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Presentations and Representations: Images of Newsroom Transformation in the post 1994 South Africa.

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A dissertation submitted towards fulfilment of Masters in Arts Degree Anthropology 2011

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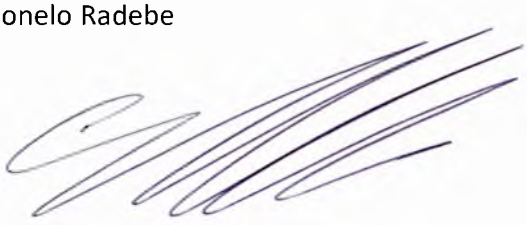
Acknowledgement

This research report was made possible by the gratuity of many people who had to bear with my many questions some of which came close to encroachment into personal and professional spaces. Most of these people were located inside the primary research site, which is one of the most prominent and busiest newsrooms in the country. Pity, and for ethical considerations, I cannot mention their names here nor can I make reference to the real name of their newspaper. Special thanks, has to go to the editor of the newspaper who allowed me into her newsroom. My appreciation also goes to members of the Wits Anthropology Department who contributed a great deal into beefing up my academic tools as I was preparing for this work. Again, special thanks go to my supervisor Dr Hylton White for his non-condescending but sharp critics.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this work was done with full understanding of the University's policy against plagiarism. Ideas expressed as mine are mine and I have referenced all the ideas that do not belong to me.

Sibonelo Radebe



Abstract

This study is a snap shot of how a particular newsroom, that produces the second largest Sunday newspaper in South Africa, is interacting with the transformation discourses of the post 1994 era. As dictated by the research field, a newspaper designed for black readers from birth in 1982 but now moving towards a 'non racial read', the study mainly grapples with the state and role of 'blackness' in defining news media transformation discourses. In doing so and through ethnographic observation the study confronts one of the key fundamentals of social identity construction, reconstruction or deconstruction. This is to observe factors which go into the social making of the 'other' and the distribution of power thereof. Set against the background of a newspaper industry that seems to be sliding towards extinction across the globe, the study confronts the dynamics which have shaped modern journalism as a critical player in the organisation of 'social power' and the prevalence of 'relationships of domination'. While a lot has been said about the role of journalism , its relationship with power and causes of its apparent decline, more needs to be done to better understand how journalists, as 'intellectual professionals' actually interact with their social surrounding as they go about in their daily duties. The study concludes that the fault lines and mainly the service of journalism to historical dominations, while they could be explained by structural factors, mainly find life in many smaller parts which are largely characterised as insignificant daily routines.

Contents

1. Introduction 1

1.1 Research Questions 12

1.2 Methodology and Methods 13

1.3 Ethical Considerations 16

1.4 Limitations 17

2. Literature review and theoretical framework 18

3. History of the *SA Mail* 35

4. From "Distinctly African" To "Non Racialism" 52

5. Ethongraphy of Intellectuals at Work 74

6. Trapped Inside Business 99

7. Seeking to Balance Expose and Development Journalism 115

8. Conclusion 129

9. Bibliography 134

Hadland, Adrian., Louw, Eric., Sesanti, Simphiwe and Wasserman, Herman 139

2008 *Power Politics and Identity in South African Media.* HSRC Press: Cape Town 139

1. Introduction

In 2010 the *SA Mail* newspaper found itself in the middle of a curious repositioning which spoke directly to raging public debates about the role and character of journalism in the post apartheid South Africa. A Sunday newspaper that has existed to serve 'black readers' for about 28 years had moved in 14 months into repositioning itself into a 'non racial read'. The initiative sponsored from the top by *SA Mail* owner, The Media Group, which still posit images of 'racial domination' by 'historically white capital' within the South Africa's socioeconomic landscape was always going to raise eyebrows (Van der Westhuisen, 2006; Tomaselli *et al,* 1987). Promoted and celebrated in certain circles in the language of 'nation building', the initiative was also criticised as premature and a 'calculated sabotage' of the 'black consciousness' project in other social blocs. If the repositioning of the newspaper can be taken to have caused a public stir, the consequences inside the newsroom were bound to be significantly unsettling as venturing into 'politics of identity'. Based on an ethnographic observation of how people inside the newsroom were navigating this environment, this study sets out to record the critical movements from inside the *SA Mail* newsroom and how they fit within the broader role of journalism in society. In particular, the study seeks to relate these experiences to the media transformation demands of the post 1994 South Africa with an emphasised interrogation of the role and state of 'blackness'.

The repositioning of *SA Mail* was quite remarkable given its yesteryear focus. After running with an exclusive focus to black readers since establishment in 1982, the

newspaper seemed to be firming up this niche in 2004 (Gongo, 2007)[1]. Back then a new editor, MTD, promised to infuse into the newspaper "Pan Africanism" of a sort which generally appeals to black readers (*ibid*). That repositioning coincided with the drumming up of the 'African Renaissance' theme as led by prominent African politicians including the then South African president Thabo Mbeki. The 2004 initiative was kicked off with the replacement of the old slogan 'The People's Paper'. The new slogan was 'Distinctly African'. The objective, as captured by the then editor, MTD, was to see the newspaper become an ally in a movement which sought to entrench an 'affirmative African identity' in South Africa (MTD 2010)[2].

With that strategy in place, the newspaper entrenched its position as the largest Sunday read focused on the black market. By 2007 the newspaper had reached total circulation of more than 200000 and readership of more than 2 million (Media Club South Africa, 2010)[3] making it one of the largest newspapers in the country. The *SA Mail* owners, The Media Group, seemed content back then to have this strategy alongside its other predominantly white focused publications. Established in 1982 and acquired by The Media Group in 1983, the *SA Mail* has been opaquely located within a media business that seems to contradict what the newspaper purports to stand for. The Media Group was formed in 1916 to prop up the rise of Afrikaner

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[1] Gongo, K. 2005. "Distinctly African": The Representation of Africans in City Press. MA Thesis, The University of the Witwatersrand.

[2] This is the first reference to informants whose identity has been hidden as explained under ethical considerations.

[3] "The Press in South Africa". 2009. Media Club South Africa. [Online]. Available: http://www.mediaclubsouthafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=73%3Apress&catid=36%3Amedia_bg&Itemid=54 [03 November 2010]

nationalism which transpired at the expense of South Africa's black population (Van der Westhuisen, 2007; Roberts, 2010; De Waal, 2011[4]). Thus the *SA Mail* has maintained a schizophrenic identity of wanting to be a newspaper that serves the political interests of its black readers within the confines of the *Broederbond* agenda.

Thus the repositioning which kicked off in 2008 appeared to be reinventing the wheel with a drive to become a "non racial read". This is not to say 'non racialism' and 'Pan Africanism' are natural opposites. But the South African historical discourses can make them as such. On one hand there are arguments that the *SA Mail's* brand of 'Pan Africanism' was exclusionary in nature and thus had no place in the post 1994 South African public which should be working towards racially integrated society. This view was clearly expressed to me by key informants within *SA Mail* newsroom including The Editor and the deputy news editor. The deputy news editor says "The slogan can be easily misinterpreted to mean exclusion of other groups [other than black Africans] including Coloureds and Indians". Steenveld (1998)[5] argues that South Africa's media transformation ambitions stood to be overridden by 'race essentialism' which contradicts democratic aspirations. On the other hand, there are still arguments that South Africa's publics could still use exclusively black social institutions to address historical imbalances. A rush into non racialism would disturb this and play into the hands of historical dominations (Mgxitama, 2009[6]; Badat, 2009). "... certain exclusivist forms of *organisations* need

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[4] De Waal, M. 2011. "Fear and Loathing at Beeld". The Maverick. [Online]. Available : http://dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2011-03-18-fear-and-loathing-at-beeld [10 February 2012]

[5] Steenveld, L. 1998. "The Transformation of the Media: From What to What". Rhodes Journalism Review. 29 September 2009

[6] Mnxgitama, A. 2010. "Why Biko Would Not Vote". *New Frank Talk*. 2010.

not be retrogressive" (Badat: 2). Badat adds that racially exclusive institutions, on the part of historically marginalised groups, can play a positive role to fostering non racialism based on "equal recognition" as opposed to dishonest "quick fix solutions".

The repositioning of the *SA Mail* was ushered in by a new editor, who took up the position in June of 2008. To fulfil this new mandate many things would have to change in the life of the *SA Mail.* Capturing this change and pin pointing their dynamics goes to the heart of this paper as evident in its title; Presentations and Representations: Images of Newsroom Transformation in the post 1994 South Africa. By 2010, The New Editor had rung some significant changes including the look and feel of the newspaper. She had also brought in a few new people to help a shift in the publication's approach to news. While she dumped the "Distinctly African" slogan as soon as she came in, she was quick to point out that her agenda would still affirm an African character. "I hope to inject a touch of Afropolitanism into the paper" (IOL, 2009[7]). This promise seemed to be speaking directly to concerns that the repositioning of the newspaper would further poison the 'presentation and representation' of black groups within the mainstream media which has a history of bias towards 'white domination and privileges'.

In my analysis, the constant fiddling with the *SA Mail's* character and 'market positioning' in the six years between 2004 and 2010 represented a struggle by the newspaper to find a comfortable social spot within the post 1994 South Africa. This

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[7] IOL. 2009. Ready for New Challenges. [Online] Available: http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/haffajee-ready-for-new-challenges-1.438694 [10 February 2012}

is particularly interesting, in taking place within a newspaper that has since birth in 1982 purported to be a black newspaper. This comes to suggest that mere blackness, at least the one represented by the *SA Mail* may not be enough to fulfil the transformation demands faced by the media in the post 1994 era. This then feeds into suggestions that blackness as defined by a stand against imperialistic and white domination may be losing its political currency (Hall 1996). Has it?

The latter question can never be answered without tackling the other side of the equation; 'whiteness'. More so, in light of submissions that the making of difference between blackness and whiteness; even within the politics of colonialism which emphasised exclusion; took place within a 'single social space' (Gluckman, 1958; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991). In tackling this question Scheurich (1998) submits that after the demise of formal regimes of racial subjugation being white is like "walking down the streets with money put into your pocket without your knowledge". Leonardo (2009) observes that the latter is useful but comes at a cost. "...the theme of privilege obscures the subject of domination or the agent of actions because the situation is described as happening almost without the knowledge of whites". It is for this reasoning that this paper uses the phrase white dominance more often than white privileges. But then I digress. The main point here was *SA Mail* in all its blackness is struggling to find a comfortable place within the post 1994 polity. There is a lot more that goes into this struggle albeit, as I will argue, mainly influenced by the race factor.

South Africa's news media fraternity, in particular print media, has its back against the wall as a result of various 'life threatening' attacks (Harber, 2009[8]). Political debates around the role of the media in the post 1994 era have become red hot bringing in their midst language that threatens the 'essence of press freedom' (Berger, 2010[9]). These threats are largely defined by the cacophony of regulations promised by the ruling party, African National Congress (ANC). There are compelling suggestions that the ANC is overreaching in dealing with a media that is failing even resisting to come to the post 1994 party (AIDC, 2010[10]). Submissions which point to a media that is perpetuating pre 1994 dominations are plenty and come from different directions (Braude, 1998; Durrheim *et al*, 2010; Ndebele, 2006). Interestingly news media products that have been broadly defined as 'black' or have transformed to accommodate 'blackness' including the *SA Mail* have not escaped the tag of perpetuating white dominations. This point is well made in Fordred (1996: 54) who argues that "yet as the recent history of the *Cape Times* proves, stereotypes of militant Muslims can flourish under a Muslim editor".

There is the fact that the social make up of the future has not been exactly clear since South Africa started marching away from its apartheid past. Mainly marked by the enfranchisement of the historically marginalised black majorities of the country's population, the 1994 political developments came to be soaked with 'transnational'

[8] Harber, A. 2009. Staring Into Newspaper Abyss. *The Labour Bulletin.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.theharbinger.co.za/wordpress/2009/04/29/staring-into-the-newspaper-abyss/ [17 March 2011].

[9] Berger, G. 2010. Surmounting Deadlock over the State of South African Media Freedom. *Mail & Guardian.* [Online]. Available: http://mg.co.za/article/2010-10-21-surmounting-deadlock-over-the-state-of-south-african-media-freedom [10 February 2012]

[10] AIDC. 2010. Statement on the threats to Press Freedom. *AIDC* [Online]. Available: http://www.aidc.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66:aidc-statement-aidc-statement-on-the-threats-to-press-freedom&catid=38:documents&Itemid=62 [12 January 2012]

dynamics to produce highly complex public spheres (Beinart, 2001; Fukuyama, 1992). The master narrative of the past which made the country's social landscape to appear 'patently black and white' is melting (Dlamini, 2009). The position of the media is further weakened by indications that readers are abandoning traditional media products and migrating to 'new digital media platforms' with claims that these new platforms come with superior 'epistemological and democratic ' grounding (Willis and Bowman, 2003; Zakaria, 2003). Quoting from A.J Libeling, Willis and Bowman argue that historically "'Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own it'. Now, Millions do." They add that "Individuals and citizen groups are stepping in to fill the void they believe has been created by lapses in coverage by big media"[11].

With all this in view, it appears as if someone has pulled the rug from under the feet of 'traditional journalism' in South Africa and beyond, living the profession staggering in confusion but still fully clad in historical gear. After all, Philip Meyers (2004) book title; *The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age* might be no exaggeration. The book title rings 'true' if one considers strong indications that the business model that has funded traditional journalism for more than a century is crumbling. Advertising revenue is diminishing. "In the long-term, we have to face up to the reality that newspapers as we have known them are dying, and with them the model of journalism which has kept us more or less informed and

[11] Willis, Chris and Bowman, S. 2003. Implications for Media and Journalism. In *We Media: How Audiences Are Shaping the Future of News and Information.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/weblog.php?id=P41 [11 February 2012]

carried our national debates, disputes, arguments and controversies for decades" (Harber, 2009). A view from inside the *SA Mail* newsroom, the second largest Sunday newspaper in the country offers some useful insights into understanding the challenges faced by traditional journalism in the post 1994 South Africa and how the people who make up a team of 'news makers' are navigating these challenge. Critically, the view enjoyed by this study offers 'cultural nuances' lost in helicopter analysis which dominates the debates about the state and role of journalism in the post 1994 South Africa.

A lot of thoughts have gone into comprehending the role of journalism in the post 1994 South Africa. The topic attracts extraordinary attention largely because journalism is generally thought to command powers that can tinker with 'mass consciousness' (Bennett, 1982; Golding and Murdock, 2000). And the profession has evolved with a special character of serving as a critical pillar of democratic politics at least from liberal pluralist point of view, a theory which dominates the actual functioning of newsrooms (Berger, 1998; McNair, 1998). As such the market of ideas is littered with journalistic accounts, most of which turn out to be heroic claims of how they took on the system and acting for public interest (Khumalo, 2006; Steyn-Barlow, 2006, Ngoma, 2011). These do offer some useful insights but as Tomaselli and Tomasselli (1987) argue, most are grossly insufficient to help the scholarly course. In a memoir titled *Responsible Journalism by Example*, Samuel Ngoma proclaims to have been 'a messenger of god'. In a way this links, functionally and symbolically, to the 'invisible hand' claims of the liberal pluralist paradigm. The claim

is, when placated within the market system, journalism serves no particular interests but the common good (Habermas, 1991).

There exist barrage of sharp criticism to the liberal view. This body of work is as old as the modern media itself, and is largely informed by the political economy theory of the media, as coming out of materialism (Bennett, Curran, et al). In here lives a contention that in a history which is far from being democratic, actually littered with injustices, journalism has served to prop up elitist interests (Herman and Chomsky, 1998; McChesney, 1998; Golding and Murdock). This position is best represented in the words of Henry Adams who submits: "The press is the hired agent of a monied system, set up for no other reason than to tell lies where the interests are concerned" (Adams in McChesney, 2000)[12]. In South Africa this monied system is fused into politics of colonialism and as such 'white domination'. This is a pertinent point where the *SA Mail* is concerned because the newspaper was conceptualised by 'colonised capital' and then flourished under the hands of 'colonial capital' (Van der Westhuisen; Tomaselli *et al,* 1987).

The latter is a critical point in this study whose ethnographic material comes to show that the *SA Mail* is very much impacted by its socio economic surroundings and while purporting to serve black interests does end up propping up 'white dominations' even in its ensuing repositioning which is styled as a faculty of transformation to better serve the post 1994 polity. However this report hopes to argue this point using a less 'rigid' theoretical approach which treats the research site, *SA Mail* newsroom, as a 'highly dynamic' space of power contestations. The paper arrives at

[12] McChesney, R. 2000. Journalism, Democracy and Class Struggle. Monthly Review. 52 (6). [Online]. Available: http://monthlyreview.org/2000/11/01/journalism-democracy-and-class-struggle

this point by stealing from the approach adopted by the Comaroffs in rolling out what they call "the colonisation of consciousness and the consciousness of colonisation". What is critical and taken out from the Comaroffs is a clear move away from treating subjects of social study as total victims of the 'super structure' and also desisting from creating rigid boxes of social identity.

