-to-face as in traditional communicative environments and small communities. This may give the impression to the observer of impersonal and fragmented human relations (as early sociological studies of the growth of the urban centres reveal – Louis Wirth 1964, Herbert J. Gans 1967, and Robert E. Park 1952). However, as media technology has become an important and indispensable part of modern life, there is a growing sense and an intimacy in human relations as different and diverse cultures are juxtaposed through media instruments, in film (theatre), television, radio programmes, newspaper reports, and even Internet chat-rooms. An awareness of identities, whether similar or different, creates familiarity, and through habitual encounters, intimacy.
(Sreberny, 2000) where the global is increasingly being included and adapted within the local, and vice versa.

Croteau and Hoynes’s (2000, pp. 446-457) interpretation of the cultural imperialism thesis may be analysed on two grounds. Firstly, Croteau and Hoynes agree with the cultural imperialism thesis that the economically dominant nations’ cultural products are being sold and assimilated through media and other communications technology to economically poorer nations, hence the terms ‘McDonaldisation’, ‘Westernisation’ and ‘Americanisation’ (Golding & Harris, 1997; Held & McGrew, 2003; Jameson & Miyoshi, 1998). However, local cultures learn to assimilate foreign cultural practices and products in a way that synchronises or harmonises with their own cultures. Thusu (1998) provides various case studies in which resistance and dissent by traditional cultures to ‘intrusions’ of foreign cultures in turn assimilate these in their own cultural identities and interpretations of reality. On another level, ‘resistance’ means there are indeed attempts by dominant nations to disseminate their cultural-products globally to influence other local cultures and perhaps transform these. The “value wars” that McMurtry (2002) refers to, are seen as intrinsically woven with the dominance of global capitalism, which seeks to annihilate opposing and different rationalities.

Secondly, Croteau and Hoynes (2000, p. 450) may be criticised in that they have ignored the issue of power. Dominant cultures and nations wield political and economic power over other less dominant cultures and nations. Power, in fact, influences the image-construction and the perceptions amongst nations, particularly when comparisons are made between them (Couldry & Curran, 2003; Escobar, 1995; Golding & Harris, 1997). For example, it is not uncommon especially among the youth in developing nations to want to take on or imitate an identity foreign to their own cultural identities and attributes because of the power-representations of those foreign cultures in the media. “Bollywood” or the

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19 The influence of power is the basis on which nationalities are constructed, through symbolism, common and shared identities and this, identity-construction, is most pervasive through media instruments.
‘Westernisation’ of traditional Eastern cultures is an example of the imitation of Western cultural expressions in local Eastern culture, or an example of the assimilation of different cultures (Thussu 1998). The result is not so much facilitating understanding of differences, than furthering the profit-driven motive through entertainment (Thussu, 1998; cf. Diawara, 1998; Miyoshi, 1998; Golding & Harris, 1997). The unintended outcome is the crossing-over of cultural diversities, but it is questionable whether this brings about greater understanding and acceptance between diverse cultures.

Previous studies show that the relations between nations yield inequalities (Hoogvelt, 2001; Nordenstreng & Griffin, 1999; Vincent et al., 1999). These inequalities are more clearly manifested under ‘regimes of power’ including for instance colonialism, fascism and apartheid. In the late 20th century, there is an evolution in these systems or regimes of power for which information communicated through media instruments have played their part. Under the global financial and economic system of neo-liberal capitalism, however, power is splintered and diffused. In this socio-economic and political system, recognising power in social relations is less obvious particularly the ‘power of capital’. Neo-liberal developments have diffused power relations with every aspect of society including in structures and among agencies. It espouses ‘democratic freedoms’ and rights, which make locating power within this system difficult. The ‘power of capital’ is present in cultural, political and economic life, in group and individual behaviour and because the ‘value’ framework of neo-liberalism is based on ‘freedom’, ‘free flow’, limited state intervention in the economy, and other precepts of ‘democracy’ such as human rights, observing this power directly is difficult.

7.2. News agencies, the impact of societal influence and competing ‘cultures of news’
News agencies are caught up in the crisis facing all industrial societies in the 21st century. In the case of news agencies, they need to adapt and change in order to
remain existent. Paradoxically\textsuperscript{20}, news agencies are linked to all other institutions that rely on mass-production and that are in flux. The ability to transform to something consistent with a ‘third wave’ type existence that is dominated by electronic formats may solve a part of the crisis that news agencies in the twenty-first century are facing (cf. Dyson et al 2004). However, according to Bennett (2003:77), “despite tremendous gains in communication technology and the vast potential of the Internet, the news of the future will [not] come any closer than we are today to meeting the information needs of democracy – unless, that is, people (...) begin to understand how this information system works and think about how to fix what is wrong with it”. While Bennett (2003:77) is referring mainly to mainstream media practices in the United States, he is alluding to all democracies in which media systems operate. He states, “[t]he most systematic attempt to create an information system with more of the qualities outlined above [referring to democratising news content] is the ongoing media experiment with public or civic journalism”.

The apparent shifts in news agencies’ operations and relationships are becoming clearer when one compares the societies from which news agencies operate in (also see Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen 2000, 1998, and Forbes 1998). News agencies operating in developing social contexts are not as competitive in the global market with news agencies that emerge from developed societies mainly in Western Europe, the USA and since the late 1980s and early 1990s in parts of Asia. Despite there being a co-dependency relationship between global and national news agencies, national news agencies emerge from developing contexts that have not undergone an ‘information revolution’ in the sense explained by Castells in his trilogy (1996, 1997, and 1998) and by other authors (Dyson et al 2004, Leadbeater 2004, Webster 2004, and cf. Poster 1996).

This limits developing nations’ media in their operational capacity and outputs because a flourishing media system requires a democratised, informed and educated civil society. Furthermore, news agencies in developing contexts operate

\textsuperscript{20} The paradox, in the sentence, refers to the claim by media people of their independence from social influence.
in societies that have not acquired the same or similar skills, knowledge and even IT necessary to compete in a global news market that developed contexts are exposed to. Mass audiences in developing societies also do not possess the same buying/purchasing power that audiences in developed societies have access to especially IT hardware and software. Taken together these and other factors do not attract advertisers and sponsors to developing contexts in which their media require a boost of financial revenue and sponsors for building local capacities in the profession of journalism.

Previous studies distinguish amongst news agencies based on their statuses as ‘global’, ‘national’, and ‘continental’. This distinction formed the basis for arranging them in a hierarchical relationship to each other, in their access to news markets, and their ability (or non-ability) to disseminate news widely. One of the findings in this study concurs with previous studies that the national and continental news agencies remain largely excluded from direct access to global news markets (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen 2000). The explanation offered here has to do with the inability of national and continental agencies to compete and adapt in a highly competitive global news environment. SAPA, for instance plays a negligible role outside of South Africa, and PANA’s distribution of news is limited to mainly North, West, and Central African countries’ news agencies, not globally. The reintegration of SAPA into the African continent following the end of apartheid since 1994 has been slow, according to SAPA Editor (2005). According to PANA Deputy-editor (2006), PANA has attempted to expand globally and they have tried imitating Reuters’ and AFP’s operations in Africa. However, since their inception, the PANA ability to expand globally still beset them as a problem. This includes the lack of commitment from the member national news agencies to meet their quotas of news stories per day, to pay subscription fees, and the poor quality of news from some national agencies particularly regarding news stories that need translations into other languages (PANA Deputy-editor 2006, also cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen 1998, 2000; Karikari 2007).
A related issue tends to be no clear perception of what news ‘ought to be’ in the African context as opposed to the easily transposing Western perceptions of ‘news culture’. Thussu (1998:273-291) gives a critical analysis of the localising of global news in the Indian news context with a few case studies on Zee TV\textsuperscript{21}, Doordarshan\textsuperscript{22}, and Indian newspapers. African news media culture is based largely on global Western journalism practices of news and news values. This is not altogether ‘bad’, but what is lacking is an African news culture in all its diversity (given that the African continent is not a ‘homogenous’ group of nations). Partly for this reason, the alternative news agency, IPS, aims at building the local capacity of African journalists, and in a sense ‘liberating’ African media structures. IPS offers an alternative impression of what news is, and what it could be in Africa (see chapters four and six on the IPS practices in Africa). This compares differently with both the Western global news agencies and the government-owned African news agencies.

Global agencies have defined their own sense of what news is and in how they go about producing it. Their adoption of specific news values and criteria framed within their ideals of ‘objectivity’ (meaning balanced, free and fair), reflects this. The news selection practices at agencies are discussed at length in chapter 6 and will not be repeated here. However, the main attributes of the global and national news agencies is their adherence to Western news values; values that emerged within the profession of journalism in newly industrializing societies (De Beer & Steyn, 1996; Kumar, 2004; M’Bayo & Onwumechili, 1995). Global agencies are also suspicious of the news disseminated by national news agencies in Africa because of their perceived propagandistic-style of information that is supportive of the political states and governments there. This suspicion is partly accurate and partly ahistorical (Forbes, 1998; cf. Barratt & Berger, 2007; Hunter-Gault, 2006).

In other words, state intervention in African media operations has a history that stems back to colonial rule and post-independence (Gourgault 1995,Karikari

\textsuperscript{21} Zee TV is a privately owned television channel in India and is partly owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation (Thussu 1998:273).

\textsuperscript{22} Doordarshan is a publicly owned television channel in India that provides mass entertainment as well as educational programmes (Thussu 1998:289).
There is a sense gained from the global news agencies, that the kinds of news stories that the national news agencies focus on in Africa, for instance, do not hold an interest in the global and public realm of developed societies. The exception to this is news that shocks, entertains, or absorbs the interest of overseas audiences, which tends to be the “main news menu” of “international news” agencies concerning developing contexts (De Beer & Steyn 1996, cf. Hunter-Gault 2006).