In here lies a 'reflexive' approach to understanding power. It is a less functionalist approach which avoids the weakness of overemphasising material factors and also recognises human agency. Being a faculty of a 'cultural industry', what happens inside the *SA Mail* newsroom can pass as 'social performance'. This is to argue, as Coplan (1994: xvi) did, that "performance is rich, even indispensable, resource for understanding ... consciousness and agency in the interplay of ...forces, structures, processes and events". Coplan adds that the methodology of social performance "centres on this dynamic of reflexive influence and illumination between material, social, and representational processes, seeing them as mutually constitutive rather than discontinuous".

This research project came close to being entirely and wholly consumed by an apparent 'ideological divide' of the *SA Mail* newsroom sparked by the decision to reposition the newspaper into a 'non racial read'. Everywhere I went, informants were taking one of two positions, pro and against the move towards 'non racialism'. As a theme, this makes for an interesting divide in reliving the great debates that shaped the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the 1960's and 1970's. My key informants were elaborate in their positions and as such my notes were littered by this theme. The theme was developing a life of its own in being used

by informants to explain key developments within *SA Mail* newsroom; including staff departures, promotions, editorial content direction and many other things. And so this study was nearly redirected into a 'discourse analysis' of this particular divide. In many parts, it might be just that. For that matter, this report has a chapter dedicated at interrogating the dynamics surrounding the move towards a 'non racial read'. This chapter is titled from 'Distinctly African to Non Racialism'.

But then I had to move an inch below the surface of this apparent ideological warfare to realise that much more was being offered in between the lines. Firstly there was always 'appropriation of history' in the build up of arguments by my informants from both ends of the divide. And so this report landed another key focus being 'historical ethnography'. From both ends of the concerned ideological divide, the submissions made were more about the place of *SA Mail* in history than they were about the present and the future. I use the phrase 'appropriation of history' because most of these submissions are highly contestable but then deserve to be entertained because history and myths commonly mix to make social realities (Sharp, 1997). Secondly some of the language deployed by informants in defining and defending the role of blackness in the post 1994 South Africa made for curious connections with dominant 'markers of social difference' in this era. And so Boyer's words (2001) came rushing to inform another key theme and also chapter, being 'ethnography of intellectual professionals'.

> "I am arguing that professional intellectuals create an accredited formality for particular social knowledges of difference through the recursive elements of their knowledge labors, even if they do not, because of their own social and situational exigencies, create those

> formalities exactly as they please. How individual actors participate in the epistemic 'feedback' mechanism demands more focused ethnographic attention" (Boyer: 461).

Going into the *SA Mail* newsroom with my chosen tools of analysis is like stirring at the coal face of what goes into social identity formation and/or reformation in the post 1994 South Africa. In particular the *SA Mail* newsroom came alive in revealing factors that inform 'black consciousness', not the movement but the state of being black in the post 1994 South Africa. I have to state that I'm threading on dangerous ground in usurping the phrase 'black consciousness' from its ideological grounding to make it mean something towards the contrary. My point is, the social activity inside the *SA Mail* newsroom as revealed to me during the observation period was of subjects who are mainly grappling with the role and state of 'blackness' in the post 1994 South Africa. The move to reposition the *SA Mail* into 'non racial read' while violently opposed by people who fly the 'Black Consciousness Movement' flag, comes with strong elements of black people who are conscious of their blackness and seems to be seeking a more meaningful role within a non racial setting. In my view the latter group is equally conscious of its blackness as the purveyors of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) are.

1.1 Research Questions

The concept of transformation is highly elusive and yet it could be a critical factor in securing the future of journalism in South Africa and beyond. Transformation obviously means different things to different people. **How do people inside the *SA Mail* newsroom understand and interact with the transformation demands of the post 1994 era?**

Kruger (2004) notes that South Africa's political history largely defined by racial polarity and inequality still lives in the present. **What is the influence of historical social polarities on the discourse of newsroom transformation?**

For such a pregnant concept, words may not be enough to express and comprehend the meaning of transformation held in newsrooms. It could be that the essence of transformation is inculcated into the DNA of newsrooms or that newsrooms are built to repel anything to do with this concept. **How do South Africa's newsrooms interact with the transformation discourse in their daily operations and production systems?**

It is tempting to entertain a thought that South Africa's news media transformation discourse is only a symptom of a bigger problem faced by the practice of journalism, as shaped by positivist principles. The decline of traditional journalism is in some analysis characterised as a rejection of the idea that certain individuals should have a 'special status' on a questionable basis that 'they can tell the truth'. So the question is: **How does South Africa's newsroom transformation discourse fit within global trends?**

1.2 Methodology and Methods

This study was mainly conducted through ethnographic observation at the *SA Mail* newsroom which is located in Johannesburg. While the *SA Mail* newsroom was my primary field of study and produced most of my key informants, the field of this study was to a certain extent borderless. This is partly a result of the fact that newsrooms are outwardly focused in their nature and have histories which demands conversations with people who played key roles in the making of the past and

present. Some of these individuals have left the newsroom. As such, plenty a times, I found myself taking notes for this study in many other places across the country.

This research project was primarily designed to be a qualitative study. The project set out to understand meaning, perceptions and attitudes of people towards transformation within a South African newsroom. This mission was undertaken through ethnographic observation. Partly, as a result of time and resources available to perform the study, I have taken a conscious decision to stay clear of positivist ambitions at theoretical level. And critically, this is also informed by my positionality in relation to the subject matter. Being a practicing journalist, I delved into this study with a strong epistemological position. As a journalist, I have never thought of myself to be capable of "telling the truth". I have always been aware of my subjective interpretation of social events and news. I therefore delved into this study with views about how journalism operates and how it should be. In a sense my 'positionality' pushed my intellectual outlook on the subject matter towards a relativist corner.

To a certain extent my 'positionality' made me a participant observer in this largely ethnographic study. While my stay at the *SA Mail* newsroom was limited to a three months period; between June and September 2010; my interaction with some of the key informants continued beyond this period and outside the *SA Mail* newsroom. This was made possible by my own journalistic activities which made it possible to frequently meet up with informants from the field. In a way, I found myself in a fortunate position where the research field seemed to be following me. For instance, in October 2010 I was employed by a newly established national daily newspaper

and found myself amidst three individuals who were at the *SA Mail* newsroom when I was there for the purpose of this study. There were three more people who in their long journalistic careers had spent time inside the *SA Mail* newsroom. And so the conversations which started during my observational period inside the *SA Mail* newsroom continued. Critically these conversations continued because, the key theme of the study being transformation of newsrooms in the post 1994 era, confronted us on a daily basis within our new place of employment.

This study was largely informed by conversations with key stakeholders located mainly inside the *SA Mail* newsroom and also with a small number of outsiders who I considered as interested parties. Inside the *SA Mial* newsroom I had formal and informal conversations with no less than 20 people and about 10 people who were located outside the newsroom. These conversations and interviews were selected out of what should pass as non probability sampling. These interviews and conversations were guided by a purposive sampling which was employed because I necessarily wanted to talk to people who are strategically located, who are influential and who have strong views about the subject matter. The engagement with the few key individuals then snowballed to cover a larger group inside and outside the newsroom. This shaped up in this way because I had a history with some of the individuals located inside the *SA Mail* newsroom. For example I had previously worked with one key informant in the same organisation before he moved to *SA Mail*. He held my hand and opened access to many other people.

The ethnography rolled out was also shaped by mere observation of events from a safe distance not to interfere with 'natural behaviour'. I could do this because I went

into the field with strong understanding of how the newsroom works. This enabled me to watch events, take notes and make sense of day to day action inside the newsroom without coming into the face of actors. The report also features considerable amount of text produced inside the SA Mail newsroom. It was not my brief nor was it my intention to venture into full 'textual analysis' which demands to be a project on its own. But then most of the text featured in this report was produced around the time of my observation period and as such form part of the social setting I was out to capture. Most of this text was conceptualised, discussed and put to paper in my presence.

On completion of the ethnography, I subjected the data to critical analysis by largely employing the 'grounded theory' approach. This included coding and thematic classification of the ethnographic data and archival material. Using established theoretical frameworks I sifted through the data to expose qualitative meanings.

1.3 Ethical Considerations

I went into this study while being a practicing journalist, at first as freelancer and later in the employ of a media house. This came with ethical challenges. The *SA Mail* editor granted me permission to do the study in her newsroom with some conditions. These were primarily meant to safe guard the news editorial diary of the *SA Mail* and also what The Editor called "editorially sensitive information" and "potentially competitive information". I had to sign a confidentiality declaration for me to seat in the editorial meetings which proved highly useful for this study. In these editorial meetings people should be able to speak freely without fear of being recorded and quoted outside the context of the newsroom. As such while I sat in these meetings and recorded some of the conversations, I had to black out the

identities of the speakers. This brings me to a critical issue of this study being my decision to black out real identities of the research site itself and of all the people inside the *SA Mail* newsroom captured in this study. I have also blacked out identity of individuals of former employees. I reached this decision after careful consideration of the situation. While a significant majority of informants had chosen not to hide their identities when speaking to me, I decided to hide the identities of everyone including the research field itself. This is largely because, I acknowledge the sensitivity of the issues at hand and the potential to cause havoc and harm to individuals if this paper end up being used or abused for other purposes. I say this with experience in journalism. A reporter can get such a paper and then pick and choose potentially explosive extracts and quotes attributed to individuals in a way that extricate them from their context. There is also a consideration that certain comments have a potential to compromise job security of some informants. And so I have replaced real names with coding to hide the field and the participants.

1.4 Limitations

This research project as always going to be limited in its findings because of the one sided engagement of the transformation discourse. As an ethnography that is focused on the newsroom, the research missed the reader's perspective. The readers' perspective is critical in a study which engages meaning of 'presentations and representation' in media messages. To a large extent such meaning is created out of an interactive process where each party brings something to the table. This project misses that critical point of interaction in the making of media messages.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

Media and Transformation Discourses

Transformation is a tricky concept in that it can mean different things to different people. At first glance media transformation seem simple in demanding fair and just 'representations and presentations' and along the lines espoused in the country's political transition in 1994 (Kruger, 2004). Like in many other post colonial societies the media, as a potentially powerful tool in shaping mass consciousness, has been called upon to galvanise citizens for social redevelopment and transformation (Ndebele, 2007). While there is general consensus that the South African media needed to transform in order to align to the post 1994 politics, there are disagreements on the how part. Views on the role of the media in the post apartheid South Africa vary from 'watchdog extremism' to a lapdog type developmental approach Berger (2000). Throughout Africa there is no shortage of experiences where the media has been hijacked by corrupted post colonial elitist interests under the guise of nation building (Louw, 2004)[13]. And yet there is little doubt that the South African media and in particular news fraternity needed to shake off its colonial alliances.

There is the fact that the cultural identities which must be served by the media 'justly and fairly' are based on shifting memories affected by a largely distorted history which has come to inform the desirable in the discourse of transformation. "...the way in which apartheid envisioned South African society was, indeed replete

[13] Louw, R. 2004. Challenges facing the South African Media. Lecture at Rhodes University. Rhodes University. 6 October 2004

with lies. On the other hand, it is important to remember that (even distorted) representations are part of social reality" (Sharp, 1997). In the pre 1994 South Africa there was an organised attempt by the colonial government to foster social difference among various 'cultural groups' which folded into one, reality and political imagination (Magubane, 1973; Mafeje 1976). And so the country marched into the post 1994 South Africa with strong markers of social difference. Race differentiation was the supreme factor of all. General acceptance that the country is made of various cultural groups, 'a difference made in nature', is well represented in the 'rainbow nation discourse' which speaks of 'unity in diversity' (Beinhart, 2001). This discourse informs a lot that goes into media transformation themes and mainly allowing for fair and just presentation and representation of the historically marginalised groups. Fraser (1990: 120) argues that fair and just participation "means being able to speak in one's own voice, and thereby simultaneously to construct and express one's cultural identity through idiom and style". Berger (2000: 85) observes that "the democratic duty of the media has been portrayed in JS Mill style terms –i.e. as providing a platform for debate between many divergent and independent voices". Question is; what becomes of 'fairness and justice' as relating to representation and presentation of difference in the discourse of media when the social memory has been bruised and battered by an unjust past (Sharp). These can become embroiled in myth. In particular the reference to 'divergent independent voices' can be problematised when the history of colonialism, while showing a clear political effort to sow social division, created a single albeit conflict driven social spaces (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991).

At this point, enters the temptation to discard a lot of what passes as culture with a materialist approach. This is an approach which attempts to strip out myth out of the social equation and focuses on the material bottom line (Magubane, 1973; Mafeje, 1976). It is an approach that can be drawn from Gluckman (1958) who argued that an "African miner is a miner". The African miner's standing in society is impacted by the very 'social organisation' which also propels the status of the 'bosses'. The 'overplaying' of mythical themes is seen as sly obfuscation and even a drift towards 'structural functionalism'. This may be a sensible approach in a world where injustices seems to revolve around single source: ownership patterns of the means of production. This does not mean to neglect critical points of difference and nuances in different social settings.

Political Economy of the Media

The repositioning of *SA Mail* can be understood on two broad fronts. On one hand the *SA Mail* is a private enterprise which exists to maximise profits for its shareholders. On this account the repositioning addresses commercial demands as identified in (Meyer, 2006, Picard, 2004). These include pushing the newspaper's focus upwards in the country's income brackets which promises to deliver superior advertising revenue and profits. But then commercial demands of media operations are inherently linked to their political roles. Around the world, deployment of private capital has been a purveyor of all sorts of injustices and prejudices (McChesney, 2004). To a large extent the observation made by Karl Marx in the Communist Manifesto still rings true. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of

class struggles" (Bennett, 1982). It is broadly accepted that media operations straddle the line between industrial activity and the cultural arena. A comprehensive study of any media organisation must strive to account for the "interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communications" (Golding and Murdock, 70). "... the goods they manufacture –play a pivotal role in organizing the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world." (Golding and Murdock: 70). Again Karl Marx observations, albeit facing challenges, can never be ignored:

"The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance".

As a cultural agent, the media has been scrutinised from many angles for its role in the construction of meaning. Social scholars have been kept busy by the potential of the media as a tool which can tinker with mass consciousness (Curan *et al,* 1982). For that matter some scholars, loosely categorised as elitist, met the 'massification' of the media with suspicion if not resentment. These will include Friedrich Nietzsche who spoke against the 'rise of the mob' (Bennett, 1982). "In short they feared that the rule of the elite was over and the reign of the rabble about to begin ..." (Bennett: 35). This thinking may have been boosted by the employment of 'mass media' in the

making of the Nazi ideology, during the first half of the 20th Century in Germany, whose tragic outcomes are well documented. This may have show cased the power of mass media but does not settle the how part of the debate. Suggestions that the masses are there for the taking by a 'hypnotic tool', the media, remain questionable (Fiske, 1989).

This instrumentalist characterisation of mass media has been countered largely by liberal pluralist thinkers. Bennett (40) argues that liberal pluralist theorist like Edward Shills redefined the term "mass society" to represent "a pluralist hotch-potch of differing regional, ethnic, religious and economic primary groupings." In addition the masses cannot be treated as a single unthinking body of people whose view of the world is at the mercy of some grand ideological machinery. Liberal pluralism as a normative media theory submits that mass media, especially in liberal democratic societies, does not amount to a single entity that serves particular interests or ideology. Moreover this is unlikely to be as a result of the two way process through which meaning is produced from media products. The argument is, readers are not passive recipients of media messages. Other theorists have gone to an extent of declaring 'consumer sovereignty'

Nevertheless, the profession of journalism has developed to occupy a special place within modern politics. Berger (2000: 82) argues that "... journalism – unlike other modes of communication – has an organic and intrinsic link to democracy". This development can be traced back to the 18th century. Habermas (1991) locates the emergence of professional journalism in Western Europe within the establishment of 'independent civil society' which served to keep in check the powers that be and

thus became a critical factor of democracy. The massification of the media in the latter part of the 18th century seemed to position journalism as a 'force for democracy'. Journalism fulfils the critical role of disseminating information to enable both citizens and public officials to make informed political choices. "In these terms, a journalist should be accountable primarily to his or her own journalistic conscience..." (Berger, 1997: 5). The 'journalistic conscience' here referred to revolves around the idea of holding the mirror for society to view itself.

Borrowed from the positivistic ideologies, this claim of journalism to objectivity has always stood to be challenged. It has drawn more attacks with the corporatisation of media and annexation by elitist groups in the latter half of the 19th century (Manning, 2001; Croteau and Hoyns, 2003; Allan 1999). At an epistemological level, the idea that persons can extract and disburse social phenomena without imposing their bias seems absurd and mainly to scholars touched by hermeneutics and relativist approaches (Schweizer, 1998). Marxist scholars in particular have contended that the flow of ideas in society is inextricably linked to material conditions. So if mainstream social scholars are challenged by their social bias, journalists who are more crudely positioned within commercial institutions, media businesses, expressly designed to serve elitist groups have an even more difficult claim to objectivity. The media has been characterised as an "active intervener" and not a "passive transmitter" of ideas (Curran et al). McChesney drills this point in by citing words uttered at the beginning of the 20th century by historian Henry Adams: "The press is the hired agent of a monied system, set up for no other reason than to tell lies where the interests are concerned". In a world where the media is increasingly

dominated by globalised capital, such observations have grown stronger. Commenting about the state of SA Media Group's media titles, Van der Westhuisen in De Waal (2010) observed that these titles tend to "kowtow to a commercial agenda".

Chomsky and Herman (1987: 280) argue that "In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role [of mass communication] requires systematic propaganda". They add that the monopolistic control over media is obvious in countries with clear cut authoritarian rulers. "It is much more difficult to see a propaganda system at work where the media are private and formal censorship is absent". This picture becomes unclear where the different media entities seem to be competing against one another "periodically attack and expose corporate and governmental malfeasance and aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest" (*Ibid*).

Given South Africa's history the annexation of the media by elitist interests mingled with the racial supremacist ideology of the pre 1994 political establishment. The history of South Africa is such that "Political media and news were geared towards the white community and the legitimisation of the ruling political ideology, while political and economic alternatives were limited to the options advanced among the white polity" (Johnson *et al*: 48). An overwhelming majority of the country's mainstream privately owned media were natured by colonial capital whose influence and interests remain strong in the post 1994 era. Kruger (2004: 18) argues that South African journalism is very much a product of its past. "History casts a long shadow

over the South African present. Along with the broader society, journalists and the industry in which they work are products of that past".

The Crisis of Journalism

The repositioning of the *SA Mail* coincides with what seems to be a tumultuous era for the newspaper industries and the journalism profession in general. Over the past decade or so, newspapers have been haemorrhaging across the globe (Meyer, 2006). The operating model which has sustained newspaper journalism during the past century seems to be collapsing. Declining circulations and advertising revenues have sent many newspapers across the globe and mainly in the US and Western Europe into financial distress. Some were pushed over the edge and collapsed when the world sunk into an economic depression in the 2008/09 period (Harber, 2009)[14].

The financial distress of newspapers is broadly interpreted as a symptom of a fundamental problem. Traditional journalism seems to be losing its public appeal. "In the long-term, we have to face up to the reality that newspapers as we have known them are dying, and with them the model of journalism which has kept us more or less informed and carried our national debates, disputes, arguments and controversies for decades" (Harber). In her study of the role of the media in post 1994 South Africa, Fordred (1998) argues that "the epistemological grounds of the industry [media] are melting" at the back of technological advancement mixed with social metamorphosis. This comes to question the ability of journalism to fulfil its traditional claim of being a neutral servant within the public sphere. Newsreaders

[14] Harber, A. 2009. Staring Into Newspaper Abyss. *The Labour Bulletin.* [Online]. Available at: http://www.theharbinger.co.za/wordpress/2009/04/29/staring-into-the-newspaper-abyss/ [17 March 2011].

have been migrating into digital news platforms which come with a claim of more 'inclusive and democratic' dissemination of information (Meyer; Willis and Bowman, 2004). The decline of newspapers is therefore thought to mask a protest by publics against the political orientation of news they serve.

As the legacy of the past persists, voices calling for transformation of South Africa's mainstream media have grown louder. In 1999 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made this call after finding that South Africa's mainstream media was historically embedded within the apartheid regime (Durrheim et al, 2005). In 2001 the Human Rights Commission found that the media still served to perpetuate pre 1994 racial dominations and made call for transformational efforts (Braude, 1998). For its part the media industry has rung some changes which are mainly defined by the 'cooption' of black journalists into newsrooms and into leadership positions (Steenveld, 1998). It is hoped that employment equity in newsrooms would impact on the character and approaches to news in a way that ensures fair representation of the black population in the media. This cooption has to a certain extent reached the ownership of the media with black elite groups invited to take up minority ownership stakes under the country's black economic empowerment framework (Jacobs' et al). This cooption model has proven to be grossly insufficient as demands for transformation of the media have grown even louder.

Employing, critical political economy of the media outlook, Brand (2009)[15] and Banda (2009)[16] take the view that South Africa's privately owned mainstream press has

[15] Brand, R. 2009. South Africa's Financial Press and the Political Process. *Rhodes Journalism Review,* 29 September 2009: pp.9-10.

served the reproduction of historical hegemonies. South Africa has emerged from a white supremacist political regime which was officially ended in 1994. While the country has been a democracy for the past 16 years, it continues to be characterised by gross economic inequalities, mainly on racial lines (Van der Westhuisen, 2007). Transformation policies put in place by the new government have so far had limited success in breaking the dominance of the economy by elitist white interests (Gqubule, 2006). Brand argues that the media has played a complicit role in these developments by firming up an economic philosophy which is accused of maintaining the status quo. "Media institutions are part of the socio political process and, as such, they are implicated in the relationships of power in which global capitalism operates" (Brand, 2009: 10). Brand further argues that financial press in particular has played a key role in "promoting the myths of the free market". In South Africa, argues Brand, the media has historically promoted elitist economic policies because it is embedded within these interests.

Is this "flat footed functionalism" as Schudson (2000) has characterised a similar argument made by Chomsky and Herman? If this is critical political economy, Murdock and Golding (2000) argue, it goes far beyond raw functionalism in maintaining that the media serves to entrench dominant forces. This discourse is possible given the contribution of scholars like Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser in the characterisation of power as a phenomenon (Bennett, 1982). These theorists have contributed into the development of "a more flexible, less

[16] Banda, F. 2009. When Journalism is a Blunt Knife. *Rhodes Journalism Review,* 29 September. Pp 10-12.

economistic way of conceptualising the relationship between ideological, social, political and economic processes..." (Bennet: 53).

Here stands a discourse which maintains that the pervasiveness of power takes place in a subtle but effective ways (Smart, 1985). Fraser (1990) argues this point by offering a Gramscian interpretation of the 'public sphere'. She characterises the 'public sphere' as a phenomenon which facilitated transformation and not eradication of political domination. "This is the shift from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one, from rule based primarily on acquiescence to superior force to rule based primarily on consent supplemented with some measure of repression" (Fraser: 117). Bordo (2007: 167) speaks of power "whose central mechanisms are not repressive, but constitutive".

Content which reaches the audience is largely shaped by private capital in different ways (Golding and Murdock). Media financiers, be it providers of seed capital or advertisers, determine which ideas will make it through the media production pipelines. They subjectively pick and choose which media products to fund. The South African media market is also controlled by oligopolies made by a mix of local and international players (Kruger, 2004: 19). On the print front, all South Africa's major newspapers, with the exception of the Mail & Guardian, are owned by four large groups, Avusa, Naspers, Caxton and Independent Newspapers. The latter is a subsidiary of global media conglomerate Independent Group which is controlled by Irish billionaire Rupert Murdock. Having dominated the mainstream press, Avusa, Naspers and Caxton have recently spread their wings into community media and the knock and drops market. The three firms control more than 65% of the magazine

market (Voigt, 2008)[17]. Naspers has operated a monopoly on the pay television market for many years.

It is absurd to speak of 'consumer sovereignty', or at least a universal version, in this environment. This is because "nobody has a complete range of cultural goods as and when they might wish without restriction" (Golding and Murdock 2000: 84). Access to desired media products is also a big issue because private ownership of the media comes with all sorts of social exclusions. This exclusion could take form of alienating content or no access to media products. As Kruger (2004: 6) puts it "media products follow the money and so poor people are left out in the cold. One need not look further than South Africa's media landscape".

Media and race and the national question

The role of race in the creation of media messages, with a particular focus to unjust and prejudicial practices, has received much attention from social scholars. The bone of contention is the 'presentation and representation' of marginalised social groups in the media. Much of this goes to the racialised politics that are a legacy of western imperialism and the role of 'whiteness' as a political identity in these politics. Understood as a purveyor of dominant ideas in society, the media stands accused of reinforcing the dominance of 'whiteness' even in post slavery and post colonial societies (Hall *et al,* 1978?). Hartmann and Husband (1973) argued that the British media, bound up within its surrounding social and cultural traditions, contains "derogatory elements" to foreigners and particularly towards blacks. Many other studies have driven the point that the dominance of journalism by white males is

[17] Voigt, C. 2008. The fragmentation of the South African magazine market: The Spawning of Niches. MPhil (Journalism) Thesis. University of Stellenbosch.

cause for concern. Allan (1999: 157) argues that "... one study after the next suggests" that the handling of race in western media is framed by dominant white cultural attitudes. South Africa's media does not escape this conclusion as it emerges from a history of colonial domination.

While South Africa emerged into a democracy in 1994 with a promise to end racial domination of the white minority over the black majority section of the population, it inherited people and social institutions defined by their past. White domination persisted inside newsrooms which allowed for the reproduction of prejudicial media messages (Braude, 1999). In her study of media coverage of post 1994 political violence in KwaZulu-Natal, Fordred (1998) notes that this coverage tended to emphasise the 'black on black' violence theme. This, argues Fordred, played into the hands of white prejudice. She found that the narration underplayed orchestration by the colonial state and ignored other critical social factors fuelling the violence thus linking with prejudicial expectation that black people were savages bound to politics of annihilation.

As such, the media transformation debate in South Africa is focused on fixing racial presentations and representations. It is generally accepted that the solution largely lies in equitable representation of black people in newsrooms and in media ownership in the hope of achieving fair and just presentations. This is largely based on 'common sense' which has it that fairness in media presentation will be realised with black people 'telling their own stories in their own way'. It is this line of thinking which propelled the *Drum* magazine of the late 1950's through to the 1960's into legendary historical status. The black writers who burst into the Drum newsroom

during this era are widely credited for editorial output which served to strengthen the "identity and dignity for the slum land dwellers ..." (Johnson, 1991: 23). This can prove to be a simplistic and counterproductive approach to pursuit of fairness and justice. The *SA Mail* case partly makes this point. The *SA Mail* has been a black staffed newspaper for a long time but has not been left out by the demands for transformation.

A critical review of the *Drum* magazine during its celebrated era will reveal embarrassing editorial features at the hands of equally black journalists. "Nevertheless to those working on the paper, day-to-day, more important than politics seemed matters of football, crime, sex social music, magic mumbo and freakballs" (Stein: 38). To a certain extent the editorial positioning of *Drum* fulfilled a critical colonial agenda. "Rapidly increasing literacy brings in its train a real need for the development and sane guidance of Bantu opinion as expressed in the native press. Their function is also to maintain a progressive yet moderate policy on political and economic questions" (Couzens in Johnson: 22). In the post apartheid South Africa there is no shortage of publications under the leadership of black journalists which continue to play into the hands of historical prejudices and dominations. Fordred (1996) argues that "yet as the recent history of the *Cape Times* proves, stereotypes of militant Muslims can flourish under a Muslim editor".

This then links to the argument that the overemphasis of racial representation in the media transformation debate can be counterproductive. It obscures other critical sources of social inequality like class and gender. The extreme end of this argument has it that race is dead as a 'social signifier'. This comes to emphasise

'intersectionalism theory' that competes with the historical supremacy of race and mainly "blackness" in modern identity formation. Other dynamics like gender, sexual orientation, class, social status, political ideology, religion and culture, have come to complicate modern identities and their social settings far beyond the race factor (Hall 1993; and Giroux, 1997). Thus the path to transformation should not be overly dominated by race.

The repositioning of the *SA Mail* into a 'non racial' newspaper is styled to fit into South Africa's post 1994 agenda of carving a cohesive national identity. South Africa was remade into a new polity when the country transformed into a democracy with the hosting of the first democratic election on the 27th of April 1994. From then onwards the country was to work towards creation of a new public that is free of its historical racial divisions. Recognising its ability to shape the public's consciousness, the country's media was identified as a crucial player in the project of pushing South Africans towards a cohesive national identity and fostering a culture of tolerance and democracy (Fordred).

The post 1994 expectation for the media to play helping a hand in the political developments of the country has encountered serious problems. It came face to face with a stubborn view that the media should serve as a mirror to society and not align to any political demand. As a mirror to society, the media cannot play the role of promoting reconciliation and nation building because it merely exists to purvey the 'truth', no matter how ugly it is. "A political agenda –and by this I include a developmental agenda- should not, under any circumstances be imposed [on the media] from outside by politicians or even by society" (Stander in Fordred: 12). This

view is partly informed by concerns that the media will fall prey to party political interests and then fail to fulfil its role of keeping politicians in check.

The view of journalism as a mirror to society can stand against concerns that in its claim to independence, the media has actually acted as an opposition to democratisation. It is a view mainly expressed by the ruling ANC government. It is represented in the 1995 utterances of ANC president Nelson Mandela. "To protect its own privileged positions, which are a continuation of the apartheid era legacy, it [the media] does not hesitate to denounce all efforts to ensure its own transformation consistent with the objectives of a non racial democracy" (Mandela in Fordred). "Paradoxically when subjects believe themselves to be acting as free agents ... it is precisely at that time that they are most powerfully motivated by ideology" Tomaselli in Fordred.

Despite these philosophical debates, the case for the media to transform in one way or the other is well made in the survival struggle of traditional journalism as carried by the newspaper industry. Former journalist turned media scholar Philip Meyer argues that traditional newspaper journalism faces extinction and a paradigm shift is necessary to secure the future. "They [newspapers] can't just keep doing the same old things in the same old way and succeed" (Peters, 2001: 5)[18]. The South African case is rendered more complex by the fresh politics of transition. If journalism works better as a "mirror" to society it serves (Gross *et al* 2001, Gaziano and McGrath,

[18] Peters, S. 2001. Feedback: Newsroom employees want it, manager avoid it. Evanstone, Northwest University: Kellog School of Management and Medhill. [Online]. Available: http://www.mediamanagementcentre.org/publications/feedback.asp [27 November 2011]

1985), it is only reasonable to expect South Africa's established news media which has been owned, managed and largely understood by white interests, to transform for the new era. The *SA Mail* repositioning fits into this social background and could answer critical questions.

3. History of the *SA Mail*

The *SA Mail* newspaper comes out of a history that wants to belong to the direct legacies of the legendary *Drum* magazine. This link is in a way inevitable because of the towering legacies of the *Drum* history in all narratives that deal with the evolution of South Africa's 'black mass media'. Invariably, the Drum narratives can be folded into a single theme, being a search for a fair and just formula to present and represent black voices within South Africa's public spheres and through the media. In the case of *SA Mail* which has direct institutional links to the *Drum* magazine, these legacies of the '*Drum* era' are overbearing. A critical review of this history is thus inevitable and highly useful for this study which in the final analysis should be a snap shot of how the *SA Mail*, in a particular moment in time, is handling this continued search for 'presentations and representations' of blackness. As will be shown in the ethnographic body of this study, the *Drum* narratives partly informs and shapes the perceptions of the historical role of the *SA Mail,* its desirable contemporary and future character as held by different stakeholders and informants engaged in this study. In a way, the *Drum* legacies have become a critical reference point of how the *SA Mail* and many other black media remember themselves.

This chapter, a brief historical review will first display evidence of the direct institutional links between The *Drum* magazine and the *SA Mail* which extends into the 'political characters' of the two titles. The key theme being that the *SA Mail* as an offspring of the *Drum* magazine contests for a place within the pre 1994 'subversive media'. Contest being a key word in this narration, the idea is to critically review the extent of this subversive character in consideration of the structural limitations,

mainly ambiguities of being white owned commercial black media. These limitations and ambiguities are effectively exposed when viewed against the history of non commercial and black focused, owned and controlled media whose history can clash with that of *Drum* and *SA Mail*. Necessarily this review will therefore trace the origins of black media with an objective of showing the significance of white commercial interests as a factor in defining the political character of titles like the *SA Mail* and *Drum* and against 'alternative black press'. This review will also show that the history of the black press which tends to be collapsed into unilinear narratives is far from homogeneous. This is to say the history of black media is varied and is not equal to the history of *Drum*.