The alternative news agency, the Inter Press Service, by comparison, began with a different philosophy on news than global and national agencies. IPS perception of news is based on the view that news is information that should educate, inform and advance the specific goals of development of the ordinary people and the audiences that it informs. This philosophy takes precedence over news as revenue generating and it does not even entertain the idea of news as commercial ‘infotainment’ (see Thussu 1998). The Inter Press Service (IPS) was set up for that very purpose of ‘development journalism’ (see later) including the training of local journalists in developing and developed social contexts, building capacity with a focus on development-oriented and democratically based media frameworks.

Ritzer and Goodman (2004) further clarity differences in perceptions and differing cultural values:

> At the extremes, the globalization of *culture* can be seen as the transnational expansion of common codes and practices (homogeneity) or as a process in which many global and local cultural inputs interact to create a kind of pastiche, or blend, leading to a variety of cultural hybrids (heterogeneity). The trend toward cultural homogeneity is often associated with *cultural imperialism* [and] the global seen as interacting with the local to produce something distinctive – the glocal. Stress cultural heterogeneity (…). (pp. 569-570, emphasis in original text)

Global agencies have indeed been theorised as imperialist (operating as a cartel), and later as evolving towards heterogenous relationships with non-global news

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23 Ritzer and Goodman (2004) are drawing on the conceptualization by Robertson (1992) who opposes cultural homogenization and stresses a ‘glocalization’ in which the global is seen to interact with the local.
agencies – a sort of interdependency. In modern Western societies, news developed for a specific purpose and this idea was transported to other social contexts as a result of colonialism and migration. Missionary societies also played a role in transporting Western ideas, processes and lifestyles that interspersed with the local cultures and that shaped the media systems in non-Western social contexts (see Kumar 2004, Vilanilam 2003). Hence, so-called developing nations’ media systems are not entirely government controlled but a hybrid of state, business and privately owned media.

In post-colonial contexts, information and knowledge developed and served a different purpose than it did in early modern industrializing Western societies. Industrialisation may have led to Western development and modernisation, which was transported to other social contexts, but met with resistance in these other contexts when it was perceived as impeding cultural traditions. Kumar (2004: 45) states that “[i]n developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the mass media, which include traditional media have a different function to perform.” This function, in Kumar’s view, is that of “development communication”, or “communication that focuses on the information needs of the poor and the oppressed, and their socio-economic and cultural interests” (Kumar 2004: 45, also see Servaes 1999). Some of the sections below explain attempts to recapture this lost genre of development communication, or communication for development. This form of communication and information will not come from commercial or government controlled media, and even if governments intervene in development, it is not always in the interests of the broader civil society.

7.2.1 Colonialism and the construction of ‘the nation’

The process of colonialism extended from the sixteenth to the twentieth century and it involved, amongst other things, the slave trade, the interruption of local polities, economies and cultures and the uneven distribution of wealth (Bourgault 1995, cf. Karikari 2007). Socio-economic, political and cultural processes associated with mercantilism (1500s-1800s), colonialism (1800s-1950s), and neo-imperialism (1960s-1990s) (Hoogvelt, 2001, pp. 15-25) deconstructed and re-
constructed local cultures in various parts of the world. Such processes resulted in the symbolic re-construction of the nation-states in Africa, Asia, and South America, and it shaped identities in the fashion of colonialisit authorities (see Ahluwalia, 2003; Hoogvelt, 2001). Historically, colonialism, in comparison with other systems such as imperialism, is a condition in history that led to the qualitative, ‘Third World’ categorisation.

In previous studies, parallels drawn between the broader social inequalities and exchanges among nations and in the global media structures and exchange relationships as well, are referred to as ‘imbalances in global news and information flows’. In other words, inequalities such as exploitation in the global socio-political and cultural realm of society, is reflected in part in the relationships among news agencies in their differential access to information and media markets. This study indicates, however, that the relationships among news agencies, at the beginning of the 21st century, reveal growing inter-dependencies and co-dependent relationships in their participation in and control over news flows. News agencies have been described in previous studies in hierarchical power relationships similar to the hierarchical structuring of nations, for example, ‘First’, previously ‘Second’ and ‘Third’ World. What has changed or is changing this, blurring the boundaries between these differentiating concepts?

7.2.2 The construction of global consciousness in the news media

The contribution of newspapers in the construction of nationhood as discussed by Benedict Anderson (1983), illustrates the impact of the media in instituting a commonly shared (national) identity. Consciousness is akin to the construction of a national identity based on certain shared notions and cultural attributes. Nationhood is constructed through the conscious choice of citizens to embrace a common identity. This shared social identity then strengthens the idea of nationhood in the lived reality of the group, but it can also be used as a tool for social exclusion and destructively as in the ‘us’ and ‘them’ syndrome (also see Leadbeater, 2004).
Individuals who identify issues affecting them that have similar impact on the lives of others (at a distance) such as poverty, environmental and climate change, and pandemics, can, instead of experiencing division and exclusion, experience an empathy with ‘the other’. The media is an instrument that inadvertently reflects such diversity and unity, while it simultaneously allows people to observe their own realities as similar or dissimilar to others. Ultimately, however, this instrument can create commonality and shared experiences as seen in the examples from Anderson (1983) and Burbach (2001). It can, however, also promote divisions, animosities and prejudices. It is for people to decide in the final instance on the outcome of their choices with the knowledge they possess of their interdependence as a global social group.

Mass conscientisation is a form of power, but power from below, meaning it belongs to the ordinary women and men of societies. It is the result of the convergence of civil societies (in other words, the public realm) and conscious (critical) action. Similar to the Marxian idea of “class consciousness”, conscientisation is an outgrowth of (re-)action from below, facilitated by access to technology and media (cf. discussion of McLuhan’s “the medium is the massage” (1967) controversial statement below)24. Similar to Castells’s (1997) explanation of the ubiquity of social movements (they are everywhere, formed on the basis of just about every social/public issue of concern), mass conscientisation is not restricted to class, gender, race, or ethnicity. Conscientisation within social movements is a result of alternative identities forming and it celebrates diversity rather than forces cultural diffusion. The more diverse the composition of members in a social movement is, the greater has been the impact of conscientisation in which the message has reached various peoples in various localities (see below).

Human consciousness is an individual cognitive process and at the same time part of the social construction of societies (cf. Held and McGrew 2003:3-4) through

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24 Marshall McLuhan aimed in his writing at being controversial in order to stimulate debate and critical thinking. His dictum ‘the medium is the massage (sic)’ is one such statement he made to spark critical thinking on the role of media technologies in society.
groups that possess the capacity to reason, make judgements, come to know and acquire knowledge and understanding. On the positive side, knowledge (as opposed to ignorance) creates a sense of purpose and directs the capacity to understand and, hence, to action. Consciousness occurs at the cognitive level of the individual actor, but consciousness within the group occurs at the broader structural level in which social processes take shape within and across societies, (e.g. cultural formation is a group process). Consciousness is an important first step in the process towards ‘conscientisation’. This latter term describes action with a purpose for change (see Jansen 1995).

Taken further, global consciousness can have a positive impact on the world as a form of ‘social praxis’[^25], which is deliberate and critical action aimed at, for instance, changing unequal material circumstances and alleviating political, economic and cultural deprivation amongst peoples, and ultimately between nations (cf. Vincent et al 1999). If globalisation is ‘action at a distance’, (see chapter two), then ‘conscientisation’ is the critical realisation of action reaching across the globe.

7.2.3 Selection, gatekeepers and objectivity as central concerns in the flow of news and the impact on society

The selection process involves the choices exercised by journalists and editors in what they think their news markets want to read or watch. In the case of news agencies, selection is based on what their main customers (clients) the retail media want. To use the example of SAPA, news is filtered through the news agency before it reaches the retail media, and it is further filtered at retail media newsrooms by the editors there before it reaches the public (see chapter 4). Hence, very specific foci and a limited number of news stories end up in print or

[^25]: Hegelian philosophy, which influenced and shaped the writings of Karl Marx, recognised an evolutionary consciousness in the development of people. Karl Marx, however, was critical of the Hegelian ‘idealism’ that views peoples’ development and consciousness as inevitable (determined) and passive. Marx, instead, pursued a course of reasoning in which people are the makers of their own material reality through labour and work, and that they therefore direct their own consciousness through labour (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004). Praxis is the intentional, goal-orientated action of social actors in their material world (realism). Hence, Marx developed his historical materialism as a praxis of evolutionary processes between the person and structure (society) which he reduced to the economic base.
broadcast news bulletins, which lead media critics to question the choice of news events as well as the broader objectives and objectivity of news focus (Curran & Gurevitch, 2000; De Beer & Steyn, 1996; Hatchten, 1996; Herman & Chomsky 2002).

The question remains whether selection is a subjective process, which is open to bias by individual reporters and editors as some media critics argue (cf. Bennett, 2003; Golding & Elliott, 1979; Graber, 1990; Schudson, 2000). The arguments made in several previous studies (Sreberny-Mohammadi et al., 1985; 1997) attest to the bias and over-presentation of ‘bad news’ particularly when this is about poorer so called Third World nations (cf. Golding & Elliott, 1979). Developing nations are said to be overwhelmingly presented in a negative light with repetitive news reports focussing on wars, famines, political coups and so on (Nordenstreng & Griffin, 1999; Vincent et al., 1999).

An explanation for the over-presentation and representation of ‘bad news’ when this has to do with the developing Third World, has to do in part with the nature of news – what news is rather than what it is not. News in mainstream media globally, reflects a fragmented view of reality (Bennett, 2003, pp. 48, 69-72). This is the first issue of concern to media scholars (see also Golding & Elliott, 1979; Hall et al., 1978; Marris & Thornham, 1996). Secondly, the ‘news’ practices in newsrooms around the world (in developed and developing contexts) has evolved from a ‘Western construct’, or more precisely, news journalism originated in Western Europe. Its concomitant values and guiding principles are also part of Western journalism that has been carried over into other (non-Western) social contexts.26 This is a second issue of concern (or should be) for media scholars.