The Jim Bailey Factor: Creation of the "first popular black magazine"

The *SA Mail* comes directly out of the business ventures of one Jim Bailey, who is mainly remembered for his significant contribution in the making of the *Drum* magazine into "almost- the first black man's magazine" (Stein, 1999: 10). Established under its current name in 1983, the *SA Mail* could be described as a reincarnation of the *Golden City Post* which was designed to serve black readers by Jim Bailey in 1955. This is after Jim Bailey had harnessed *Drum* magazine into something of a legend and a pioneer within black 'mass popular press' (Johnson, 1991; Horwitz, 2001). After a slow start in 1951 *Drum* grew in leaps and bounds to boast a circulation of 470000 in 1969. At the back of this success Jim Bailey also guided *Golden City Post* to a mass popular black read. He sold the *Golden City Post* to publishing house Argus in 1964. The *Golden City Post* grew to a circulation base of 224000 in 1970 before being banned by the National Party government for apparent

anti apartheid tendencies in 1977 (Horwitz, 2001: 53). Jim Bailey then launched a new title called The *Golden SA Mail* in 1982 which was renamed *SA Mail* in 1983.

The *Drum* magazine, *The Golden SA Mail, The SA Mail* contests for a place within the subversive press of the apartheid era. The subversive angle partly flows out of the mere circulation numbers achieved by the Jim Bailey publications as quoted above. These circulation numbers came to subvert a critical part of the colonial establishment which actively denied the existence of such literary trends within the black population. This subversion is well made in the memoir of the second editor of the *Drum* magazine Sylvester Stein. He submits that as an operation *Drum* came to "expunge the image that the white world still had of them [black people] as illiterates, tribesman and barbarians ..." (Stein, 1999, 34). Thus *Drum* came to represent a key reference point in the history of mass literary trends within the black population.

Arguably the circulation numbers of the Drum era denoted the newsroom culture, of black people telling their stories in their own way. This comes out of Sylvester Stein's narration of how *Drum* was turned around from its struggling beginnings into a popular product. He notes that after the unsuccessful launch in 1951, a poll of views from the black community produced a simple diagnosis. "The diagnosis was easy for them to make. *Drum* to them [black readers] seemed designed for whites not blacks. And it was for whites because it was by whites" (Stein: 36). At establishment, *Drum* was largely staffed by white journalists, from the chief editor to the reporters. This was reflected on its positioning, content and market reception. In its beginnings, Drum therefore was a classic colonial product, all wrapped up with the racist nanny

approach towards the black population. "*Drum* ...had the appearance of being a donation from on-high, from the white man to the worthy 'native'" (Stein: 35).

And so came the 'Drum era' class of black writers who contributed to the immortalisation of the *Drum* magazine. These include Todd Matshikiza, Henry Nxumalo, Can Themba, Eskia Mphahlele, Nat Nakasa and William 'Bloke' Modisane who have become icons within what is generally celebrated as a tradition of black people telling their own stories in their own style. "Speedily they talked up Drum into a noisy opinionated journal, which is what finally gave it its world repute" (Stein: 38). These writers were mainly reflecting on life experiences in the 'ghetorised' black urban settlements. Leaning towards covering a vibrant black urban culture their narrations was to earn a character of triumphalism, denoting a remarkable human spirit to survive amidst crushing social conditions imposed by the apartheid state (Stein; Johnson; Wigston,2007). Their style of writing stood against a state enforced paradigm which treated black urban settlements as nothing more than labour reserves. Their powerful prose "reflected the extraordinary creativity of an age when writers, despite or because of the miseries and humiliations of apartheid, felt impelled to maintain their human spirit and values with a compassion and ironic humour which defied the encroachment of the police state" (Stein: 1).

And yet, to many an analysis the *Drum* style of journalism was defined by the sensational coverage of black urban settlements and thus was found to have been limited in its links to direct political engagement. While *Drum* content served to strengthen the "identity and dignity for the slumland dwellers, they seldom linked to forms of political resistance" (Johnson: 23). Stein submits that while it was a

politically cheeky product "Nevertheless to those working on the paper, day-to-day, more important than politics seemed matters of football, crime, sex social music, magic mumbo and freakballs" (Stein: 38). There are compelling arguments which suggests that this dominant character of the *Drum* magazine made it complicit to the agenda of the colonial administration. It may have served as an opium of sort. Couzens in Johnson (22) points out that "rapidly increasing literacy brings in its train a real need for the development and sane guidance of Bantu opinion as expressed in the native press. Their function is also to maintain a progressive yet moderate policy on political and economic questions".

While *Drum* is known to have run with limited direct political coverage it is nevertheless remembered as a significant player within the resistance against apartheid. In Wigston (2007: 39) *Drum* is remembered as a publication that "fearlessly conducted investigative journalism and addressed the social and political grievances of black South Africans". This is partly as a result of a sprinkle of investigative stories which directly challenged the colonial regime. These stories include the investigative pieces which exposed brutalities suffered by black prisoners at the infamous potato farm in Bethal. Anchored by *Drum's* most famous writer Henry Nxumalo's infiltrative disguise, the potato farm story had all the elements to become a generational landmark. Other such stories include exposure of racial discrimination within the Church penned by Can Themba. And there was the coverage of the 1950's campaign for the inclusion of black athletes in South Africa's Olympic team. While these stories were few and far in between, they have come to

overshadow the other dominant feature of *Drum* as a magazine dedicated to the story of sex drugs and crime.

There is no doubting the position of the 'Drum era' as a significant factor in the development of journalism that purports to have served the interests of black South Africans, politically and otherwise. But this view tends to be overdone in a manner that positions the *Drum* tradition as the alpha and omega of black and protest journalism and is sometimes crudely extended to general black literary trends. It is not my brief nor is it my speciality to uncover another history. My problem relates to the ranking of histories that came to influence the character of the *SA Mail*. Partly because of the Jim Bailey factor, *Drum* is a significant factor in this equation and there are others to be considered.

"The Ambiguities of Dependence" of the white owned black press

The factor of Jim Bailey, a white investor in a publication for the black market, is important. It denotes an important category and behaviour of the black press funded and controlled by white private capital of the apartheid era. Such titles are generally treated with suspicion particularly by scholars who employ the political economy approach of understanding the history of South Africa's news media. This approach understands media as being reflective of its socioeconomic surroundings. "In South Africa, as in other states, the mass media are social institutions whose role like that of other institutions, is defined or regulated by the economic and social organisation of society" (Chimutengwende, 1978: 11). Chimutengwende adds that the press reflects competing interests within a polity and the dominant forces tend to get their

way in news content. This domination could be marked in a publication owned and controlled by white capital during the apartheid era.

Chimutengwende's submission has significant implications for a publication like *Drum* which was established and tightly controlled by white and naturally 'colonised capital'. The Jim Bailey factor can be problematised and not celebrated as an unwavering progressive force. The Jim Bailey factor can be seen as another instrument of colonial subjugation particularly given *Drum's* shyness in tackling overt political stories. This shyness is reflective of what Couzens (1976) calls "ambiguities of dependence" which speaks to the limitations of black political leaders, in this case black journalists who in their protest against colonial oppression were beholden to colonial institutions. One could argue that black journalists inside publications like *Drum* found themselves in a give and take situation. They were giving political timidity to avoid the wrath of the apartheid era government but at the same time covertly taking significant political space through mere expression. "With little political power black leaders have had to walk a tight rope between collaboration and resistance against their white oppressors," (Marks in Couzens, 1976: 2).

Jim Bailey's censoring hand is clearly visible in the memoirs of Sylvester Stein. The best example would be the recorded attempt by Jim Bailey to spike the story about racial segregation in the church. Jim Bailey is also said to have replaced a cover picture depicting the first black women champion of the Wimbledon tournament Althea Gibson kissing her white runner up Darlene Hard. The picture was removed on Jim Bailey's instruction on concerns that the apartheid government will take offense and then close down the publication (Stein: 132). This trend of timid political

engagement within the white owned black press continued right up to the 1980's (Tomaselli et al, 1987; Nauright, 1997). In his testimony to the truth and reconciliation commission, veteran black journalist Thami Mazwai who started his career at the *Golden SA Mail* enforced this point[19]. "The *Golden SA Mail* did not touch politics although it thrived on reporting transgressions under the Immorality Act. It also specialised in sex stories. Political stories were spiked as a matter of course and we, thus, did not waste time doing them".

Jim Bailey's investment in the mass popular black market was mainly motivated by a commercial rationale found on the back of an increasing literacy within black communities. This is a trend which can be traced back to the pioneering era of the mass popular black press, the *Bantu World* established by BC Paver in 1932 (Couzens). The *Bantu World* which became the *World* in 1955 dominated this market up until its banning in 1977. The *Bantu World* assumed an 'apolitical' character up until the 1950's. This was direct result of being owned by white capital whose interest was to push sales while remaining in the good books of the colonial regime. In doing so the white owned black press may have served to prop up the colonial regime by imposing commercial pressures which encouraged the "lowest common denominator type of journalism" (Johnson: 23). There was also tacit political pressure (the enforcement of a sane –in white terms- interpretation of black organisation and resistance)"

[19] Mazwai, T. 1997. Special Hearing: Media Hearings. Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Johannesburg. [Online. Available: http://sabctrc.saha.org.za/documents/special/media/56346.htm [10 January 2012].

Drum type black media versus alternative and community based black media

The latter few paragraphs suggest an ambiguous character of *Drum* and other titles in the category of white owned black press. This is made clearer when viewed against a variety of community based black publications which were largely pushed out of the market by white owned black press (Johnson). It is useful to trace the strands of this history back to the early 1800's considered to house the roots of black press and more broadly black literary trends in South Africa. The first phase of this history features titles launched at the back of missionary stations like *Umshumayeli Wendaba,* the very first black press launched in 1837 according to Switzer in Johnson. Then came; Ikwezi in 1844 from Lovadale. Three other titles emerged from Lovedale including *Indaba* published by Tiyo Soga "the first great black literary figure of the nineteenth century" (Johnson: 16). The list also includes *Kafir Press* launched in 1870 and *Isigidimi Sama Xhosa*. These publications are said to have featured a "nascent elements of political opposition within the newspaper although they were extremely muted".

Towards the end of the 19th century emerged a press broadly described as the 'elitist black media' and marked by a significant break away from the politically blunt approach of the missionary educated black intellectuals (Couzens). A key figure of this era was John Tengo Jabavu who editied *Isgidimi* in 1881. He then established *Imvo Zabantu* in 1884 described as "the first newspaper to progress from being for and by blacks to being under their ownership and control as well" (Johnson: 17). Another significant title is *Izwi Labantu* which has been described as more radical than *Imvo* and closer to the South African Native National Congress. In this category

also stand titles like *Ilanga lase Natal* founded by John Langalibale Dube in 1903, *Koranta ea Bacoana* formed by Silas Seleme and Solomon Plaatjie in 1901, the *Workers Herald* of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union and *Abantu Batho* by Pixely Seme.

Most of the black press which emerged between 1880 and 1930 are considered to have been radical given the resistance politics of the time. "With the exception of Jabavu, all the pioneering black journalists were involved in the beginnings of the ANC," (Johnson: 19). Thus the period between 1880 and 1930 is described as the 'golden age' in the history of the black press. But factors which came to curtail this trend were emerging during the latter part of this period. Johnson summed up these factors into three categories. Firstly, black newspapers were identified by South African rulers as part of a growing threat of radicalisation of the black population. Secondly, white business saw an opportunity in the growing black newspaper reading market. Thirdly black press was highly vulnerable to financial pressures. This then prepared the ground for the venture of white capital into the black market carrying both political and commercial ambitions. This trend is largely thought to begin with the launch of the *Bantu World* by BC Paver in 1932 (Couzens, Johnson, Horwitzs, Wigston). However it can be stretched back to the 1920's which saw the Chamber of Mines launch a publication called *Umteteli Wa Bantu*. The latter came to dilute the influence of ICU's title, the *Worker's Herald* (Johnson; Couzens).

"The *Bantu World* brought to black publishing the look and feel of the Western (particularly British) popular press..." (Johnson: 22). In this trend which extends to 1977 emerged many other white owned and black targeted press including *Drum,*

Golden City Post, the *Post*. While the latter publications are banded together in a single overarching category, it should be noted that they differed in political character with some being more radical than others. The history of single titles also shows variability in character with titles bouncing in between radical critique of the apartheid regime to extreme muteness. *Drum* went through changes of character since establishment in 1951. When *Drum* picked up its political sharpness in the mid 1950's which was followed by increased circulation figures, the *World* which had largely been timid followed the *Drum* political tracks. The *World* was eventually banned in 1977.

The latter trend did not totally obliterate the concept of alternative press and "black owned politically orientated press" (Johnson: 24). Alternative and black owned press tend to be used interchangeably even though some alternative press were led by white leftist groups whose politics married them to the course pursued by many strictly black owned titles. Alternative press is largely defined by non commercialism, direct political resistance to the colonial regime and largely dedicated to black readers. Such press included *Inkundla ya Bantu* which occupied the space between 1938 and 1951 and is considered as one of the most critical black press of the era where other publications like it were strangled by commercial publications (Ukpanah, 2005). Its role can be seen through the editorial leadership of struggle heroes like Govan Mbeki and Anton Lembede, key figures in the radicalisation of the ANC.

"*Inkundla* played a significant role in charting a new role for the African nationalist movement in South Africa during the 1940's and helped change the direction of

African political discourse during this decade from petitionary protest to non violent resistance" (Ibid: 165). The ANC also churned out publications like the *Spark, The Africanist* and *The African Lodestar* between the 1940's to the 1950's. The South African Communist Party had a publication called *Inkululeko* from 1921 which changed to *Umsebenzi* in 1930 and collapsed after the Second World War under the title, *SA Worker*. Another key publication of this era is *The Guardian* established in 1937 and growing to boast national circulation. It was not without contradiction. "*The Guardian* was founded by whites and served blacks," (Zug, 2007: 5). While established as a non partisan progressive publication it grew closer to the SACP with time boasting contributions from individuals like Govan Mbeki, Brian Bunting, Ruth First, Alex Laguma and Albie Sachs.

Black Consciousness Movement

The explosion of the black consciousness movement in the 1960's had significant impact on the alternative press environment. In its push for black people to take total control of their destiny, the black consciousness movement churned out publications which were free of white influence and thus endowed with radical editorial content. That trend fitted well into the famous expression of black consciousness movement icon: 'Black man your' on your own'. "The black consciousness movement acted as a catalyst for the re-emergence of independent non commercial alternative publication" (Johnson: 28). Such publications will include the *SASO News Letter* launched in 1970, *Black Review* established in 1972 by the Black Communities Programme and *Black View Point*. There was also the *UBJ Bulletin*

established in 1975 following the breakaway of black journalists from the South African Society of Journalists to form the Union of Black Journalists (UBJ).

The black consciousness movement "kept the tradition of alternative publishing alive and it was this continuity which laid the foundations for the third most sophisticated –phase of the alternative press which began to unfold in the 1980s" (Johnson: 29). This phase is significant in understanding the character of the *SA Mail* at inception and its evolution between the 1980's and 1990's. The reincarnation in the 1980's of black controlled left wing press sought to avoid the obstacles which sunk the earlier black press (Johnson: 5). This phase encompasses titles like the *Grassroots*, *New Nation, UmAfrika, South* and *New African.* The character of these titles can be traced back to the fore bearers of black controlled presses of the 'golden era' which was designed to directly carry the struggle against apartheid (Tomasseli, 1991: 158). Emerging in the 1980's these publications could not live to see the 1994 political transition largely as a result of political and financial pressures. This equally applied to left wing white controlled publications of the 1980's like *The Rand Daily Mail* and *Vrye Weekblad*. As they collapsed one after the other, these publications released a particular strand of 'intellectual property' that found new homes in mainstream commercial media including the *SA Mail*.

Even so there is no escaping the fact that the *SA Mail* was part of the establishment and therefore limited in its protest against apartheid. The tight grip of white capital was reflected in the overall character and framing of news which arguably served to reproduce the relationship of domination (Chimutengwende, 1978; Johnson, 1991; Ntshakala and Emdon, 1991). Another category of black press developed parallel to

progressive commercial titles like the *SA Mail* and *Sowetan.* This category of black press is referred to as left commercial press in Low and Tomaselli (1991). The latter publications were strangled out of the market by publications like *SA Mail* and the *Sowetan*. While the *SA Mail* was obviously a commercial publication, it was in many ways impacted by the winds blowing from the black consciousness movement which influenced the alternative press of the 1980's. This is partly a function of a limited pool of black journalists circulating in the market. Many would have been influenced by the black consciousness movement which formed the backbone of the Union for Black Journalists (UBJ). "SASO officials were responsible for strong BC input into the UBJ during its early years, but this trend had not been acceptable to some black journalists," (Raubenheimer, 1991: 98).

Some prominent black journalists of the time were eager to break free from the censorship exercised by white bosses in the commercial press. Political pressures of the mid 1970's may have translated into market pressures for white owners of the black press to appoint black editors. "Shortly after the Soweto uprising...in June 1976 Percy Qoboza was appointed as the first black editor without white supervision" (Wigston: 51). It was under Qoboza that the *World* was banned in 1977. Qoboza moved on to edit *The Voice, Daily Post* and the *Sunday Post.*

Qoboza became the first black editor of the *SA Mail* in 1985 following a period of detention and brief exile. "Under Qoboza's editorship, *SA Mail* quickly became the country's widest-read black-edited publication," (IPI: 2000[20]). Circulation reached 200000 by 1988. By now *SA Mail* had earned a strong anti apartheid tag due to its

[20] Kudalk, R. 2000. Percy Qoboza: Symbol of resistance in South Africa. International Press Institute. [online] . Available at: http://www.highwayafrica.com/images/50years.pdf [17 March 2011]

political coverage which exposed human rights violation of the National Party government. This represented defiance against the *SA Mail* owner... which had "demanded reduction of political reporting to 10% of total editorial content," (Tomaselli, 1991: 156). Thus when the resistance against apartheid reached its height in the mid 1980's, the *SA Mail* had somehow earned close associations with the broad resistance movement. This character persisted under Qoboza's successor Khulu Sibiya who edited the paper from 1988 to 2001.

Under Khulu Sibiya the *SA Mail* marched into the post 1994 South Africa with a strong dose of watchdog journalism, a defender of vulnerable sections of the South African population against the powers that be. Meanwhile the political environment had changed with the ANC, representing freedom aspirations of the historically marginalised black population, coming to power on April 27th 1994. By 1996 the *SA Mail* together with other popular media was estranged to the ANC which was alleging that the media had become 'the enemy of the people'. As part of a general dressing down of the media, with black journalists being a prime target, Khulu Sibiya was summoned to a tongue lashing session by the then ANC president Nelson Mandela (Braid, 1996[21]; Fordred 1998). The situation was more complex than being a case of the press versus the ANC. Inside the news media itself, there was commotion around the positioning and complexion of newsrooms. Black journalists who were now organised under an entity called Forum for Black Journalists were

[21] Braid, M. 1996. Mandela Turns on Hostile Media. The Independent. [Online]. Available:http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/mandela-turns-on-hostile-media-1356173.html [3 February 2011]

also piling up pressure against a media seen as harking back to the pre 1994 practices. In 1995 Khulu Sibiya and another veteran black journalist Thami Mazwai had walked out of the South African National Editors Forum on account of general resistance to transformation by the media (Berger, 2002).

Reacting to this, the ANC argued that: "The continued exclusive dissemination of news and information by white-owned monopolies has led the portrayal of the complex processes of political and social transformation of South African society in a superficial and one-dimensional manner. This has led to a significant distortion in the free flow of information to the people of South Africa, particularly, around the RDP and the entire transformation process," (ANC Today; 1995[22]).

In 1997 Thami Mazwai argued that the Black Editors Forum should be maintained into the future to "...give 'encouragement, strength and support' as 'no black journalist can survive in these non-racial organisations unless he becomes a coconut'..." (Barratt, 2002[23]).

The media needed to somehow adapt to a new and complex future. This trusted the South African media into challenges faced by media in many other post colonial societies throughout the continent. This mainly relates to how the media relates to the post colonial state which claims to serve the people. Does it become a friend of the new state which is called for by those who says the media needs to play a developmental role in a move which comes with the danger of lap dog type

[22] ANC Today. 1995. Re Khulu Sibiya, City Press. ANC. [Online]. Available: http://www.e-tools.co.za/newsbrief/1995/news0928 [10 February 2012].

[23] Barratt, E. 2002. "Part of the Story: 10 years of the South African National Editors Forum". SANEF. [Online]. Available: http://eprints.ru.ac.za/825/1/full%2520book.pdf [10 February 2012].

journalism in the face of gross abuse of the state for personal gain by the new political elite?

This brief historical review has established clear institutional links between the origins of the *SA Mail* and the legendary *Drum* magazine. It also showed that this link also extends to the political character of the two titles and mainly the extent to which they presented and represented black voices within the parameters of being white owned black commercial press. A link was also drawn between the *Drum* era legacies and the broader strand of white owned black media extending back to the 1920's and mainly defined by the establishment of *The World* in 1932. The critical point was that this media served to frustrate other strands of media and mainly alternative and black owned and controlled media titles. This schism between alternative and commercial black media can be traced right up to the 1980's when black consciousness movement inspired media titles blossomed but were muscled out of the market by titles like the *SA Mail.* The *SA Mail* was to navigate the transition of South Africa with this history and needed to somehow adapt. This adaptation continues to this day.

4. From "Distinctly African" To "Non Racialism"

The repositioning of the *SA Mail* from its exclusive focus on black readers into a 'non racial read' came to cause a mini political storm in and around South Africa's second largest Sunday newspaper. Soon after the decision to set the *SA Mail* onto a 'non racial' course was pronounced by The New Editor in mid 2009; a counter campaign wrapped in 'radical black consciousness' talk seemed to be forming. A protest letter purporting to represent the black consciousness brigade of the *SA Mail* newsroom was circulated to other media houses in an attempt to embarrass the leadership administering the repositioning. Staff members who are thought to have opposed the repositioning voted with their feet or were purged as some informants claim. When I got there in June 2010, the air was still thick as represented by emotionally charged corridor talk. At the centre of this storm, stood a debate of how to best 'represent and present' blackness within the post 1994 South African 'publics'. Interestingly a closer look reveals that it is actually the interpretation of the past, the history of the *SA Mail,* which is at stake here more than anything else.

And so I was fortuitously positioned in a space where the complex factors that shape social identities, and in particular 'blackness', in the post 1994 South Africa came out to play. Being a newsroom, my research site is particularly interesting if not more complex, given its special place in the arena of identity formation. Media entities are generally understood to play a significant role in the formation of social identities while they are also shaped by their social surroundings in a process that can be described as 'cross fertilisation' (Boyer, 2001). This point is well made in Golding and Murdock (2000: 71) who argue that media entities "play a pivotal role in organising

the images and discourses through which people make sense of the world". In turn the struggle I observed inside the *SA Mail* newsroom adds into thoughts that media entities are not simply passive messaging agents but they are active participants in the signification of 'social differences'.

As such this chapter sets out to capture the discourses which inform the storm engulfing the *SA Mail* as informed by the evolution of the post 1994 state of blackness. In doing so, the chapter will necessarily delve into 'what was'; that is the perceived state of things before the repositioning was ordered. This is to go down the *SA Mail*' memory lane and thus this chapter becomes a 'historical ethnography' of the *SA Mail* as mainly informed by actors within the newsroom. This chapter is different from the previous one in largely focusing on recent history and as held by informants. It will interrogate how the *SA Mail* employees remember the newspaper and mainly its consciousness during the apartheid era. If one thing is clear in this murky subject, it is the general consensus amongst informants in remembering the *SA Mail* as a newspaper that has unwaveringly served the interests of its black readers which then informs the raging debates about its current and future positioning. Considering that this memory of the *SA Mail*, which is presented by an overwhelming majority of informants as the 'truth', is controversial, this chapter will trace the origins and dynamics of this 'truth'. This is essentially to ask the following question: How is it that a newspaper which is deeply embedded within what can be described as colonial capital set up with an expressed intention of advancing the interest of 'white domination' came to be remembered as a pro black publication? The approach undertaken by the Comaroffs (1991) will to a large extent guide

narrations of this chapter. The chapter will also show that transformation taking place at the *SA Mail* is largely defined by a paradigm of 'accommodation' of black interests within the plane of white dominance and privileges. This is problematic and feeds into the paper's main argument that the *SA Mail* in its attempt to transform to better serve the post 1994 polities end up perpetuating pre 1994 dominations.

State of Blackness

You have to be blind to miss the claims of the *SA Mail* newspaper to 'blackness' and yet you must suffer from serious memory loss to ignore the huge limitations of this claim. This is to say the *SA Mail* has existed and continues to be defined by some remarkable 'schizophrenia' in its claim to be a newspaper that has served black readers. As discussed in the latter chapter, the *SA Mail* comes out of a well established historical trend of black commercial publications 'donated' by the pre 1994 'white capital' which existed in relative harmony with the colonial establishment (Low and Tomaselli, 1991; Stein, 1999). This point is well made in Couzens (1976) who argues that the roll out of black popular publications from the 1930's came with remarkable 'political ambiguities'. While purporting to be speaking on behalf of black people these publications were beholden to pro colonial institutions.

Perched on the second floor of the Media 24 building in Auckland Park Johannesburg, the *SA Mail'* newsroom I found in June 2010 was overwhelmingly populated by black employees from the bottom right up to the top editorial management structure. Since the appointment of the first black editor, Percy Qoboza, in 1985, the *SA Mail* has been led by black editors and its editorial body

became blacker and blacker with time. In 2010, the *SA Mail* newsroom ran with a total staff complement of about 70 people. The *SA Mail* managing editor, KDL, pointed out that about 90% of the newsroom editorial staff, including staff in five provincial bureaus, was black. The newsroom had only seven white staff members stationed at the main newsroom in Auckland Park. It is important to note that the six white staff members of the *SA Mail* were all occupying non journalistic positions. The seventh white staff member, occupied the position of web content editor, which was also noncore given the weakness of the newspaper's website. This meant that that the newspaper ran with 100% black journalists and 100% black sectional editors. Thus the *SA Mail* can hardly be faulted of perpetuating the exclusion of black people from the workplace and from key positions within the post 1994 South Africa. But this does not necessarily redress historical power relations because domination can be furthered through inclusive gestures. The latter submission is propelled by the contribution of scholars like Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser in the characterisation of power as a phenomenon. These theorists have contributed into the development of "a more flexible, less economistic way of conceptualising the relationship between ideological, social, political and economic processes..." (Bennet, 1982: 53). Here stands a discourse which maintains that the pervasiveness of power takes place in a subtle but effective ways. "This is the shift from a repressive mode of domination to a hegemonic one, from rule based primarily on acquiescence to superior force to rule based primarily on consent supplemented with some measure of repression" (Fraser, 1990: 117).

The demographic character of the *SA Mail* newsroom employee base has been a critical factor in the positioning of the newspaper against market and political factors. It addresses a significant historical imbalance and editorial credibility in a country which has a history of denying black people a right to self representation within the public spheres. This factor addresses political, cultural and commercial demands of media, being products that are driven by their perceived affinity to the groups they serve (McGrath & Gaziano, 1985). In this case the predominance of black people in the *SA Mail* newsroom presumably gives it a potential to enable the black section of the South African population "to speak in one's own voice, and thereby simultaneously to construct and express one's cultural identity through idiom and style" (Fraser 1990: 120).

Before the repositioning course was undertaken, the *SA Mail* was selling more than 200000 copies which gave it a readership base of about 2 million overwhelmingly black readers (Media Club South Africa, 2008)[24]. A readership base of 2 million can be significant within South Africa's demographic dynamics. In the 2001 census South Africa was estimated to have a total population of about 45 million people. The 2001 census also found that the country had an adult population of about 31 million. According to the South African Advertising Research Foundation (2008), South Africa's newspaper industry boasted market penetration (newspaper readers as a percentage of total adult population) of 48,6%. This means that about 13% of all newspaper readers in the country read the *SA Mail*. This may suggest that, in its

[24] Media Club South Africa. 2008. The Media in South Africa. Media Club South Africa. [Online]. Available: http://www.mediaclubsouthafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=110:the-media-in-south-africa&catid=36:media_bg%20 [10 February 2012].

formula of serving black readers, the *SA Mail* was clearly onto something socially, politically and to a certain extent commercially palpable.

In June 2010, the *SA Mail* was 11 months into a new direction. The New Editor had expressed a plan to reposition the newspaper from its exclusive focus on black readers and into a "non racial read". The Editor told me that she was not about to radically change the complexion of the *SA Mail* newsroom. "The *SA Mail* should remain a place where black journalists can prosper but within a broadened editorial appeal". She said this should allow black journalists to set the national media agenda, not only for black people but for all who are interested to understand "the heart beat of South Africa and the entire African continent". She added that it was not her plan to suddenly reshuffle the newsroom staff and complexion.

However she was on the "lookout for a few senior journalists who will come in and introduce fresher and diverse approach but the newsroom has to and will remain predominantly black". She said her focus was on redefining the treatment of news so that the output can command a broader and 'non racial' appeal than before. Her mission was not about diluting the historical blackness of the *SA Mail* but to propel "black journalism" into the "mainstream debates". An interview based piece about The Editor's plans for the *SA Mail* takes this point further. "The Editor says that one of the most significant challenges facing her is the fact that the paper is positioned as a medium written by blacks, for blacks" (Witepski, 2009)[25]. The Editor is quoted in this piece saying "Black leadership has always been important to me but we need to

[25] Witepski, L. 2009. Facing Down Bullies. *The Journal*. [Online]. Available: http://www.jom.co.za/site/?p=721 [10 February 2012]

broaden the focus so that it's a black-led paper writing for those interested in Africa".

One of the critical steps taken by The Editor in moving towards the non racial direction was to remove the 'Distinctly African' slogan from the masthead of the *SA Mail*. The 'Distinctly African' slogan was introduced during the tenure of MSD's editorship which began in 2004 and ended in 2008. When subjected to critical analysis the slogan "Distinctly African" is complex to a point of being elusive but there is broad agreement that it appeals more to the black African readers within the South African population (Gongo, 2007)[26]. Images used to complement this slogan in the outdoor advertising campaign that was run by the *SA Mail* in 2007 confirm this assertion. Pasted on advertising billboards across the country, the slogan was complemented by 'distinctly black African' head and shoulders images of MSD flanked by South Africa's president Thabo Mbeki and the president of African Parliament Getrude Mongela. In a conversation I had with MSD, he explained this slogan as an expression of a desire to promote socioeconomic development throughout the African continent. "We took a conscious decision to promote through our coverage the view that South Africa is part and parcel of this continent [Africa]. It was also a move towards fostering a South African identity that complements Africaness". He added "To do this you must then have staff that is equal to the challenge". The New Editor says she removed the slogan because it had the potential of contradicting her brief to give *SA Mail* a 'non racial' appeal.

The Media Group Factor

[26] Gongo, K. 2007. Distinctly African: The representation of Africans in City Press. MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand

The *SA Mail'* 'blackness' is reduced to a dot once you step outside its newsroom. The surrounding premises of The Media Group building houses various media titles mainly targeted to white readers. In a way the *SA Mail* has always been sandwiched within a sea of 'whiteness', white dominance to be precise (Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1987). This surrounding has haunted the *SA Mail* claim to blackness since establishment in 1982. More so if one accepts that news media institutions are heavily impacted by their surroundings and mainly political orientation of their funders (Golding and Murdock, 2000; McChesney, 1998). What is most interesting about The Media Group factor in this research is the ability of people stationed inside the *SA Mail* to simply ignore or forget its influence in their presentation of *SA Mail* as "The people's paper". And yet The Media Group factor is in your face.

When I made my first visit to the *SA Mail* newsroom for the purpose of this research, I could not help but notice its 'strange' social surroundings as resulting largely from The Media Group factor. As you approach the *SA Mail* offices in Auckland Park on the western borders of the Johannesburg City, its logo cuts a somewhat lonely figure within a list of media brands listed on a block at the entrance of The Media Group offices. The *SA Mail* name is squeezed between titles of these mainly white focused media brands. Watching this, I began to wonder, to what extent is this squeeze at the entrance represented in socio-political dynamics at play inside The Media Group building and inside the *SA Mail* newsroom.

The Media Group has developed into a globalising media empire that struggles to shake off its *Boerevolk* beginnings in 1915 (Van der Westhuizen, 2007). As a commercial operation active in the 'cultural industry', The Media Group's role in

shaping and benefiting from the rise of 'Afrikaner nationalism' and at the expense of the human rights of black South Africans is highly pronounced (Van der Westhuizen, Muller, 1987). It was established with an expressed intention of advancing 'Afrikanerdom' and served the two key pillars of this phenomenon, capital formation and propaganda. "Afrikaner nationalism very often meant economic mobilisation... Newspapers were needed to voice this strategy" (Muller: 120). The company has churned out media products which have been accused of propping up the apartheid regime and continue to push for preservation of pre 1994 dominations in the post apartheid South Africa (Braude, 1999; De Waal, 2011). Where the SA Mail is concerned Muller argues that it was established for a specific political purpose. "[The Media Group] needed as established and well accepted 'black' newspaper since 'the one thing missing from total strategy (was) a credible voice with which to win the hearts and minds of this country's black (African) townships" (Lodge and Stadler in Muller: 50).