26 In this regard, an interesting study would be a qualitative assessment of the Arab-based and Arab owned television news network, Al Jazeera, in how closely it imitates or differs from Western style journalism. Rantanen (2004) offers a recent comparative case study of the reporting by Al Jazeera on the US attacks on Iraq in 2002, compared with the reporting by the BBC, CNN and other European national news agencies. She concluded that the Arab television station differed significantly in its news reporting from these Western-based global agencies.
One respondent says wars, famine and coups tend to happen more often in the developing nations than in the developed nations, hence they are reported more often from these contexts (developing nations). However, when coups and wars do happen in developed nations they tend to be ‘big news’ because they are said to happen so rarely there. Some political media theorists and critics argue that such a response misses the very important point of the fragmented nature of news when this news covers the developing nations (cf. Bennett, 2003, pp. 48, 69-70; see also Golding & Elliott, 1979). What they mean by this is that the histories of developing nations and their historical contexts are omitted in fragmented reports on issues ‘generally associated with’ developing nations such as famine and coups. The contextualisation of news within its larger social frame has mainly to do with investigative style journalism.

News agencies are on-the-spot news providers and they therefore do not have opportunities for in-depth and investigative journalism apart from the occasional feature story, according to another participant. Ideally, according to media critics, news is what sells (cf. McChesney, 1997). In other words, good news is bad news and bad news is good news27 because audiences (media markets) are said to be disinterested in good news stories and more attuned to news as bad. The nature of news is the contested issue here, that is, how audiences are conditioned or have conditioned themselves to what they want to read about or view as news.

The issue seems to be that news sells if it intrigues and excites or horrifies. Hence, an issue of central importance in the selection process of news events is the commercialisation of the product (Herman & McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 1997; Thussu, 1998, 2000). This has been a central issue of debate amongst critics of media organisations, particularly in the commodification of news; turning news into a product that sells over and above the role of news to inform and educate. News must sell in order to be newsworthy, but this condition arose outside of the role traditionally of news as important information to inform the citizenry.

7.2.4 Objectivity and biases in new reporting?

A recent and a clear example of the ‘symbiotic potential’ between the media reporting the news and public action (social praxis) is the response by nations, particularly donors, to the “humanitarian crisis in the outbreak of cholera in Zimbabwe” (SABC3 news report 4-6 December, 2008). Putting this response in a rhetorical question; is it in the interests of donors and aid-givers predominantly coming from Western and developed nations to offer aid and assistance to poor and suffering nations, or are their actions purely humanitarian? (cf. Carruthers 2004).

Carruthers (2004) believes that even in ‘good’ and moral acts, the issue of power is pervasive. For instance, mainstream Western news reports never fail to represent the fact that such and such a country, or forum donated an ‘X’-amount of aid to some developing nation. This aspect of ‘identity construction’ in the media has been referred to as ‘imaging’. Aid giving is never an anonymous event it is usually reported globally in news reports and repetitively, meaning that the event appears several times in news reports, not to mention across several different news stations and in different newspapers. Carruthers (2004) questions this ‘imaging’ of Western donors as benevolent and generous to nations mainly of the Third World that are seen as ever-dependent on this aid for their survival. Escobar (1995), on the one hand, state that the identities the Third World have been ‘constructed’ as ‘dependent’ on developed nations. The news media (whether unintentionally) play a key role in this image-construction and in the identity-formation of nations in how nations are repetitively portrayed in news.

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28 Further research on the symbolism and ‘the ideology of aid-giving’ would make an interesting area of study with a hypothesis that aid-giving is not a neutral act; it has simultaneous political, humanitarian, reparation and economic connotations.

29 This repetition of a single event in news reporting has an interesting conditioning effect on viewers’, or readers’ or listeners’ perceptions, and this is an area for further study in ‘the psychology’ or ‘effects’ of news messages on cognitive processing. Several other interesting studies reveal how audiences’ perceptions have either been influenced by the news media or, in turn, influence the shape of media reports – see Crigler (1999), Cook (1999), Bennett and Klockner (1999), Gamson (1999), V. Price, D. Tewksbury, & E. Powers, (1997), and M. V. Patti, H. A. Semetko, & C. H. De Vreese, (1999). These studies fall mainly within an area of social-psychological research or ‘media effects’ research.

30 It would make a further and interesting case study, to observe how news constructs identities of nations based on how they are pictured or photographed in news reports.
However, is it a fair comment that media deliberately report ‘bad news’ from these developing contexts and ‘good’ or positive news from developed contexts as many previous studies have framed as an imbalance in news flows?

The reactions by foreign nations to a domestic local crisis also reflects partly the influence (and the meaning) of globalisation and the inter-dependencies of world nations to ‘preserve’ the world and peoples. In the 21st century, media are significantly important instruments in creating awareness and in facilitating new kinds of knowledge and social responsibilities (cf. Croteau & Hoynes, 2000, pp. 14-21, Hunter-Gault 2006). For example, the use of media technology by various social groups and social movements to advocate for specific outcomes shows the assimilation of media technology in the real lives of people (cf. Burbach, 2001). One might conclude that there is an association between globalisation, global consciousness and the production of news by agencies and other media. The next sections review this statement.

7.3 News agencies’ adaptations to global change and constraints on the formation of global consciousness

News agencies, like all mass media in democratic societies, claim to be independent of societal influence in reporting the news, but they are nevertheless dependent on that very social context in order to produce ‘news’. The view of the independence of news media, which is predominantly held by media workers (rather than by media critics) is further questioned in this study (cf. Golding & Elliott, 1979; Schudson, 2000). The independence of media is usually taken to mean an independence from any external and internal influences on the media’s role and not just independence from government or market and business influences.

A ‘free’ and an uninhibited press is associated with the ‘libertarian’ principles of press freedom and liberal views on democracy, or the right to communicate (see McQuail 1987, Curran 2000b, Curran and Leys 2000). What are identified in this study are mainly external pressures and constraints on news workers, the agencies
they work for, and on the changing behaviours that they exhibit in order to compensate for working under these constraints (cf. Bennett, 2003, pp. 164-175, 180-3). These findings further question the libertarian view of the uninhibited and unconstrained role of the press (see also Curran, 2000b; Curran & Leys, 2000).

The main structures influencing the media’s independence have been classified under the broad terms, ‘market extremism’ on the one hand, and ‘government and statist control’ on the other hand. These have a constraining influence over news flows including influencing the production, selection and distribution of news and ultimately the labour of journalists at news agencies. The term ‘alienation’ introduced earlier in the discussion is just as relevant here to describe the impact of these constraining factors in the process of news making and ultimately on the formation of global consciousness (cf. Bennett, 2003, pp. 185-186).

Other constraints on the activities of journalists and on global consciousness in the production of news may be attributed to differences in the perceptions of and ‘cultures of news’, the fragmentation of news events from its historical occurrence or the de-historicisation of events, conflicting and competing news values in the definition, selection and production of news (the latter two factors relate to the growing tabloidisation of news, together with too much market influence), and media conglomerisation (cf. Bennett, 2003; Berkowitz 1997; Tuchman 1978; Thussu, 1998, own italics). The preceding three chapters introduced and describe these factors, but this chapter consolidates a critical analysis.

A higher level (or more complex) discussion on the role of news agencies must seek to go beyond seeing these agencies merely as producers and distributors of news. News agencies are contributing to maintaining the global social system of inter- and trans-national relations (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen 1998, 2000; Held & McGrew 2003). This occurs through information exchanges and in the facilitation and flow of ideas (knowledge) across national borders and within

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31 The term *alienation* is extracted and adapted from the traditional Marxist use to mean the separation of social actors from the means of production and from control over the final product.
nations. The information that is disseminated is in question here – who controls it, and who decides on its content and relevance. The media instruments (e.g. news agencies) inadvertently facilitate global relations through the information that they transmit. The use of technology further facilitates the operations of the media and the flow of information (discussed below).

The following sub-section addresses a point raised earlier in the discussion above on why the mainstream and commercial news agency operations are unlikely to fulfil the role of highlighting conditions for global improvement (and to stimulate global consciousness). What comes to the foreground in this discussion, are the competing values of newsworthiness and the different perceptions of news, or ‘cultures of news’ and a search for an ‘alternative’ news model.

7.3.1 Prospects for news agencies in a post-industrial society

Either extreme market forces such as intense competition and profit making, or government propaganda and control, are affecting the news product, which is the result of the activities of news agencies, amongst others. Global agencies are in competition with each other and with other media (retail media) to obtain and to sell news. Global news agencies’ audiences are mainly internationally based and global in scope. The content of their news is also geared towards meeting the need for specific information required by certain audiences and for particular media clients, but the ultimate end is to boost revenues for the agency.

At the end of the previous section, certain adaptation strategies by news agencies are discussed. Global news agencies are adapting to increasing competition amongst each other by expanding their operations regionally on all continents.

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32 Elsewhere, Castells (1996, 1998) has referred to the ‘informational society’ and ‘informational capital’ both of which rely on the capacity and effective use of knowledge and information. In Castells’s view, information technology is central to these transformations.

33 The focus is not on the content of news or on how news is produced but on why news is important to the discussion in so far as it is the product of news agencies and it is also affected by how news agencies respond to broader conditions of change.

34 This is best illustrated in the transformations and changes at the Reuters news organisation that specializes in providing financial and economic news for investors, and banking and trading houses. Reuters has accordingly maintained its position as a leading global news industry because it has been able to adapt successfully to broader social changes (as discussed in previous chapters).
Regional bureaus act as satellite-centres to the main operations of global agencies with their headquarters in the city of origin. News agencies are also increasingly adapting to new information technology (IT), by setting up direct subscription services to the public via the internet. Finding special areas of interest to emerging markets, or niche areas, is another adaptive strategy.

These adaptations are seen as responses to external social pressures and a transforming global news and information environment. One explanation for the (need of) adaptation and coping strategies at news agencies is the increasingly intense competition from various sectors in the information industry, including from the public realm. This is explained as partly due to the introduction of new technologies and new systems of knowledge. News agencies compete amongst themselves to be the main distributors and sources of news worldwide but are also (in the transforming global society) having to compete with non-conventional sources and distributors of news.

Internal pressures are addressed as changes in ownership patterns at news agencies, which have a direct and an indirect impact on the news product (see chapters 4 and 6). Gatekeeping and editorial practices influences the labour of journalists in newsrooms and are further pressures on the work of journalists and the final news product. The internal pressures to the structures and operations of news agencies are related to the broader external challenges, for instance, ownership may follow the same or similar pattern of socio-economic and political order in a society: if the society is predominantly corporatist the mainstream media may be mostly privately owned. If the society is authoritarian (i.e. statist), the media tends to be mainly state owned and heavily regulated.

In the news and information industry, a shift is already visible in the prevalence of so-called citizens’ journalism or public journalism. Social movements, organised around diverse and varied socio-political and cultural issues, are finding alternative ways to construct inclusive identities (that diverse people can embrace) and to build new forms of ‘community’. Held and McGrew (2003, p.34) state
Cultural and political identity today is constantly under review and reconstruction… At the same time, the globalisation of cultural processes and communication is stimulating new images of community, new avenues of political participation, and new discourses of identity.

In the new world order, these relationships are redefining solidarity (and its purpose) because these organisations and their memberships are not bound by space or time, even though the actions of such groups are coordinated and executed in real time. Amnesty International (AmnestyInternational.org), MoveOn.org, Greenpeace.org and other global social movements are examples of this type of civilian and activist organisations (see also Boyd-Barrett 2004; Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 18).

They are not bound by space because of the connectivity offered by new media technologies. They are not bound by time because the structure of these organisations extends through past, present and future, based on the issues that they are organised around. Individual identities (diverse as they are) within these movements exist alongside the common group identity (cf. Held & McGrew, 2003, pp. 291-4).

A synergizing of technologies, referring to the combined effect in the use of several technologies; computers, satellites, cable, the microchip, and the Internet, is revolutionizing information production and producing new kinds of knowledge and skills. Instantaneous streams of digitised information (including sounds, pictures, motion and script) are available to those who have access to the hardware and software of computerised technology. Relationships and communication patterns are also changing. In news production, the trend is to incorporate this synergizing of technologies that enables and expands news networks and makes such operations more competitive. Newspaper pages with content are accessible in digital format and read off computer screens. It does mean, however, the restructuring of the industry again with many ‘left out’. Potential crises facing future generations are, for instance, information overload and information fatigue.
In relation to this synergizing of technologies, Boyd-Barrett (2004, p. 25) discusses media convergence in which “old media such as voice telephone, newspapers, cinema, and television” converge with “new electronic and digital media – including satellite, mobile and wireless broadband telephony, the Internet, and the Internet ‘backbone’”. Boyd-Barrett offers further case studies of the integration of public organisation and the internet. He states: “[t]hrough the web there are very many alternatives to mainstream media provision of news and information. These contribute significantly to diversity.” (p. 29) The downside to these alternative media production sites is that they have not (yet) gained the full credibility that mainstream news sources have developed over decades of their use. It is just a matter of time before alternative media content makes a significant contribution to the opinions and interests of all media users.

7.3.2 The inability and inefficiency of the privately- and state- owned news media to reflect conscientious, critical thinking and change

Just as globalisation has been identified as an unequal process (see chapter two), which is reflected in the conditions and the relationships amongst nations, so the mass institutions in the ‘glo-cal’ space (Robertson 1992) reflect these uneven relations. Global consciousness does not necessarily mean, therefore, that automatic change will follow. The evolving thinking and knowledge within nations is a condition that can influence the future for desired change.

This leaves open the possibility for the media in the 21st century (through advances in technology) to highlight conditions for global improvement. This is, however, unlikely to come through the mainstream and commercial media because these media reflect in their structure and relationships the arrangement of global economic and political disparities. The modus operandi of mainstream mass media is geared towards profit-ratings and market-derived values. Neither are the state-owned media in a position to serve the needs of the majority in any nation-state because political actors are more concerned with maintaining positions of power than using that power to empower their constituencies.
Global news agencies are established and organised on a profit-principle even if that profit is fed back into their own operations. The point is that they make news in order to sell news. News is for these agencies, a commodity not a social good or a justification for change (i.e. unlike alternative media groups that use information and knowledge to empower and to criticise). These agencies too are affected by the recent economic crisis that poses a threat to the operations of newspapers around the world, and newspapers are the main business partners for the print-based news agencies (see chapter five and below on the notion of a media ‘market extremism model’).

News organisations are identified as reflecting the system of global economic relations, in other words, of market-based capitalism. As a result of this, the impact on the product, news, is its commoditisation. Chapter five offered a detailed discussion on the commoditisation of news and the role that news organisations play in close association with the global capitalist process. As such, the power differentials between nations are reflected in the relations amongst news organisations.

Ritzer and Goodman (2004), drawing on the neo-Marxism of Georg Lukács (1922) defines a commodity:

> A commodity is at base a relation among people that, they come to believe, takes on the character of a thing and develops an objective form. People in their interaction with nature in capitalist society produce various products, or commodities (for example, bread, automobiles, motion pictures). However, people tend to lose sight of the fact that they produce these commodities and give them their value. Value comes to be seen as being produced by a market that is independent of the actors.35 (p. 267)

The above definition draws out the negative force in commoditisation in that, both producer and product become ‘alienated’ within the system resulting in their suspension by capital from the reality of their labour (see below on the effects of market extremism).

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35 Georg Lukács’s *History and class consciousness* (1922), contributed two major ideas to neo-Marxist thought, the idea of ‘reification’ in relation to his idea of ‘class consciousness’ – see Ritzer & Goodman (2004).
News agencies that emerged from what are seen as developed First World nations have a dominant position in the global flow of news around the world. Third World or developing and underdeveloped nations have corresponding news agencies that do not hold a dominant position in the global news flow arrangement. A contributing factor to the ‘alienation’ identified above (and discussed in previous chapters) is the heightened and uncontrolled competition amongst global news agencies to secure news markets and the corresponding inability of Third World news agencies to compete in this global arrangement and therefore their exclusion from it.

The argument is further supported that because the global news agencies are closely associated with, and indeed reflect, the global economic and political relations amongst nations, that this influences their news product and the content of ‘their’ news. Hence, the form of global consciousness that is visible is in people measuring their quality of life based predominantly if not essentially on economic and material wealth. This leads to further accumulation of wealth in an incessant and obsessive competition for wealth. Nations have, in the world economic system become differentiated based on this. In relation to that, the information conveyed in news has an inadvertent and an underlying value-orientation towards inclusion and exclusion of societies that can compete in this world order (Amin et al., 1982; cf. McMurtry, 2002).

7.3.3 Locating global consciousness in the public sphere, and the ‘fragmentation of news’

When we speak of global consciousness, we need to understand the significance of this, or the ‘so what?’ as it were. Global consciousness reflects the symbolic space in which alternative voices and images, rather than merely mainstream voices and images of the global market or the propagandistic state, are heard, seen and read in the media.\(^{36}\) The latter two domains (market and state) are able to

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\(^{36}\) An illustration of this symbolic space reflecting global consciousness is the recent US presidential campaign in which ordinary US citizens took up the cause and became involved in the election of the first African American president in USA history (SABC 3, Special Assignment documentary, 27 January 2009).
absorb and monopolise access to the media because they are the more powerful than the public sphere domain in which ‘alternative’ voices represent those of ordinary citizens, non-governmental groups, social movements and dissidents.

In a democracy, it is the public domain of ordinary voices that should be as much represented in the media, as are the voices of market and state. Democracy translated from the Greek ‘demo’ and ‘kratia’ literally means ‘rule by the people’ and that can be extended to suggest ‘voices of the people’. The alternative voices belonging to the powerless and those who are marginal in societies do not have fair representation in the mainstream media or any media coverage at all (see chapter 6). In a developing context such as in Africa, alternative voices may be altogether excluded from the mainstream commercially-driven and states-owned media. Their appearance every now and then in news reports is really to prop up a sensationalised event such as road accident death counts, or when firsthand or eye-witness accounts make it necessary that ordinary citizens and the marginal are heard.37

When alternative voices of ordinary people are organised and rallied around a specific event or cause then together, as a critical ‘mass body’ this becomes significant for media coverage. Such mass organisation and mass action was demonstrated in the politics of South African (SA) society which saw the concomitant production of “alternative media” alongside mass democratic movements (Tomaselli & Louw, 1991). In Mexico, the Zapatista movement adopted a similar strategy of using media to attract attention and coverage of their socio-political and economic concerns (see Burbach, 2001). Their members rallied around a specific (human rights) cause just like in the democratic movements inspired in SA politics in the pre-1990s.

37 A case study of news reports on the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis would make interesting and further case study of media representation. Much has been said in media reports from world leaders about Zimbabwe and mainly Zimbabwean and African leadership are represented and heard in news reports, but very little presentation of ordinary Zimbabwean citizens has been conveyed in news reports about their plight. Some nations are altogether excluded from daily international news reports. Also see Herman and Chomsky (2002), and Chang (1998).
In both of these examples, however, the mainstream and private media were (initially at least) not the main instruments by which these mass movements were publicised or given fair representation. It was the so-called alternative and development media (organised by the members of these social movements) that highlighted and covered their activities. There was an element of “public journalism” (Atton, 2003; Rodriguez, 2001) in publicizing these mass demonstrations and the causes around which ordinary people from the public realm had organised themselves. A significant difference between these two examples is in the form of media used, but the principle was the same (see also Burbach, 2001; Jackson, 1993; Tomaselli & Louw, 1991).