The Media Group has in the post 1994 era claimed redemption from its past (SA Mail, 2003). Institutionally, there will be claims that the corporation has moved away from organised 'Afrikanerdom' and has embraced the democratic values of the post 1994 South Africa. In what seems to have been a well calculated move, Naspers was listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) in 1994 which comes with claims that the company exist at the mercy of market forces. These claims are largely informed by the liberal outlook which has it that the market has the power to discipline social institutions into justness and fairness (Habermas, 1991). In addition The Media Group has like many other South Africa's corporations made lots of noise

on how it support economic transformation and in particular black economic empowerment (BEE). For that matter the company has concluded a couple of transactions passed as redistribution of equity to black groups. Ironically this narration also extends to the company's move to acquire the *SA Mail* in 1984, which is described by its chairman, TVS, as offering "valuable lessons in the art of togetherness" between "blacks and Afrikaners" (SA Mail, 2003)[27]. This narration comes with many problems. The main problem is in the apparent usurpation of political concepts which talk to organisation of public life and deploying them to advance profit motives. This is the point made by Badat (2009) when he warns of commercialisation sociological concepts which does nothing to change actual organisation of public life. A critical look into the state of The Media Group and its values will reveal that many of the claims made by its chairman are highly challengeable. Observations submitted from De Waal and Van der Westhuisen in earlier paragraphs go towards making this argument.

In my conversations with *SA Mail* employees (a total of 16 informants), not one delved into The Media Group factor out of their own volition. Instead the force, the confidence with which most of my informants positioned the *SA Mail* as a paper that belongs on the side of the anti apartheid movement is astounding. This is not to say the *SA Mail* played no part in the anti apartheid movement but to ignore the limitations of its location inside The Media Group smells like an attempt to rewrite history. When I raised questions relating to possible The Media Group's limitations,

[27] Vosloo, T. 2003. Saluting the heavyweight of democratic South Africa. City Press. [Online]. Available: http://152.111.1.87/argief/berigte/citypress/2003/05/01/2/1.html [10 February 2012].

the answers were somehow disingenuous and ahistorical. These answers are perhaps best represented in a conversation I had with MSD, SA Mail's editor between 2004 and 2007. "These guys (Naspers) have invested a lot of money into the making of *SA Mail*. Anyone who has a problem with this must put money on the table to start a newspaper". This captures the extent of the pre 1994 colonial domination, where key aspects of the struggles against colonialism were shaped within colonial institutions to an extent that even the fiercest of BCM proponents "often seek to seize its [colonial] symbols, to question their authority and integrity, and to reconstruct them in their own image" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: VII).

The Legacies of Percy Qoboza

Two of my informants both of which had expressed opposition to the migration of the *SA Mail* into a 'non racial' read made sure that I see the "The Wall" from which the history of the *SA Mail* can be written. I refer to it as "The Wall" because of the striking manner in which one of the two informants MNK presented it to me. When he said, "Have you seen 'The Wall'", his tone changed and his eyes lightened up in a way that made me to mark his reference to "The Wall" as critically important. This is a wall inside the *SA Mail* newsroom which hangs a collection of the newspaper's past editors. This wall features black and white framed pictures of past *SA Mail* editors. The picture collection is organised to follow a periodical order from 1982 to 2009.

A lot can be read from this site but my informants seemed to be interested in pushing one point: the positioning of the *SA Mail* closer if not within the BCM. 'The Wall' presents a periodical order of *SA Mail'* chief editors which begin with the founding editor, Phillip Selwyn-Smith, who stands out from the picture collection

because of his 'whiteness'. Phillip Selwyn-Smith was appointed by the *SA Mail* founding publisher Jim Bailey in 1982. His appointment continued a trend in Jim Bailey's ventures to entrust white editors to oversee black publications. This trend can be traced back to Jim Bailey's venture into the *Drum* magazine as reflected in chapter 2 of this paper which deals with history of the *SA Mail*. This trend is problematised in many reviews of the evolution of black popular media. It is seen as a submission to the paternalistic apartheid philosophy which denied black people the right to 'represent and present' themselves in public matters (Stein, 1999; Biko, 1996). Phillip Selwyn-Smith stayed at the helm of the *SA Mail* for three years. He was succeeded in 1985 by Percy Qoboza who is largely remembered as something of a legend in the evolution of commercial black media (Wigston, 2007). My two informants who dragged me to 'The Wall' expressed concern that the legacy of Percy Qoboza stood to be wiped out in the ensuing repositioning of the *SA Mail.*

Pointing towards Percy Qoboza's portrait, MNK who took me to The Wall, declares "Right now he is turning from his grave". He ignored all the other pictures in invoking Percy Qoboza to argue that the repositioning of the *SA Mail* was ill considered. He added that "This (move to non racialism) is sabotage to the BCM". This view is also expressed by *SA Mail* senior journalist SBM. "We are yet to reach a point where I can say we should fully embrace 'non racial' media products. South Africa still needs a black focused *SA Mail*." He adds, "this ['move to non racial read'] will do more harm than good to the development of black people in the post 1994 South Africa".

Percy Qoboza brought to the *SA Mail* the legacy of becoming the first black editor of a commercial publication (the *World*) "without white supervision" (Wigston: 51).

Happening in June 1976; Percy Qoboza's ascension into the editorship of the *World* coincided with the 1976 black students uprising which began in Soweto and spread across the country. This was also the time when the BCM was rising among black intellectuals and professionals. As such Percy Qoboza tends to be remembered alongside the 1976 resistance against apartheid and the rise of the BCM. He is generally credited for overseeing the shift of the *World* newspaper into adopting an active anti apartheid character. This is perfectly represented in how Andile Noganta writing in 2001 remembered Percy Qoboza[28].

> "Under Percy Qoboza the newspaper had become the mouthpiece and mirror of concerns and aspirations of black people and could not have escaped the draconian attentions of Kruger and his prime minister, B J Vorster. Written by black people for black people, only black people could therefore express those aspirations. *The World*, with legendary editor Percy Qoboza at the helm, had begun to sting apartheid South Africa. Kruger and Vorster clamped down mercilessly on it".

The *World* was banned on the 19th of October 1977 alongside 19 Black Consciousness Movement aligned organisations. This raft of banning extended to the Union for Black Journalists which had forged formal relations with the Black Consciousness Movement. This day -19th of October- has been iconised and is commemorated as Black Wednesday cum Media Freedom Day. After the banning of the *World,* Percy Qoboza moved on to edit *The Voice, Daily Post* and the *Sunday Post.* He was also banned and left the country briefly before coming back to edit the

[28] Noganta Andile
2001 How Percy's World changed course to walk the political road to greatness. City Press. [Online]. Available: http://www.citypress.co.za/Xarchive/Leaders/How-Percys-World-changed-course-to-walk-the-political-road-to-greatness-20100614 [10 February 2012]

SA Mail in 1985. His editorship of the *SA Mail* marked the beginning of black editorship of the newspaper which remains undisturbed to this day. In dragging me to "The Wall" my informants wanted to ensure that I do not miss the legacies of Percy Qoboza as they extend to the *SA Mail*.

The *SA Mail* evolved to be largely remembered alongside the antiapartheid movement and in particular the BCM (Tomaselli, 1991). "Under Percy Qoboza's editorship, *SA Mail* quickly became the country's widest-read black-edited publication," (IPI: 2000). Circulation reached 200000 by 1988. By now *SA Mail* had earned a strong anti apartheid tag due to its political coverage which exposed human rights violation of the National Party government. This represented defiance against the *SA Mail* owners, The Media Group, which had "demanded reduction of political reporting to 10% of total editorial content," (Tomaselli: 156). Thus when the resistance against apartheid reached its height in the mid 1980's, the *SA Mail* had earned close associations with the broad resistance movement. This character persisted under Percy Qoboza's successor KBY who edited the paper from 1988 to 2001. Under KBY the *SA Mail* marched into the post 1994 South Africa with a strong dose of watchdog journalism, a defender of vulnerable sections of the South African population against the powers that be.

For many people this represents a history of black people telling their own stories in their own way and relatively free of the paternalistic colonial philosophy which had imposed white supremacy on all aspects of black life. While 16 years has passed since South Africa officially buried apartheid, many people still see the need to maintain exclusively black institutions to counter the neo colonialism. The two SA

Mail senior journalists who took me to The Wall, MNK and SBM, want to represent this line of thinking.

Thus the repositioning of the *SA Mail* represented a stand against the resurgence of a view that South Africa should not rush into non racialism as this would dilute black influence and interests (Badat, 2009). This view is largely a hark back into the formative days of the BCM during the early 1970's which maintained that 'non racialism' is a destruction to the course of liberating black people from colonialism (Biko, 1996). This view has persisted in the post 1994 South Africa with the growing evidence that little is changing in the way of disturbing historical subjugation of black people. In his book Black Man You Are on Your Own, Badat argues that while South Africa was founded on the principle of moving towards non racialism, "certain exclusivist forms of organisations" are still necessary at this stage in order to build a future of equal recognition (Badat: 2).

Badat's view is strongly represented within the community of black journalists who sort to organise themselves outside mainstream and multi racial professional organisations. This community is partly represented in the Forum for Black Journalists which wants to be a reincarnation of the Union for Black Journalists of the 1970's. It is well represented in the utterances of veteran black journalist, Thami Mazwai, who argued for the maintenance of the Black Editors Forum. He argued that the Black Editors Forum should be maintained into the future to "...give 'encouragement, strength and support' as 'no black journalist can survive in these non-racial organisations unless he becomes a coconut'..." (Mazwai in Barratt, 2002).

This view found much resonance within the *SA Mail* that was edited by MSD between 2004 and 2009 as marked by the "Distinctly African" slogan.

But the SA Mail's non racial brief came with arguably different dynamics than those captured in the discourse represented by Thami Mazwai. It is safe to presume that Thami Mazwai was addressing himself to the brand of "nonracialism" that takes place in historically white institutions who now find the need to transform by bringing in black people into the mix. Arguably The New Editor's brief at the *SA Mail* somehow turns the tables. The *SA Mail* is a historically black newspaper which is now transforming itself into an "all [racially] inclusive" read. This seems to place black journalists at the centre of transformation dynamics and not at the receiving end as is the case in many other institutions. *SA Mail* editorial of May 2010 which makes for the most comprehensive communication of the newspaper repositioning is priceless for this report. Thus I find it necessarily to quote it extensively.

> "We've given ourselves a makeover to reflect our role in the 21st century and as an expression of our highest aspiration, which is to be South Africa's leading Sunday newspaper – a read of black excellence...On our journey we ride high on the shoulders of Percy Qoboza, who was this week posthumously honoured with the Order of Ikhamanga by President Jacob Zuma. As we celebrate with his family, we vow to honour his legacy of journalism always grounded in the tenets of justice and human rights for which he fought so hard, on these very pages, to achieve..." (SA Mail, 2010).

Transformation as accommodation

For a number of reasons, The Editor of the *SA Mail* should be considered one of the key reference points in the attempt to understand the dynamics of repositioning of the newspaper from its historical focus on black readers into a non racial read. All indications suggest that The Editor was recruited by the *SA Mail* owners, to administer the 'non racial' agenda. The agenda was unveiled soon after The Editor

took over the *SA Mail* in July 2009. She has shown remarkable enthusiasm in communicating this mandate in her general public engagements and during a number of conversations that inform this research. Moreover newspaper editors are generally like 'demigods' in running their newsrooms. Their word is final. As such, in my attempt to capture the discourses that run through the *SA Mail*, I have taken a lot from conversations I had with The Editor and also from her public statements and general outlook.

In all the conversations I had with The Editor, she made sure to hammer home this one agenda, more than others. "Black journalists must take their rightful place in determining the national media agenda". These words clearly acknowledge the need for a redress of historical and racially biased inequities which have characterised the majority of South Africa's newsrooms. In here lies the dominant discourse of media transformation in South Africa. This is a discourse of transformation through accommodation of black voices within historically white newsrooms. It is widely acknowledged that like other South Africa's social institutions, the country's newsrooms have always reflected their social surroundings. "In South Africa, as in other states, the mass media are social institutions whose role like that of other institutions, is defined or regulated by the economic and social organisation of society" (Chimutengwende, 1978: 11).

There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that during the apartheid era, the newsrooms did not only stand as outposts of white domination but served as active

agents in the repression suffered by black South Africans (Braude, 1998[29]; Van der Westhuisen, 2007). Kruger (2007: 18) argues that South African journalism is very much a product of its past. "History casts a long shadow over the South African present. Along with the broader society, journalists and the industry in which they work are products of that past". The Editor maintains that while South Africa had by 2010 entered 16 years of democracy, the country and its media still has a long way to go in addressing the historical repression of black people by denying black journalists a fair share of media space. "The [media] industry has not done enough to foster transformation," said The Editor. She added that "the South African Media is yet to find a democratic voice that is reflective of the South African population". And so; part of her brief at the *SA Mail* was to push "black journalism" into the mainstream:

"What we are doing here is to create a place where black journalists can prosper within a non racialised setting". She adds "Our mandate is to transform the *SA Mail* into a paper for all South Africans and not one which is discernibly black. In this mandate there is chance to show case black led excellence in serious political journalism". This line of thinking was repeated by *SA Mail* deputy news editor TNT who said "We are creating a newspaper where black journalism can excel within a national non-racial setting".

Speaking from the *SA Mail* office in 2010, The Editor brings a considerable amount of history into this transformation talk. Her biography positions her as a black journalist

[29] Braude, C. 1999. Cultural Bloodstains: Towards understanding the legacy of apartheid and the perpetuation of racial stereotypes in the contemporary South African media. Research report commissioned by the South African Human Rights Commission. [online]. Available: http://www.sahrc.org.za/braude_media_report.PDF. [10 October 2011].

who took on the apartheid obstacles to emerge into one of the best journalists in the country and went on to become a media transformation activist of sort. She spent the better parts of her career in historically white newsrooms and points out that she actively campaigned for transformation in these newsrooms. The Editor's journalistic career was launched by the famous *Weekly Mail's* school of journalism in 1991. Launched in 1985 the *Weekly Mail* is remembered for its fierce anti apartheid editorial character but it also stood to perpetuate the domination of South Africa's newsroom by white journalists. The Editor moved on to a senior editor position at the *Financial Mail* between 1997 and 2004. By the time she left *Financial Mail* in 2004, the business magazine was still predominantly staffed by white journalists. She moved to become the chief editor of the *Mail and Guardian*, a *Weekly Mail* reincarnate, whose equity record was almost similar to that of the *Financial Mail*. It is fair to assert that The Editor's career and her activism for media transformation was largely shaped within predominantly white newsrooms. In one of the conversations, she acknowledges this point in saying the following. "The transformation challenges at the *SA Mail* (which is predominantly black) were milder and different to those I have encountered in other places, where you still have to deal with the remnants of white supremacy".

The Editor also pointed towards the highlights of her past 'transformative' initiatives. While she served the *Financial Mail* magazine as a senior journalist, she initiated the launch of the *Little Black Book*, a directory of black business professionals which was promoted as a tool to facilitate 'black economic empowerment'. While serving as the chief editor of the *Mail & Guardian* she introduced special editorial features

designed to enlighten South Africans about the African continent. Her media transformation activism has not been limited into the newsroom but has arguably been felt within broader media industry and professional bodies. She has been an active participant within the South African National Editors Forum where she seems to have been officially positioned to campaign for media transformation. A biographical piece published in the *Mail and Guardian* in late 2009 described her as follows. "[She] is also a council member of the South African National Editors' Forum, is chairperson of its diversity committee and a general rabble-rouser" (Bauer, 2009[30]).

Her "rabble rousing" is represented in her own words. "As a young black person working at the M&G, I was part of a group that felt that our place had not changed sufficiently for the times. It was still run by a cohort of bright, and it must be added, white journalists. It was from them that our editor took counsel; they were who he hung out with. And so we festered, angry as the paper skewered yet another black editor. ...I quit after putting up a small fight ..." (25 years of the *M&G*, 2010)[31].

Arguably The Editor has throughout her career campaigned for the 'accommodation' of the 'black voice' into well resourced white newspapers. There is some reason to believe that she came to the *SA Mail* with this particular outlook of transformation. After accepting the *SA Mail* post, she was quoted saying "I hope to inject a touch of Afropolitanism into the paper and to bring with me some of the investigative

[30] Charlotte, B. 2009. Book of SA Women: Media. *Mail & Guardian*. [Online]. Available: http://mg.co.za/article/2009-08-04-sa-women-media [23 January 2012].

[31] 25 Years of the M&G. "I take my Freedom Seriously". Cape Town NB: Publishers

journalism I have learnt at my alma mater, the *Mail & Guardian*" (IOL, 2009)[32]. The latter seems to represent a paradigm that defines transformation as accommodation of black people within historically white institutions and privileges. Even when she is surrounded by a sea of Africans, The Editor still wants to "inject a touch of Afropolitanism" into the *SA Mail.* With 'injection' being a key word, this frame of thinking appears to be one which wants to preserve the past.