According to Castells’s (1996, 1997) formulation, the “informational society” which is a type of post-modern society, gives rise to all sorts of social movements that are organised along certain cultural attributes or identities (Ritzer, 2004, p. 566; cf. Sklair, 1998). This kind of social organizing is itself the outcome of the spread of information, especially of information-based capital influencing the re-structuring of societies (Ritzer 2004: 566, see Sklair 1998). Representation (in media) is not only about the dissemination of a wide range of information but also about the ability to use this information and apply it, for example, to gain further support and coverage. In Castells’s formulation of the informational society a cacophony of voices exists alongside each other that belong to diverse sections of society – the public, private, business, state and increasingly, the marginalised.

The key to unravelling the idea that alternative voices from the public domain are significant to be the focus in news reports can be explained by using once again the notion of Castells’s “information society” (1996, 1997). Castells’s (1996) idea of social change displaces the conventional Marxist idea of a working-class revolution (also see Sklair 1998). In support of Castells’s views, Sklair’s (1998, pp. 292-294) opinion is that the prevalence of various and diverse social movements within informational societies weakens the working class. The issue of exploitation is, in this view, once again displaced as the central organising strategy of the working class globally. In Sklair’s view (1998), other more
appropriate (to the context and time period) and relevant cultural-ideological issues arise to displace class struggle as a singular entity in change.

Castells (1997) believes that social movements are organised around different attributes than simply ‘exploitation’ even though this is also one of many factors that brings about social dissent. In his view social identities and other attributes involving culture, ethnicity, gender, religious and political affiliation and the environment are factors leading to the organisation of social movements. These, furthermore, need representation in the media to sustain their movements, but do not get this support from the mainstream media. The very definition of ‘alternative media’ arose as a result. It represents structures of communication that use media in unconventional ways that are not profit motivated.

In the above two examples of organised mass movements some significant issues arise concerning the use of media in public action. In the SA example, mainly traditional print media and radio broadcasting were the main instruments of communicating the messages of the alternative voices of mass democratic action (against the apartheid state). In the example of the Zapatista movement in Mexico the Internet was the main medium that launched this movement into the domain of international public awareness and which then attracted some (but mainly insignificant) mainstream media attention.

Two differences in the use of media in these examples are observed: firstly, the historical placing of these movements differs somewhat. Mass democratic action in SA was at its height in the 1980s before the Internet had become ‘public knowledge’ in the society, or publicly accessible (see Gudykunst & Mody, 2002 on a brief history of the Internet). The Zapatista movement in Mexico was formed in the early 1990s and was at its height around the mid-1990s when new technologies such as the internet had entered the public domain and civil societies.

Secondly, despite the significant difference in the types of media instruments used during these mass democratic movements in two relatively similar social
environments (both are largely ‘Third World’ and developing contexts), it was the human organisation behind the mediums of communication that launched the ultimate ‘success’ of these movements. In other words, what Marshall McLuhan (1964, 1962) identifies in his dictum as, “the medium is the massage”\(^38\) [sic] is actually inversely applicable as well, because the ‘massage’ or, more appropriately the message and messenger ‘make’ the medium, not the other way around (Jansen, 2002). Changing media technologies do however, as McLuhan points out, reflect changes in human relations and behaviour (action). For instance, moving pictures displace the static newspaper images; television and video displace the movie theatre as the popular form of entertainment.

The internet as a medium of communication gained popularity, it can be argued, because of the revolutionary way that people use it to communicate. It is instantaneous, effective for wide and distant information coverage, accessible to all computer users whether in internet cafes or in private homes. Yet, it is not the technology but the knowledge of how to use and apply it that matters more than the technology.\(^39\) The Internet, because, of its capabilities has the most potential of all other media forms of ushering in a truly global ‘public sphere media’ (cf. Boyd-Barrett, 2004; and see below).

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\(^{38}\) This dictum by McLuhan (1964), ‘the medium is the massage’, was meant to indicate the impact of technology in shaping and influencing human life and human relations and which has come to hold a central position in modern social life. For example, the print medium of newspapers impacts human communication and stimulates cognition, or how we ‘see’ the world. Television further impacted group life and the structure of societies for instance, families huddling together around this instrument over dinner leads to a break-down in communication around the traditional supper table.

\(^{39}\) In developing social contexts, that becomes a double-edged sword because as Miller (2001) points out, the internet is still largely a medium of information, entertainment and usage by a minority of people on the planet, by a select few globally. Furthermore, it requires knowledge in its application. Accessibility and skill of application are two important indices of internet usage which present problems in developing countries. The focus in this discussion however, is not the medium itself (which comes in a later section), but the organisational incorporation of media in social action.
The alternative global news agency, the Inter Press Service (IPS), is the equivalent of a social movement (defined earlier).\(^{40}\) It is organised around specific sets of ideals and identities (values) in a like manner that social movements are. IPS has taken on an identity that challenges the conventional understanding of a news agency. It does not operate simply to further the causes of capital (business) or government. IPS was formed with a ‘development’ focus and it aims to optimize the strength of ‘fourth estate’ journalism. But at the same it rivals its competitors by aiming to provide a product that is different from that of the global (mainly western) news agencies.

Its role and mandate in Africa (and in other developing and developed social contexts) is to build on the local capacity of journalists and thereby foster an independent rather than a dependent news environment particularly in the developing world nations. More importantly, it aims to give a voice to the marginalised, the disenfranchised and the destitute (also see Giffard 1998, and previous chapters, four, five and six). IPS emerged from the ideas and debates at UNESCO on a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). These debates centred on how to transform the global media environment into a more equitable, free and fair environment.

Hence IPS, rather than the global, or national and continental news agencies has in this study come the closest to embracing and, or creating ‘global consciousness’. However, under similar constraints facing the other news organisations, particularly under the current global economic crisis (e.g. affecting financing and funding issues) IPS is, arguably, losing its original impetus and its ‘public sphere’ mission as an alternative news provider. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the origins of IPS, emergent from independent journalists in South America and

\(^{40}\) To recap from previous chapters, the main role of IPS as an ‘alternative’ news source emerged from a philosophy steeped in development goals and based on the ideal of conscientisation (compare Paulo Freire 1971). Its philosophy is in response to and a rejection of the domination of news flows by Western media (see Giffard 1998, UNESCO 1994, McBride 1980, IPI 1972, Vincent et al 1999, Hamelink 1994). IPS offers a different ‘service’ to that of the global and commercially-run news agencies and that of the state-owned news agencies. IPS trains journalists in developing and in developed countries and has a commitment to public and investigative journalism. It seeks to extend the role of media in social responsibility and developmental issues.
Italy, and their mission, spreading worldwide among independent journalists who also embraced the need for a “developmental” response to the profession (in its being undermined by too much commercial news). IPS, however, is facing the same pressures and constraints as the global and national news agencies. It faces a threat to its original mission, structure, and operations, like all the other global news agencies, from (for instance) the global economic crisis.

The IPS is transforming too, to becoming mainstream, that is focussing on providing content in competition with the private news wire services or it is losing ground to the more competitively viable news organisations. In the post-1990s in South Africa a similar fate faced the alternative and dissident media of the social movements who at the end of their ‘mission’ of emancipation of the society had to transform. Forbes (1998) offers a case study of the ECNA (Eastern Cape News Agency) that met a similar fate in attempting to become a mainstream news provider, and to sell their news to other private media operations (also see Tomaselli and Louw 1991). With the onset of democratisation in South Africa, the ‘alternative voices’ fell silent. Their organisational structures disbanded, they faced crises of funding, staffing and the lack, it appeared, of a viable ‘cause’ around which to structure and organise.

Partly because of the decline of alternative media, the once vibrant public sphere in SA dwindled despite other significant social issues that require public engagement such as crime, poverty, corruption, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. One social-action group, the TAC (Treatment Action Campaign), an alternative movement, rallies around the issue of providing education on HIV/AIDS and affordable anti-retroviral treatment (ART) for HIV-infected persons in South Africa. It has had some relative success. This movement would make an interesting case study for further research particularly its relationship with local media.

In news reports of mainstream media, the tendency is that the usual and familiar faces of politicians, government officials, ‘experts’, ‘professionals’ and celebrities
mainly receive coverage, as indicated in the study by Sreberny and Stevenson (1999). News reports rarely depict the position or a viewpoint of ‘the other’, according to Rantanen (2004, see also Bennett, 2003). Ironically, this situation corresponds with the reality of social relations; the ideas of the influential are the more visible or prominently heard in society than that of the ordinary and mundane (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000, pp. 114, 119-130,167-8, 193-225). Burawoy (2008) speaks of the need for a more “organic public sociology” as a return to ‘grassroots research’ (own emphasis) in which the so-called ‘other’ is the focus. By this, he maintains that the organic public sociologist reconstructs the public realm, “(…) prompting their growing self-consciousness (…) promoting political inclusion and democratic deliberation” (Burawoy, p. 340). 41

The media’s tendency to focus on predominantly ‘mainstream issues’ and the more visible members of society to the exclusion of others, results in a distortion of reality and therefore in distorted news. This concern reflects news that fragments history, reality and the representation of ordinary peoples’ lives (Bennett, 2003, pp. 48, 41-77). For example, events leading up to a political demonstration, disturbance or a strike may be marginal if included in news reports at all. That is, until mass violence breaks out. Then the event is presented as an isolated incident, with much of the context (i.e. history) leading up to it less visible or invisible in relation to the incident (see Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Bennett, 2003, pp. 46, 48, 69).

An event whether a demonstration, a strike or the outbreak of xenophobia-related violence in a community, is presented as ‘spot-news’, as if there is no reasonable or contextual (historical) explanation for the event or a build-up of events leading to that one major event. At least two explanations can be discussed for this fragmenting of the social context in news, firstly, news agency operations rely on speed and quickness of response to get news out. They therefore present an event

41 For instance, studies on ‘the other’, including ordinary and marginalised groups such as domestic workers, nannies, black women (see Cock 1980, 1981, 2002), street children, shack-dwellers, and many other such groupings. These studies, by telling ‘their’ story, emancipates them in a symbolic way and encourages their own self-reflection and hence mobilisation as active members in creating society.
as an extraction, ‘in the moment’ and as if it just happened per chance. The investigative element is lost. This is relevant to the second explanation, that news agencies do not conduct ‘investigative reporting’ as a priority in their operations and because of this they lose the essential context in which seemingly ‘spot-news’ events occur in, and the meaning of an event is thereby fragmented (cf. Bennett 2003 on the mainstream media reporting in America).

7.3.4 Ownership of news agencies and the issue of power: social power versus media power

This section addresses the question of how patterns of ownership, control and power affect news flows and also impact indirectly on the process of global consciousness. A few global agencies control news flows in the sense that they are the gatekeepers of the kinds of information that is selected and exchanged within the other news organisations. At this point, one should ask, is this significant?

The aspect of power is revisited here under issues of ownership and control of news flows and media organisations. Couldry and Curran (2003, pp. 3-4) suggest that to talk about “media power” presents a paradox because on the one hand it means that those with power use the media to wage their battles, for example in political campaigning. The media in this situation do not themselves possess power but are the “intermediary” mechanisms for the use of power in society by other powerful social actors.

On the other hand, the media are powerful in their own right if one considers the owners of media or as Couldary and Curran (p. 4) put it, “the media’s representational power” which is “the direct control over the means of media production.” In the first instance above, power is external to the media apparatuses and exists in society. This position presents a picture of inclusion and exclusion because it is predominantly those in society with power that have direct access to the media while those with little or no power are largely excluded. ‘Alternative voices’ or ‘the other’ are marginalised and excluded from direct access in the media. This point of view is developed earlier in the discussion (in
section (7.1.1) which introduces the issue of power and section (7.2) which discusses ‘imaging’ and identity-construction in the news).

Another related point is that the media industry seems almost conditioned by whom they present (or represent) in the media and whom they exclude. Hence, audiences will get constant streams of information with the same social actors, ‘the experts’, ‘the politicians’, ‘the celebrity’, over and over again, on specific issues. A similar repetitive pattern arises in news construction with the use of the same ‘trusted sources’ by news journalists rather than getting a diversity of perspectives. Hence, the message (news content) may also be thought to be usually addressing the same broad categories or issues because it is the same people’s opinions that are being represented in news.

In the second instance, power resides within and is internal to the media but, only specific individuals possess that power. The power of the media with regard to its influence over the consumer and the public is different (in form) from the power exercised over the media by its owners. Both these types of ‘media power’ are not overt; they are subliminal and unobtrusive. Those who own media exercise control through policy prescriptions over who may have access and a presence in the media and in how they may be represented.

Theories of ownership and control of media organisations have focussed on government control (media ownership in statist and totalitarian societies), private ownership by business, cooperative ownership, and a mixture of part state and part private ownership (see Boyd-Barrett 2000, Curran and Park 2000). In this study, the global news agencies are privately owned with variations in their ownership structures. In the case of the Reuters’s news agency, the owners are private individuals, or shareholders and Reuters’ news is meant to generate profit for these shareholders. The Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) has a shareholder ownership framework as well, but this ownership comprises predominantly all the German media of which only one-and-a-half percent (1.5%) of DPA shares may
be held by each of the media groups in broadcasting and in the print media sectors.

The Associated Press global news agency and the nationally based South African Press Association (SAPA) both began as cooperatives of privately owned newspapers. This meant that their cooperative members control them, but both agencies are moving closer to complete privatisation because of the changes and pressures in the news industry. Newspaper cooperatives are not lucrative enough on their own to sustain news agency operations and a move will be made towards full privatisation of these latter two agencies in the future.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) presents an interesting case because they are subsidized by the French government and are partly private. Being subsidized by the state or government is always questionable because, as several authors point out, this affects the news product in one way or another (see Curran and Park 2000, Croteau and Hoynes 2000). The Inter Press Service and the Pan African News Agency are privately financed and owned, but in the case of PANA it relies on subscription fees from government-owned news agencies in Africa as a main source of revenue (see also Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen). News from PANA has as a result been seen with suspicion by global news agencies none of which has exchange agreements with PANA.

Their governments regulate African news agencies through policy, which in theory was originally meant to support broader ideals of nation building, sovereignty and independence, and development (see Barratt & Berger 2007). Most if not all developing world nations in Africa, Asia and South America emerge from a colonial history and their independent governments attempted to establish political sovereignty and new national identities. This included their governments assuming almost complete economic responsibility for the post-colonial development through regulatory laws and policies. This control has extended to their media structures as well particularly in the reconstruction of their national identities after independence.
The nationalistic media in Africa was started in this way after nation-states gained independence from colonial rule (Karikari, 2007; Kupe, 2007). This statist or government-led propaganda approach led to excessive control over and influence in the media operations in the African context. Furthermore, repressive governments vying for power are overtly sensitive to open criticism of their governance and policies in the media and of their failings and shortcomings, and they clamp down on media freedom and independence. This accounts for control over the African news agencies that disseminate local news nationally.

PANA perhaps best reflects a news agency struggling with ownership issues. PANA was initially set up by African states of the now superseded OAU (i.e., AU). PANA could not be seen to represent the voices of civil societies in Africa largely because many African states were illegitimate at the time that is, not elected democratically by their citizens. Indeed the history of the African continent has been a history of political instability, economic handicap and cultural-ethnic strife with civil wars rampant in many regions. These independent governments then funded PANA, but there remains concern from all of the participants in the study, mainly the global agencies and national news agency, about the credibility of PANA despite its being privatised and brought under new ownership in the 1990s. PANA underwent various changes in ownership from government to private ownership in order to maintain its privileged position in Africa as the continent’s news wire. Its “problems” are also reflected in the fact that, over the years, it lacked the human and economic resources in its news production and this stunted its growth and development (PANA Deputy-editor, 2006; see also Forbes 1998).

Clearly, state owned media are not legitimate sources of news and they are not representative of the voices of citizens. On the other hand, the Western news agencies and the SAPA news agency are in this bracket; they operate fundamentally from libertarian principles as discussed earlier. This means a certain level of independence and freedom of the media. However, Croteau and
Hoynes (2000, p. 49) point out that discussion on a libertarian media model are often “blind to the impact of corporate ownership.” For them, this means that media that is privately owned, is also threatened by excessive intervention and influence of corporatist interests which usually translates into profit motives. Quoting Bagdikian (1997), they point to the resulting concentration of ownership and conglomeration of the news industry with only a few big operations controlling the flow of news globally. This situation is equally as unsavoury as state ownership and control of media.

One of the consequences of the concentration of control over global news flows by a few news agencies is a homogenisation-effect on news content and the subsequent loss of diversity in information, as shown by Croteau and Hoynes (2000, pp. 46-47). This is visible too in the global news agencies competing in similar regions, to cover identical events and issues. For example, SAPA editor (2005) stated that when covering a foreign news issue, the global agency that responds the quickest by posting that event on their wires first is usually the news agency that SAPA quotes. This translates into all of the global news agencies covering the same or similar news and the fact that they are competing for the same news stories, as indicated in the example of the “lock-up” situation in chapter four. This news is then distributed in the extensive news networks to national and smaller news media operations who then report on the same news stories. A lack of diversity in content ensues.

7.3.5 Competing for survival versus the traditional ‘monopolisation of news markets’ debate

In past centuries, three global news agencies operating as a cartel exercised exclusive control over news flowing across Europe and to other continents. This monopolisation of news flows\(^\text{42}\) was not based as much on their ability to compete

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\(^{42}\) In this sub-section, the author is trying to show that there is a fundamental problem in the literature on news agencies. Boyd-Barrett (1980), Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992) and even Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998) are now more historical documents than acceptable ‘empirical studies’ and this reflects the speed at which information (even in academia), is being impacted upon and challenged by the equally fast paced production of knowledge, this made possible by the intervention of technology.
with each other but rather on informal agreements to map out zones for direct access to news markets across the globe that each exercised dominance over (Boyd-Barrett, 2004; Read 1999). This exclusivity was possible then because news flowing across nations depended almost entirely on these three international news agencies (cf. Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998).

These authors (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998) interpreted monopolisation as the concentration of control over news flows by a few big news operations (see also Croteau & Hoynes, 2000, pp. 36-51). On the other hand, concentration of ownership results when a few individuals have a monopoly over a news industry or a particular news operation (Croteau & Hoynes, 2000). In essence, monopolisation is about greed (accumulation) and the unequal distribution of resources, wealth and privileges. If this definition of monopolisation holds, then the monopolisation of global news flows persists in this present decade, but the form that this monopoly has taken is far more complex in the twenty-first century than previously (see discussion in section 7.1.1. on the issue of power).

The question to ask concerning the issue of monopolisation is whether news that is circulated globally is generated only by a few agencies that have exclusive control over that news. The monopolisation of news flows will remain an issue if there is a concentration of control coming from only a few sources, those news agencies that operate globally. In other words, if only a few news agencies with global status control news flows through selection (and production) procedures, then a situation of monopolisation exists. News agencies are after all the main distributors of news to retail media, and have not developed direct distribution relationships with the public. That is the business of the retail media.

The problem with monopolies is less diversity and more homogenisation of information. A qualitative study of the content of news flowing between and from global news agencies to other news media might probably indicate that the same news content and news stories are being circulated. This indicates the homogenisation of news. The monopolisation tendencies of global news agencies
particularly as they enter new news markets in developing countries is a certainty because they exercise a greater influence over news entering and leaving these territories than local (domestic) agencies do.

While it is clear from this study that mainly three news agencies are recognised as global competitors in global news flows, an argument of monopolisation becomes increasingly difficult to support with the ‘revolutionizing’ manner in which information is being produced in societies. These three include Reuters, AFP and AP, but also the DPA, and increasingly, the Spanish EFE news wires.43 The rate at which information is exchanged within an increasingly open network of social relationships and distribution channels also makes the argument for monopolisation difficult to maintain. News generated mainly for newspapers and other retail media outlets were predominantly dependent on news agencies as sources of news, but this has begun to change since the late-1990s. In that sense, the domination of global news flows by a few news agencies and the monopolisation-debate is questionable.