The idea that transformation equals injection of black interests into historically white institutions is the very thing which opens up the pursuit of "non racialism" in the post 1994 South Africa to criticism. In this frame, 'non racialism' comes to defeat transformation because nothing changes other than adoption of black interests into old practices (Gibson, 2011; Roberts, 2007). All you have is assimilation which was rejected in the pre 1994 days and most vehemently in the 1970's by the BCM. This rejection is perhaps best represented in the words of Steve Biko who is considered the father of BCM. In 1970 Steve Biko argued that the push towards non racialism tends to transpire into a faulty racial integration. "The integration they talk about is first of all artificial in that it is a response to conscious manoeuvre rather than to the dictates of the inner soul" (Biko, 1996: 20)

Adds Biko: "If by integration you understand a break through into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and code of behaviour set up by and maintained by whites, then YES I am against it. I'm against the superior-inferior white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil." (Biko, 1996: 24). While

[32] Sapa. 2009. Ready for new challenges. *IOL*. [Online]. Available: http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/haffajee-ready-for-new-challenges-1.438694?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot [10 February 2012]

Steve Biko made this comment in the 1970's, it fits neatly into the discourse which seems to inform the *SA Mail* repositioning and mainly the newspaper's obsession with catching up with its perceived main competitor, the 100 years old *Sunday Times*.

This chapter has traced the narrative dynamics which have come to define the *SA Mail* as a black newspaper. Read together with the previous chapter, it was established that *SA Mail* came like a Trojan horse, a weapon of furthering colonial domination masked as a gift. While the intentions of the *SA Mail* owners may have been clear and well calculated, the outcome is a bit grey as influenced by what the observed tendency of the colonised to usurp the very same instrument of colonialism and use it for resistance. This does not necessarily render weak the main argument of this paper being that SA Mail perpetuates historical dominations as existing within the confines of the pre 1994 hegemony. The positioning of transformation as accommodation goes to strengthen this point.

5. Ethongraphy of Intellectuals at Work

You almost need a 'third eye' to comprehend the 'news manufacturing processes' at work inside the *SA Mail* newsroom. At first glance, the newsroom offers no clues, what so ever, in revealing the 'conveyer belt' at work. The floor-design of the L shaped newsroom gives away no particular design. The main axis of the L shape is populated by what seems to be random rows of work stations as defined by a collection of desks, chairs, computers and telephones. Only a guided tour, which I enjoyed at the hands of the *SA Mail's* business editor, revealed a pattern of sectionalised editorial teams and a pyramid structure. But then even this comprehensive guided tour could not have been enough to comprehend what happens in this place and mainly the 'news making' process. You have in this floor, intellectuals at work. There is much more happening in this space which is not visible to the eye. What you see is not what you get. Thus' an 'ethnography of intellectual practice' is in order. Boyer (2001: 461) points out the need for ethnography of professional intellectual practice not only to elucidate the complexity of making meaning but "for understanding of the everyday codification and sedimentation of social knowledges and difference".

The orientation of newsrooms and news is something which has attracted plenty of thought. This is because the business of reporting news is thought to have a special place in shaping the psyche of publics and as such organisation of power (Golding and Murdock, 2000). On one hand you have a recognition that mass media can serve social justice when positioned as a 'voice of the voiceless' (Habermas, 1991; Schudson, 2000, Berger, 2000). On the other hand, you have submissions that mass

media tends to advance all sorts of injustices (Chomsky and Herman, 1998; Allan, 1999). For that matter some scholars, loosely categorised as elitist, met the 'massification' of the media with suspicion if not resentment. These will include Friedrich Nietzsche and John Stuart Mill who spoke against the 'rise of the mob' (Bennett, 1982). "In short they feared that the rule of the elite was over and the reign of the rabble about to begin ..." (Bennett: 35). This view may have been fuelled by the clear deployment of media power in some of the worst propaganda cases in history. These will include the use of media in the making of Nazi Germany. Across the world; newsrooms stand accused of perpetuating elitist dominations. "The press is the hired agent of a monied system, set up for no other reason than to tell lies where the interests are concerned" Adams in McChesney, 2000. McChesney further argues that "It is the class bias that is the biggest obstacle". In South Africa the issue takes a racial slant with media being generally accused of propping up pre 1994 white dominations (Van der Westhuisen, 2007; Ndebele 2007, Fordred, 1998).

This chapter aims to do two things. It will elucidate the actual 'news manufacturing' process which can be observed inside the *SA Mail* newsroom. The chapter is also styled as an 'ethnography of intellectuals' at work. It sets out to display how the intellectual professionals inside the *SA Mail* newsroom in all its 'blackness' end up perpetuating historical dominations. By so doing the narration largely borrows from Boyer. "I am arguing that professional intellectuals create an accredited formality for particular social knowledges of difference through their recursive elements of their knowledge labors, even if they do not, because of their own social and situational exigencies, create those formalities exactly as they please. How individual actors

participate in the epistemic 'feedback' mechanism demands more focused ethnographic attention" (Boyer: 461). This "focused ethnographic attention" is what I was referring to when I said in the opening paragraph; You almost need a 'third eye' to comprehend the 'news manufacturing processes' at work inside the *SA Mail* newsroom. This chapter must first and necessarily show case the nature and the prevalence of 'white domination' within the post 1994 South Africa before delving into how these through a process of 'cross fertilisation' are represented inside the *SA Mail* newsroom.

Making difference: Making inequality

South Africa is generally understood to be a society made of diverse cultural groups whose differentiation can be informed by several factors and mainly language, geography, skin colour, religion and lifestyle. This is the basis of the prevalence of the 'rainbow nation' and 'unity in diversity' themes. Race is probably the supreme factor in defining the country's 'cultural differences' and mainly as a result of the country's colonial history. Race differentiation was reinforced over 300 years or so of colonialism (Sharp, 1997). This is a period in which white groups subjugated black groups largely through land dispossession and later through one of the most organised social engineering mechanism in the world, apartheid. Racial prejudice, and mainly the view that black people were sub human, rested at the centre of the reinforcement of differentiation between black and white people. This operated more like a cast system where difference informed rank within the social strata (Khometsi, 2008; Beinart, 2001).

And so when the National Party, the architecture of apartheid, was removed from power on the 27th of April 1994 through democratic elections, racial prejudice would have remained largely untouched (Khometsi). The nature of the political transition is such that, the pre 1994 relations of domination were left intact and continue to be reproduced within the country's discourses of transformation (Gibson, 2011; Mgxitama, 2010; Van der Westhuisen, 2006) . It is widely acknowledged that 27th of April 1994 marked the beginning of normalisation rather than an end of a struggle against marginalisation of black people. And so South Africa has been engulfed by the 'social transformation' theme. To a large extent, South Africa's transformation path comes wrapped around with the 'politics of difference' as a factor of domination where the 'other', that is the 'inferior' black people, must be educated to become equal partners within the post 1994 public sphere (Gibson). This is a critical point which I will attend to fully later. As a tool with a potential of tinkering with 'mass consciousness'; the media has largely been expected to play a pivotal role in redressing the wrongs of the past (Fordred, 1998; Ndebele 2007). Throughout the post 1994 era the *SA Mail* newspaper has claimed a role within this discourse.

This is what VMN, *SA Mail* editor between 2000 and 2003, has to say. "In the past 21 years, we have proudly hoisted the flag of hope and aspiration for our people. Throughout its 21 years of existence, even when there was no hope for South Africa, *SA Mail* educated and encouraged its readers not to lose hope. Four years ago, *SA Mail* launched another product, *SA Mail* Business, as part of its editorial package. This was in response to the reality that black people are not only interested in sex, scandal and soccer stories but want to be informed about what is going on in their

economy and how they can increase their participation therein. The feedback we are getting on our coverage of business says we are on the right track" (SA Mail, 2003).

In a conversation I had with MSD, *SA Mail* editor between 2003 and 2007, he characterised the *SA Mail* as force for transformation and with an emphasis of 'decolonising the mind'. The *SA Mail* was positioned to "...cover issues here at home, the things that enhance our identity, and those that threaten our identity are going to drive our coverage" (Gongo, 2007).

Educating the Natives

The *SA Mail* newsroom is almost obsessed with black economic empowerment (BEE) as a news theme. Everywhere I turned, during my stay inside the *SA Mail* newsroom, people were talking BEE. Some were thrashing it and others singing praises. In the three interviews I had with The Editor, she never failed to emphasise the importance of BEE polemically and professionally. In her polemics she expresses the view that "BEE must happen and fast if South Africa is to sustain its democracy". Professionally she stresses the need for the *SA Mail* to elevate the subject in its editorial pages. Indeed the theme featured prominently in all the newspaper's editorial meetings I attended for the purpose of this research. BEE is largely covered in the *SA Mail* pages through narrations of how black people are climbing the corporate ladder and how the new 'black rand lords' who have been given shares in historically white owned companies are handling their fortune.

BEE was conceived with naked paternalism (Mbeki, 2009; Mafuna, 2007). The idea is based on the push to accommodate 'black interests' within established white capital.

The face of BEE has come to be represented largely by the dishing out of minority shares within historically white capital. And those who earn these shares are then adopted into historically white boardrooms to learn the ropes of doing business. This is complemented by the employment equity and skills development law that also demand the 'adoption' of black people into management roles within the work place. Through and through, the BEE discourse comes with this idea of 'educating' black people about the ways of doing business. This approach has been widely criticised largely for the same reasoning that runs through my analysis being that the naked paternalism in BEE perpetuates relations of domination between black and white groups. "BEE was in fact invented by South Africa's economic oligarchs, that handful of white businessmen and their families who control the commanding heights of the country's economy ..." (Mbeki: 66). But then even the detractors of BEE fail to shake off the treatment of black people as the 'exotic other' who must either be educated about 'real entrepreneurship' or must carve some exotic path towards economic freedom.

A conversation I had with one of the *SA Mail* senior editors is telling. It went like this.

Senior Editor: While BEE is an important subject for us, there is a need to change the way we cover BEE. There is visible fatigue on the market about the BEE subject. People are tired of being told about these BEE deals which make no difference in their lives. These deals add no value to the economy.

Me: What kind of changes do you have in mind?

"We need to cover the subject in a way that inculcates the culture of entrepreneurship within the black communities. Entrepreneurship is the way to go to address the country's economic weaknesses and unemployment. As things stand, people are waiting to be handed BEE deals with a hope of becoming millionaires overnight like the Patrice Motsepe's and Tokyo Sexwale's of this world. This is not sustainable. Black people must learn that business success comes out of hard work. The way BEE has been done is not sustainable".

This expression is clearly linked to common wisdom that black people need to be educated in the ways of doing business and entrepreneurship. It comes with a silly discourse embedded in the treatment of black people as the 'exotic other' who, as apparent in this discourse, have existed in some 'total seclusion' to modern ways. It was only in 1994 that this 'bounded tribe' was woken up to the ways of doing business (Gluckman, 1958; Magubane, 1973). And so they must now dust off their 'tribal' ignorance and endorse the modern ways.

This logic is nakedly represented in Vuyo Jack's book, *Broad-based BEE: The complete guide.* Vuyo Jack is a critical figure within the BEE space as he is considered to have led the drafting of BEE policies. In a poor attempt to draft a psycho analysis of BEE participants, Vuyo Jack uses George Kinder's model from *The Seven Stages of Money Making.* These are more like stages of mental development starting from "innocence" which seems to point towards ignorance and developing towards "knowledge" accumulation and "wisdom". "In the first ten years of democracy Black people in South Africa vacillated between the stages of childhood innocence and

pain... Currently most black people are moving towards the knowledge stage, while others may already be at that stage" (Jack and Harris, 2007: 4).

This discourse is absurd in suggesting that black people existed in isolation and must now be educated about entrepreneurship. Firstly it seems to be of an epistemological approach which wants to understand the state of blackness through 'fetishised isolation' as observed in Gluckman. In The Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand, Gluckman presents an approach which bundles both the colonised and the colonisers into a 'single social space' and as such is devoid of treating 'Zuluness' in bounded tribe terms. It was "... a systematic assault on the concept of the 'bounded tribe'" Macmillan (1995: 49). Adds Macmillan "The essential point he was making is that cultures differ but they also interact and overlap. The processes of cultural and social change are, under capitalist influence, everywhere the same". This has developed into a broader push for a dynamic understanding of the colonised and the coloniser as existing within a 'shared' social space. This point can be adapted from the dynamic narrations of the Comaroffs. "And yet, even as they are encompassed by the European capitalist system –consumed, ironically, as they consume its goods and text –these 'natives' of other worlds often seek to seize its symbols, to question their authority and integrity, and to reconstruct them in their own image" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: VII).

Secondly, the absurdity of this discourse is in its suggestion that the prevalence of entrepreneurship has been extraordinarily low, with some slant to nonexistent, within 'black communities'. This thinking is well captured in the statement made by *SA Mail* senior editor captured above: "We need to cover the subject [BEE) in a way

that inculcates the culture of entrepreneurship within the black communities". The idea that entrepreneurship levels are alarmingly low within black communities and therefore they must be educated is deeply entrenched in the *SA Mail* newsroom and mainly its business section. In communicating his "long term strategic objective" the business editor says the section "needs to have more useful news items for the reader. Our readers must find snippets of information which can make material difference to their life". He said the paper was already doing this on personal finance and consumer issues but needed to do a lot more in pushing the culture of entrepreneurship. "One of the things we plan to do is to beef up the team with someone who knows their way around the SME sector and entrepreneurial psychology... This will be our contribution in laying a foundation for the emergence of our mark Shuttleworths".

It is hard to comprehend this logic in a country with so many examples of how a people who were systematically pushed into becoming only servants, found loopholes to shine as entrepreneurs. This discourse also tends to be ahistorical in discounting entrepreneurial activity of black people prior to the systematic dispossession which arguably gained speed after the 1913 Land Act (Qgubule, 2008; Peires, 2007, Mafuna, 2007). "Except for a few exceptional cases, history fails to show the achievements of black people in business. Most of recorded history depicts blacks as an indolent and commercially unimaginable lot that should be grateful to the civilising mission of colonial contest" (Mafuna: 34).

The chronicles of historian Jeff Peires are most useful in pointing out 'successful' commercial ventures of black people before dispossession gained speed. Comments

of a white magistrate made in 1880 and presented by Jeff Peires are revealing. "[The black peasants] are the largest producers of grain in the division; without them the trade of Queenstown would not be anything like what it is at present. It is an indisputable fact comparing them with Europeans, taking man for man and acre for acre, the native produces from a smaller extent of ground, and with more primitive appliances, more than the Europeans" (Peires, 2007: 43). Peires adds that "black South Africans were as receptive as white South Africans to the opportunities offered by the mineral discoveries, starting with the diamonds at Kimberly in the 1870's and followed by the development of the Witwatersrand goldfields in the 1880's".

To a large extent, the education discourse, represent a continuation of an old discourse that tends to hover over post colonial societies. There are clear similarities between this treatment of the state of blackness in the post apartheid South Africa and the attitude observed by Ferguson (1994) within the 'development discourse' deployed in Lesotho in the 1970's. Ferguson successfully displays how a 1975 World Bank Report on Lesotho came to suggest that "Lesotho in 1966 was a 'traditional subsistence peasant society', 'virtually untouched by modern economic development'" (Ferguson: 25). While pointing out that this characterisation of Lesotho was nonsense, Ferguson's *coup de grace* is in exposing, not the inaccuracy of the observation, but the fact it is of a self serving purpose. He makes a compelling point by summoning Michel Foucault's words which I also find highly useful in my argument.

"Have you ever read any criminological texts? They are staggering. And I say this out of astonishment, not aggressiveness, because I fail to comprehend how the discourse of criminology has been able to go on at this level. One has the impression that it is of such utility, is needed so urgently and rendered so vital for the working of the system, that it does not even seek a theoretical justification for itself, or even simply a coherent framework. It is entirely utilitarian" (Foucault in Ferguson, 1994: 25).

In addition to being ahistorical, the discourse of entrepreneurship talk in South Africa serves to prop up the master servant relationships. A closer look into the deployment of the words like entrepreneurship may reveal that it comes with a push to carve some 'exotic' business activity for black people outside the 'normal' and for the amusement of the 'centred people'. As I was consuming the entrepreneurship talk from my ethnographic notes I could not help but reflect back into an experience I had as a young reporter in the early 2000's. . I have subsequently written about this experience and published it in a newspaper. As such I'm party recycling those published thoughts.

About 10 years ago, I had an intriguing exchange with an executive of a blue chip company. Lacking a driver's licence back then, I was in the habit of hitching a ride back to the newsroom, instead of phoning the office for a pick-up after the assignment. And so I found myself a luxurious ride from this business executive. As we came up Glenhove towards the Oxford corner in Rosebank, we were approached by a street hawker. Hoisting a child on her back, she was waving all sorts of stuff at us as she sang their praises. As my executive drove past the hawker, he said something along these lines: this is what we need in this country, an entrepreneurial spirit. (Radebe, 2011[33]).