It is a fact that a few news agencies with global status have had concentrated control over the global exchange of news. It is also a fact that their operations are spread across continents (see chapter five). Their regionalised operations are sustained in part by the relationships (exchange agreements) with the local and national news agencies. Foreign news agency bureaus obtain much of their news about local contexts from the news already generated within these contexts by the local news media. However, the ‘foreign news category’ that local media in turn rely on still comes almost completely from a few big news agency operations, the global agencies.

The situation above is rapidly changing as the retail media (in local contexts) that include newspapers, television and radio stations are relying increasingly on their

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43 Because the English language remains the global language of economics, the news agencies operating predominantly in English, tend to be the more dominant. AFP, a predominantly French language news agency is an exception. Apart from using translation services, AFP has survived a long history as a global news agency having its roots in the previous Havas dynasty.
own resources for generating news content as indicated in chapter six. They are sending their own foreign news correspondents to cover international news. They are also seeking direct contracts of exchange with news sources other than with global news agencies (see below). In other words, local retail media (in all social contexts) are seeking out new options for generating their own international news than having to rely solely on news agency operations. In the near future, this will be an area for further study. Newspapers especially are faced with economic challenges as their circulation figures are dwindling so they need to seek out alternative means of generating income and this is affecting their agreements with news agencies. There may also be a perception amongst retail media owners that the future role of news agencies is uncertain with the introduction of new technological means of producing news as well as distributing that news.

There are also smaller news operations mainly within the broadcasting sector that are making in-roads in the industry. In SA, the private E-TV news channel and the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) news channel had both successfully launched international news bureaus in various African regions. Before it ran into managerial problems in 2009, the SABC had a regional office in Washington, D.C. In Europe, a similar expansionary-trend is reported among the smaller national news agencies (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 2000). The internet is also playing a significant role as a newcomer in technology and as a potential credible source of information for retail media. Technology overall is playing an important part in ushering in change within the news industry.

The ability to compete globally and exclude would-be competitors is what distinguishes the global news agencies from the national and continental news agencies in this study. However, global news agencies are increasingly facing competition from unlikely and different sources of news, particularly from sources that have adapted to technologically. Ironically, some of these new news sources have their origins in the public realm. Hence, several authors address the
trend in the new millennium of "citizen journalism" (Atton, 2003; Glasser, 2000; Rodriguez, 2001; Rosen, 2000).

Public journalism or citizen journalism is on the increase because of technologies such as the Internet and mobile cellular phones becoming more accessible in the public realm (Boyd-Barrett, 2000, 2004; Rantanen 2004). Rodriguez (2001) conceptualises “citizens’ media” as “a philosophy of journalism and a set of practices that are embedded within the everyday lives of citizens, and media content that is both driven and produced by those people. (…) Its practice emphasizes first person, eyewitness accounts by participants…” (cited in Atton, 2003, p. 267). Public journalism results in the interaction of the real with a symbolic space in which the actions of ordinary people form a common and a shared identity. This identity revolves around common interests in public matters and issues of concern to a broad community of people. There is a resulting element of activism or advocacy in public journalism when it has its basis in such formations (see again Castells’ ideas relating to social movements in section 7.3.3.).

Davis (2000) cautions newsroom editors however, about the loose application and incorporation of the idea of “public journalism” in the traditional profession of the “rank-and-file”, that is, within professional journalism. According to Davis (2000), some American newspapers attempted to incorporate their version of public journalism in their newsrooms by simply inviting members of the public to participate in sharing their ideas with editors. This did not work for obvious reasons. Public journalism is interpreted in different ways especially depending on who is doing the interpreting; the editor of a commercial newspaper, or a human rights activist belonging to a social movement. For mainstream newsrooms that are in the final instance concerned with circulation figures, revenue-generating and profit margins, public journalism is not a viable option or an ‘easy trend’ to follow. It that case, public journalism loses its intrinsic purpose, which the

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44 Synonyms or related phrases to citizen journalism include ‘public journalism’ or ‘alternative journalism’.
researcher argues is offering an ‘alternative’ to what already exists in news production.\textsuperscript{45}

The following illustration attempts to represent in diagram form this changing pattern of global information flows. It differs significantly from the illustrations presented in chapter two. In chapter 2, Figure 2-1 presented a straightforward (top-down) hierarchical relationship amongst news agencies and, the related Figure 2-2 in chapter 2 showed a ‘core-periphery’ relationship of clear dominance between agencies. These ideas are now being challenged because of changing sets of circumstances. Figure 7-1 below presents a shift in the global pattern of news flows and relationships in the twenty-first century:

\textbf{Figure 7-1 Global news flows in transition: changes in the structural position of news agencies}

\textsuperscript{45} Diversity does not necessarily mean a replacement of the ‘old traditional’ with the ‘new and novel’. It is placing ‘difference’ alongside ‘different’, each to co-habit the same environment, not as competitors but as offering something, which is in essence, different and possibly supplementary and complimentary. But, public journalism can also become the ‘fourth estate’ of mainstream news, news that is not covering issues of relevance and pertinence to the lives of the majority of ordinary citizens. Davis (2000) describes newspapers as becoming out of touch and therefore in decline with the people they report for and report on.
Retail media, particularly broadcasting media, with their online and satellite outreach direct to news sources and to news markets, are increasingly taking centre position in global news flows including the likes of broadcasters CNN, BBC World, Sky News and Al Jazeera (cf. Rantanen 2004). Rantanen (2004) and Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (2000) argue that global news agencies have been losing their dominance and influence (in monopolising the global news market). This is seen most clearly in this present decade. News agencies are also competing with non-conventional media sources from the public domain.

The traditional and older news agencies, Reuters, AFP and AP and the smaller but significant global news agencies such as DPA (German), EFE (Spanish) and ANSA (Italian) have extended their services of news distribution directly to public subscribers on the internet, and so have the national news agency SAPA and the Pan African News Agency (PANA). The ability to reach non-media clients and the public directly is facilitated now by advanced digital technologies. This trend is altering the perceptions about news by non-media professionals. The prevalence of online blogging and citizens’ capturing live footage of events such as in amateur photography, video-recording and mobile pictures may be seen as altered perceptions about news. The next section briefly discusses the future of news agencies in a post-industrial society and reflects on the impact of these for the future of news and information flows. The section thereafter offers a summary and highlights the main discursive points of the chapter.

7.3.6 News agencies as reputable news sources versus “citizen journalism” and the prevalence of “blogs” on the Internet

A question and a recent trend that has arisen from so called information imbalances or asymmetrical information and the dissatisfaction with ‘official sources’ of information about public affairs has resulted in the phenomenon of ‘blogging’. Nel (2001, p. 9) defines ‘blogging’ firstly as the informal term referring to a “weblog.” This “is a frequently updated website consisting of date entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears

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46 In Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998), and Boyd-Barrett (2000)
first” (Nel, p. 9). Nel states that individuals using an informal and personal writing style typically publish weblogs, and that there is a great variety in the quality, content and ambition of weblogs. (p. 9) Furthermore, a weblog (blogging website) may have anywhere from a handful to tens of thousands of daily readers (Nel 2001, p. 9).

More and more the question arises as to how to characterise bloggers and blogging sites. A blog is a platform for free expression centred around special interest items on the Internet. The conflict in Iraq for instance saw the emergence of a completely new type of journalist, one who writes for a specific blog and tries to distance him/herself with a daily-personalised impression that deflects from the conventional news media. Websites such as MoveOn.org carried their own news and opinions of the Iraqi war. It typically qualifies as a blogging site even though several individuals, who belong to the organisation/movement, write the online postings.

Catastrophes, like the tsunami in South Asia in 2005 and the devastating earthquakes in Haiti and Japan in 2009, are further examples of the capturing of these events by ordinary citizens. This prevalence of alternative, Internet-based information sources is an increasing phenomenon.47 Even news wires have indicated blogs as alternative news sources, but with a certain degree of suspicion. Since information that is present on the Internet cannot always be verified, unless, for instance, independent news professionals set up their individual blogging sites that produce news and that are accessed by disparate sources and by non-professional people. Several of the respondents (SAPA Editor 2005, AP Bureau Chief 2006, and the DPA Bureau Chief 2007) voiced this trend as a concern for traditional news agencies. The widespread use of cellular telephones using camera technology has added to this trend of citizen journalism. One of the examples being the pictures that were circulated around the globe after the explosions in the

47 See online website at: http://dmmselick.wiley.com/view.asp?m=y9o7m9tazujqbx4pp0&u=4924014&f=h as a sample page of an alternative online media source.
London subway, where no one apart from the witnesses on the scene had direct visual access.

7.4 Conclusion
The chapter explores the emerging issue of global consciousness. This is suggested as an emerging social phenomenon in relationship to globalisation. It is explained with the emergence of a post-industrial society, which is a knowledge-based, informational society. For example, Western Europe, the USA, and Japan display characteristics of this type of society. It is characterised by new, advanced information technologies and systems of knowledge, including different/novel methods of creating the knowledge-system. In an age of mediated communication and information, however, the question was asked whether the mass media could be the space for encouraging open public debate and reviving the public sphere? The study found that the market extremism model where there is too much of market penetration into, for example, mainstream media, and statist control by governments, will not support the development of a global public sphere. Instead, emerging alternative forms of media, such as citizens’ journalism, together with an emerging phenomenon, of a global consciousness evident in new social movements, for example, have been argued to offer a potential framework for pursuing the ‘revamping of the public sphere’, in local and global context.

In further response to the above question, the argument was made that various social movements have adapted well and strategised well under conditions of change referred to as ‘globalisation.’ These non-government organisations, such as Green Peace, Amnesty International, and MoveOn.org, are relevant to the growing post-industrial society. These latter are reported in the chapter as relatively successful attempts to rally and attract the interests of large sections of the public sphere or of civil society, to create this space for public debate and expression.

A further trend is the growing use of ‘civilian journalism’ also known as “public journalism” and “citizens’ journalism”. These are explained as the intervention of
ordinary citizens in reporting on events in real time as they witness them. But, public journalism is more than this, it represents a shift in the perception of ordinary people concerning what ‘news’ is and what it should be. This assertiveness creates the alternative space for the role of media that is different from mainstream and privately run media and state-owned media. Public journalism also ties in well with the idea of an emerging ‘global consciousness’. This latter term has been described as the awareness that creates ‘conscientisation’, the critical thought and action of citizens concerning their rights as citizens within democracies.

News itself is transforming with regard to who produces it and who has rights to public information and knowledge. The occurrence of “blogs” made possible through new technology and the internet, sees ordinary citizens supplying their own ‘news’ and opinions about events. However, the Internet has not meant equal access to information, and only those with purchasing power and the knowledge and skill to use this technology are able to access information. The international public space is being re-configured given these changes. These changes, however, and greater freedom do not mean improved democracy unless it is for the betterment of others – the marginalised in society. A democratic society makes it the duty (and obligation) of citizens to observe similar and equal rights amongst their fellow.

The chapter identifies important continuities and changes, concerning the role of news agencies in so-called information imbalances, as well as the evolution in their relationships of news exchange. This chapter extends and challenges the findings in previous research on global news flows. In the context of global change in the news environment, and in general, news agencies are, having to adapt and re-evaluate their position, and in their futures, under these external pressures. It is becoming clearer, that they are constantly adapting to changing internal and external conditions (pressures), which again raise the point that these media organisations are indeed intrinsically part of and influenced by the social change and social forces internal and external to their operations.
Retail media which have direct interaction with the public and which are more directly responsible for public access to news than the news agencies are, have always set their own news agendas and employed their own journalists to cover stories. They also receive news headlines or news copy from news agencies, particularly news that they are unable to cover across a country or from international coverage. The news copy that they receive is a selection from what the news agency will present to them. Retail media are increasingly seeking different sources and to enter new news markets to expand their operations as mentioned earlier. This is a setback for traditional news agencies particularly since retail media already have direct access to the public.

Global news agencies have undergone and are undergoing radical changes in their structure. One of the reasons is the shrinking circulation of print media, especially newspapers, which traditionally are the most important clients of news agencies. Reuters, AP, DPA and the others too have become holdings where specialised services (content on demand, financial services, news-for-kids, graphics, and video and audio streams) are increasingly supplementing their general news production processes. So-called soft news (infotainment) is increasingly replacing hard news in commercial media.

Specialised agencies like Bloomberg, Reuters and Dow Jones are providing, for example, the backbone of data and information that is relevant to banking houses, stock exchanges and other commercial trading houses. These financial-focused news providers present a basic shift in the traditional news agency operations. They also however, present a clear case of the integration of their product in the system of capitalism. News is a commodity of exchange meeting a demand and supply ethic.

Adaptation challenges the conventional monopolisation-debate in previous studies, which explain monopolisation as a condition. In this study, monopolisation is seen as an outcome rather than a natural condition and tendency.
of larger global agencies to dominate the news markets and news flows. Adaptation has inevitably altered the relationships amongst them and re-structures the argument framing the monopolisation of information by global news agencies. It also presents an emerging strengthening of exchange relationships with the possibility of direct ‘South-South’ news exchange as in the case of South African and the Chinese, Xinhua, news agency (also cf. Rantanen 2004). This ‘trend’ is seen as possible because of the increasing socio-economic presence of the Chinese on the African continent.

While there is still a core-periphery relationship between global and other national and continental news agencies (especially in the domination by the former over newspaper markets globally), the form of monopoly is changing significantly due in part to the independence and strength of global retail media particularly in broadcasting. Retail media produce and are sources of news to global media markets and their ability to attract markets is linked to advertising revenues. News agencies do not make use of advertising to support or supplement their operations because of the ‘spin’ that various advertisers place on products, which may question the credibility and legitimacy of news agencies news. News agencies are still the ‘traditional’ sources. They tend to avoid tabloidisation and advertising.

Another (more traditional) and competitive source of news is growingly evident from the assertiveness of independent retail media (that are the main clients of news agencies). Local television news channels are also less bound by space and time. They are now capable of ubiquitous outreach reporting on events not within their usual local and national territories. Advances in technologies are assisting in this ‘internationalizing’ of locally based retail media. A third and a more recent trend related to the emergence of citizen journalism are ‘blog websites’, or blogs on the internet that cover any and all sorts of information including news. This presents a different and an unconventional means of information dissemination and knowledge production.
These latter trends do not yet pose a real threat to the existence of traditional news agencies, but they may in the future. This especially includes the mainstream retail media, which for reasons of economic survival are now beginning to compete not only amongst each other, but also with all media producers including news agencies.

The element of competition is also a strong indication of the hierarchical ordering amongst news agencies. Global news agencies compete with each other because they have the means (human, technical and resources) to do so. Because they compete with each other, they do not have news exchange agreements with each other but instead attempt to be the main source of news for other media and non-media clients. On the other hand, non-global news agencies (the national and continental agencies) cannot compete with the global news agencies. They do not have the means to do so. At the same time, they enter into relationships of news exchange agreements with the global news agencies. A seeming dependency relationship therefore develops.

Competition has been a strong indicator of the survival tendencies of global news agencies, but the issue of competition is also identified as a justifiable explanation for the persistence of monopolistic tendencies of global agencies in what had previously been identified as hierarchical relations amongst news agencies. For instance, global news agencies compete with each other for news, news sources and media clients, but they do not compete with national news agencies largely because the latter are not capable of competing.

The Reuters news agency best reflects its evolution and adaptive changes to external pressures. It has a dominance, even amongst global news agencies, that sets it in a league of its own. The global news agencies, AP, Reuters, AFP and DPA (but to a lesser extent) are increasingly showing adaptive capabilities. At the national level in news agency operations, these external market pressures are also affecting national news agencies particularly given their relationships (e.g. news exchange agreements) with the global news agencies.
As a result of communications technologies for instance, the world has become smaller and more visible across boundaries with the resultant dependency that behaviours in one part of the world has relative repercussions in other parts of the world. A further example would be for instance emerging international governing bodies to address issues of concern across nations rather than between two dominant poles such as North and South.

This chapter has also sought to consolidate the research findings with previous related studies on the issue of global news flows and the role of news agencies. Particularly the issue of imbalances in global news flows have been re-addressed in the light of the changes mentioned such as technological, political and economic. Previous research identified monopolisation, biases in news content especially about developing nations and directional flows of news from global to local as main concerns. The point has been made that it is not a case that imbalances do not exist. The point is they do not exist in the same manner and form as they had been previously identified because of social structural and organisational changes, as well as changes in the nature of news itself.

In the study, it becomes apparent that the adaptive roles of news agencies occur under increasing external conditions (pressures) described by the process of globalisation. The impact of these market-based and external pressures are more visible within the global news agencies because they operate on a bigger scale than the national or continental news agencies do, and as private media organisations, there is greater access to them. At the global level, changes in their operations and structures at global news agencies have more visibility than changes at the local level in which national news agencies operate. This small difference might give the impression that more is happening at the global level of news flows and the re-structuring of global news agencies, but this study finds that this is not the case.
Changes at the national level of news agency operations are also visible, as in the case of the South African Press Association. What this study notes is that there tends to be a domino effect such that when one part of the news flow structure (such as at news agency organisations) undergoes change, this impacts on the news flows structure as a whole. Yet, further qualitative studies would reveal the potential positive or negative impact of such change. In this study, the change has been qualitatively addressed as affecting negatively on the global structure of news flows as well as on some of the agencies both global and national.

The main negative impact for news flows is the continuance of a hierarchical, North-South flow, as well as the lack of confidence by overseas markets and global news agencies on the Third World, such as Africa, reporting itself. The main negative impact on news agencies as news organisations has been the increased need to survive these changes by implementing structural and operational changes in their news product as well as in the area of human and technical resources. Smaller, national news agencies cannot hope to compete with the advanced technological capabilities exhibited by global agencies primarily because of a lack of financing of such technology and the need to build capacity and training in the use of these. This tends to be the general pattern on the African continent when it comes to the national news agencies. Governments, such as in the case of the BBC and AFP, may in part finance media operations, but these media are still able to maintain their independence in news production. African governments and media systems can learn something from this.

In addressing the nature of news, both the role and relationship of the news agencies as well as the role of news workers, journalists, have been discussed. Related issues of power, ownership and control and the commoditisation of information have needed further discussion. Ownership and control influence media organisations with regard to the news product as well as the news clients. In the case of news agencies, ownership and control impact the exchange relationships amongst them creating an inter-dependent situation of news exchange. This is particularly visible in the relationship between the national news
agency and the global news agencies in the South African context that are inter-dependent on each other for news.

The role of news workers (of editors and journalists) have been addressed in the light of news selection and production and newsroom policies that include that values associated with news production. The issues of objectivity and information sources have been discussed as central to selection and production practices. News agencies remain the most accessed and trusted sources of information for retail media, but that accessibility has been extended to other non-media clients such as government departments, non-government organisations and even in some instances, such as the changed role of the Reuters news agency, to financial institutions.

The differentiation between hierarchical forms such as global, national and even continental and regional news agencies will persist in large part because of the associated role that each of these categories are said to play. In the case of the national South African news agency, its national status is based not on its being state or government controlled. It is independent and owned by the privately owned newspaper groups. Rather, its national status is the result of the kind of news role it fulfils which is to collect and distribute news about South Africa or the national context to its media clients, which includes the global news agencies. In return, global news agencies supply, in exchange agreements, their international news wires with the national news agency (and to national news agencies in Africa and around the world).