[33] Radebe, S. 2011. BEE Psyche of the Nation Needs Change. *The New Age*. [Online]. Available: http://www.thenewage.co.za/blogdetail.aspx?mid=186&blog_id=54 [13 January 2012]

I was taken aback by this experience. Here you have this obviously poverty stricken woman, under the scotching African sun, with a child on her back, scrounging for cents at the periphery of the economy. And you have this executive cocooned in lavish living saying: this is the way to go. It was a classic presentation of a discourse of the 'white privileged' which elevates 'dancing at the airport' by the 'exotic other' into true empowerment. The privileged tend to derive pleasure by throwing cents at the 'airport dancers' while they whisk on and off the runway in their executive jets. This perfectly suits the privileged groups who do not want to be disturbed in their grasping of ill-gotten assets. The language of entrepreneurship is used to keep the historically marginalised struggling for crumbs at the periphery.

The latter conclusion is further represented in the coining of words like 'tenderpreneurship' which features frequently within the *SA Mail's* news gathering conferences and pages and in other media. The word 'tenderpreneurship' is derived from two words, tender and entrepreneurship. It is exclusively deployed to characterise black people who do business with the state and in a language which suggests inherent 'ill' in this practice. This is strange when it is widely known that the state is everywhere the largest purchaser of goods and services. As such this is discourse which suggests that it is fine for Murray & Roberts, a white controlled company, to do business with the state but there is something inherently wrong when a black company does the same. Surely what's good for the goose should be good for the gander. As Beinart (2001: 309) argues "Winning the state proved important for black people, as it was for Afrikaners, not only in providing public sector and parastatal employment, but in facilitating commercial opportunities"

And you have the 'Black Diamonds' theme to cap the 'exotification' of blackness in the post 1994 South Africa. The phrase 'Black Diamonds' was coined by the Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing in an attempt to elucidate consumption patterns of the 'emerging black middle class'. The idea is to 'educate' traders about the changing consumption patterns as affected by rising incomes of the 'emergent' black middle class. The Institute issues findings of 'research surveys' revealing how black people are 'embracing modernity' through taking up cell phones, high tech and luxurious cars, single malt whiskies etc. In 2006 when the institute was introducing the 'Black Diamonds' theory it made startling comments. "The black middle class is a very complex group to understand because they live in two worlds: modern and traditional. What makes South Africa's scenario more intricate is the cultural paradox. There exists a pull-back to cultural roots that is often in contradiction towards Westernisation" (UCT Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, 2006[34]).

This thinking is clearly soaked within the 'civilising' framework that sees 'tribal roots' in every African. Faced with the persistence of this false dichotomy, Magubane argued back in 1973 that it represented "pseudo-scientific defence of economic and political interests of white society. One is inclined to characterise the 'Black Diamonds' concept as an ideology that serves to denote Africans as a foreign feature within mainstream commerce. How else do you explain the insistence to quarantine

[34] UCT Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing. 2006. Connecting with black diamonds. [Online]. Available at: http://www.unileverinstitute.co.za/Research.aspx?ProjName=Connecting%20with%20Black%20Diamonds%20(2006) [20 December 2011]

from a system, a group of people whose entire lives has been shaped by the very same system? (Radebe, 2011) [35].

The *SA Mail* and the media in general have been 'thrilled' by the Black Diamonds theory judging by the uncritical coverage of the Institute's survey results and interpretations. The *SA Mail* is also said to be positioned as a newspaper for 'black diamonds'. This positioning was expressed to me by two senior members of the *SA Mail* editorial collective. It has also been acknowledged by The Editor in her 2011 column[36]. One of the two senior editors laid out the endorsement of the Black Diamonds theory when we were talking about the new look of *SA Mail* which was unveiled a few weeks before I started my site visits. The redesign was undertaken by a person described as an "international newspaper consultant" (De Waal, 2010)[37]. After launch of the SA Mail new look, the consultant commented: "The Sunday English-language paper sports a new masthead, new names for various sections, a new colour palette, new typography and best of all, new content too" (Peterong.com, 2010)[38].

Of the new design, the SA Mail senior editor said: "I like the bright red [on the mast head]. The mix of colours is much more lively than the previous one. I think it will

[35] Radebe. S. 2011. Irritating Black Diamond Theory. The New Age. [Online]. Available: http://www.thenewage.co.za/blogdetail.aspx?mid=186&blog_id=54 [13 February 2012].

[36] [The Editor], 2011 "We must claim victory but also admit defeat". The SA Mail. [Online]. Available: http://m.news24.com/citypress/Columnists/Ferial-Haffajee/We-must-claim-victory-but-also-admit-defeat-20111029 [10 February 2012]

[37] De Waal, M. 2010. New Look City Press Hits the streets. *Daily Maverick*. [Online]. Available: http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2010-05-01-new-look-city-press-hits-the-streets-this-sunday [12 February 2012]

[38] Ong, P. 2010. City Press design launches today. Peterong.com. [Online]. Available: http://peterong.com/blog/?p=173 [12 February 2012].

appeal to the market we want, the young hip and happening black diamonds". This theme is continued in the redesign of the *SA Mail* supplementary lifestyle magazine which happened in 2011 way after I had done my ethnographic observation. The magazine came out glossy and in that and other features is screaming the consumerism espoused in the black diamond discourse. This represents a perfect space to showcase how newsrooms are connected to broader social discourses and in this case discourses which perpetuate historical dominations. This argument punches holes to the positioning of news media within liberal political settings as disinterested entities. Instead as Allan (1999: 49) argues "...codified conventions of news work contribute to the naturalisation of the various social divisions and inequalities indicative of the modern society, principally by helping to reaffirm these inequalities as being *appropriate, legitimate or inevitable* ..."

But then I'm fully aware that this argument will be incomplete if it does not descend into interrogating the 'actual' news making process as it happens on a day to day basis in a newsroom particularly for a study anchored on an ethnographic approach. It has been argued that the day to day news production processes and organisation of the newsroom, the procedures, bureaucracy, time pressures, favour objective narration. If the claims of organisational theorists are anything to go by, argues Schudson (2000) the social rooting of an individual journalist should not matter. "Whoever they are, they will be socialised quickly into the values and routines of daily journalism" (Schudson: 186). Berger (1997: 3) argues that the news media fraternity commands "relative autonomy" as a result of institutional factors. "It has its own rhythms and bureaucratic processes, personality conflicts, internal struggles,

all of which make the most determined manager tear their hair out. It is very hard to make the media accountable in a narrow sense to one centre of power". I now turn the daily grind of the *SA Mail* newsroom.

The News Machine

In the introduction to this chapter, I briefly touched on the actual news manufacturing floor of the *SA Mail.* I'm now going back to the 'invisible conveyer belt' that characterises the L shaped newsroom. As I noted, the main axis of the L shape is populated by what seems to be random rows of work stations as defined by a collection of desks, chairs, computers and telephones. The guided tour I received from the business editor revealed a pattern of sectionalised editorial teams and a pyramid structure. In this floor, section editors are located at the centre and surrounded by sectionalised teams. For instance politics reporters are grouped together and so are sport reporters, business and general news reporters. And then you have the non writers like subs, layout and page designers grouped together on the other far end of the newsroom. The leisure and entertainment editorial team populates the shorter axis of the L shape. Back on the main block stands a display of past front pages which gives away an inkling of what happens in this place. Behind this display, pasted against a glass wall, seats the editor of the newspaper in a space that covers about 20 square metres. Next to the editors office follows three other secluded but smaller spaces accommodating the managing editor and two other senior editors. All this I recorded during the guided tour. Over the next four months from June to August, the manufacturing process was to be revealed.

The *SA Mail* runs on what can be described as a traditional newsroom structure formed out of a centralised collection of a handful of individuals who decide what makes news and what does not. The structure of the *SA Mail* newsroom is hierarchical in nature with The Editor sitting on top of the 'news manufacturing' process. She is flanked by four associate editors who make up what can be described as the top editorial executive team. The four executive editors had different responsibilities. There is a managing editor, a position more like chief operations officer, executive editor responsible for investigation and one focused on production processes.

One of the executive editors, JPZ, served as the news editor, which is a critical position in any newsroom. The news editor is the point person for most of the reporters and he takes care of the news pages of the *SA Mail* and most importantly the front page. The news editor has a deputy and is flanked by four section editors who are responsible for the business, politics, sports features and leisure sections. Each section head has a task of marshalling a team of reporters, about five on average in each team. At its main newsroom, the *SA Mail* kept a total of 22 reporters. Alongside this line of reporting rests the subediting section of the newsroom which is headed by the chief sub. Under him, the chief sub has a team of about 15 sub editors who are responsible for cleaning copy and designing and laying out stories on page. During my stay at the *SA Mail* newsroom the total editorial team of about 60 people gathered to take stock on a weekly basis. The executive team gathered about five times a week to set the news agenda for the week.

The *SA Mail* editorial structure and *modes operandi* is taken to be inherently democratic within the liberal professional theory of journalism. The 60 odd individuals who populate the *SA Mail* newsroom are supposedly bound by a 'journalistic ethic' which ensures an independent and neutral conduct in the production of news. This contention is well represented in Berger (2004: 82) where he argues that "... journalism –unlike other modes of communication- has an organic and intrinsic link to democracy". According to Berger (81 -82) "... there is an ashamed stance for reserving the term 'journalism' for communication with a 'public interest' significance. This definition assumes therefore that at root, journalism has a democratic thrust –and ... one that is mass orientated".

In practical terms these claims to independence and objectivity of journalism translate into a weekly package of editorial content generated, shaped and fine tuned for public consumption by the *SA Mail* editorial collective using individuals in their respective roles. This process is supposed to be free of 'undue influence' (McMair, 1998; Berger, 1997). As a collection of individuals the editorial team is seen as a cohesive machine which processes news ideas without 'fear favour or prejudice'. This is supposed to work like a conveyor belt of sort, where news ideas come in on one end and emerge on the other end as a finished product. In this case the finished product is supposedly neutral. In this machine the journalist becomes a "professional communicator whose work is structured and shaped by a variety of practices, conventions, and ethical norms" (McNair: 61).

I did shadow the development of a number of story ideas from inception through to publication to observe this theoretical claim in practice. My observation of this

process had to begin at editorial meetings of various sections of the paper. This is where news ideas are considered to be at their rawest form as they enter the *SA Mail* news production machine. I had an opportunity of attending four editorial meetings of the business section of the *SA Mail*. These are held on Mondays to gather news ideas from five business section reporters. Each reporter brings story ideas to the table to be deliberated upon in way that wants to interrogate their 'news value'. This also offers an opportunity for the head of the section to dispatch "news worthy" assignments. While this level of news gathering can be considered the entry point of the news processing, there is a lot that precedes this starting point which I will reflect as I go. I should point out that my understanding of this process would have been enhanced if I had the opportunity of tracing stories from the sources. My attempts to accompany journalists to their sources of news were thwarted. I was stood up a number of times, given all sorts of reasons including what appeared to be genuine sensitiveness of stories and sources and in other times I was simply stonewalled.

In the four business section meetings I attended, about 10 firm news stories were discussed in each meeting. The total list of stories discussed in one meeting (19th July 2010) was made by the following topics.

- Tracking wage negotiations in the public sector
- A fight between South African businessman for oil exploration rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo
- The conflict of interest caused by the private business interests of the communications minister

- Internal fights within the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce (Nafcoc),
- Financial results of the Industrial Development Corporation
- Interview with departing CEO of MTN Phuthuma Nhleko
- Looking into the prospects of a new newspaper *The New Age*
- The travails of the financial sector charter.
- The conflict of interests posed by minister of communication Siphiwe Nyanda's business interests
- The meeting also discussed the consumer page stories.

The system is designed in way that will subject this list of news stories to interrogation. As the list goes through different levels of the newsroom only the 'best stories' will make it through to publication. The business editor takes this list into the executive editorial meetings where the story ideas are further interrogated for their 'news values'. As the week progress, some of these stories fall off the news list for several reasons. Their spot may be taken by other 'sexy' news stories which break as the week progresses, others are dismissed by the executive team and others don't make it due to various difficulties encountered by journalists in building the story ideas into fully fledged publishable material. In this process there is a 'news filter' at work. This feature informs the argument that the newsroom has efficient checks and balances to guard against 'propaganda' (Berger, 1998).

News Values: If it bleeds it leads

In addition to the latter bureaucracy, a qualitative test that determines the progression of story ideas into publishable material is observable. The key factor of

the test I observed is representation of more than one voice in the narration of the story. This is a religiously guarded principle which is constantly put to journalists from the time they suggest the story idea to editing of the final version. It is a critical feature as it links to journalistic claim of presenting news objectively and fairly. I did note the relegation of a number of stories into insignificance due to failure by the journalist to secure more than one source on the story. A couple of times this was commanded by the chief editor herself who in our conversation had cited variety in news sources as 'holy grail' of sort. In practice the emphasis to variety in news sources tends to be weak and replaced by a mechanistic representation of more than one source in the story without due regard to the location of such voices. Thus a story with more than one voice, expressing the same notion and from the same school of thought will certainly pass through the system without much trouble. This plays into the hands of institutional powers that make the primary sources of news. So when the Reserve Bank issues a statement on the state of the economy, a journalist will source comment from other institutional organs like banks just to tick the box of featuring more than one source in a story. The result is a story that features more than two sources all of which are embedded in the 'neo liberal' economic paradigm. As such the *SA Mail's* coverage of economics will fall into blind endorsement of market fundamentalism (Banda 2009; Brand 2009; Herman and Chomsky, 1998).

The observable *SA Mail* news worthiness test is also very much guided by the traditional 'news values'. Over the years journalism has developed a pattern which determines what makes news and what does not. I draw largely upon my induction into journalism which is very much represented inside the *SA Mail* newsroom room

practices. In my journalistic training, a six months crash course, I was given four key principles that should guide the making of a news story. I should state that when diligently followed these never failed me in ensuring publication of my stories even though I found them to be a cunning tools of censorship. "The genius of professionalism in journalism is that it tends to make journalists oblivious to the compromises with authority they routinely make" (McChesney, 2000:). These principles are represented in four simple words being, *conflict, prominence, resonance* and *context*. I find it useful to spend a bit of time on each of these only to show how they link with the broader principles of journalism and its role in society.

My observation at the *SA Mail* came to confirm that newsrooms are in love with the conflict factor. This refers to conflict as in a fight or a collision between two or more parties. If the conflict factor comes with violence if blood is spilled the better for news. This submission is largely drawn from my ten years experience in different news newsrooms and was also observed during my short observatory stay at the *SA Mail*. I can say with a high level of confidence that it is the most important factor that determines the making of news. It is as if the 'gods of journalism' had decided that conflict sells newspapers. This is certainly represented in the old mantra which dominated the newsroom I have served. 'If it bleeds it leads.'

I did consciously watch the prevalence of the conflict factor in the making of news during my stay at the *SA Mail* newsroom. The factor dominates by far any other critical factor in the manufacturing of news. It dominates the list of news ideas presented by journalists and the news stories that make it through the process and those that finally get published. All the 10 stories in the list from the business section

I submitted above had the conflict factor, some more than others. In his interjections and questions posed to journalists as they were presenting their stories, the business editor, was almost searching for the conflict factor. This I also observed in his comparative review of the previous newspaper edition during the Monday meetings. When one of the reporters, ANN, presented his story list and when he came to the Angola story you could see the business editor lightening up as he expressed the view that "this is a good story". This is noticeable during the presentation of other stories which come with the conflict factor.

Prominence is another key factor in the process of making news which was also observable in the *SA Mail* newsroom. This is a critical factor which is hidden within the famous four W's and H of journalism Who What Where When and How. A story and mainly the main subject must command a reasonable level of 'prominence' to make it through the system. If the story is predicated in a personality, the person at the centre of the story must be prominent or must already be a celebrated public figure. This is such that an ordinary Joe stands little chance of competing for space on the editorial pages when pitched against an already celebrated figure like MTN CEO Phuthuma Nhleko, Communication Minister Sphiwe Nyanda as reflected in the business section news diary presented above.

Resonance refers to an effort of presenting the story in a way that makes the story or the subject matter to be close to a wider readership base. This can be achieved in a number of ways and mainly by relating the subject matter to a previous prominent happening. For example a story about an ordinary Joe has to be made relevant by linking the ordinary Joe to a prominent figure. The ordinary Joe has to be the cousin,

friend, niece of Nelson Mandela to give the story weight as it were. The story about Tiego Moseneke's ventures into the DRC is only significant because he is the brother of and Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke. This fits neatly into Hall *et al* observation that the news stories are 'socially constructed' through a processes of identification. "If the world is not to be presented as a jumble of random and chaotic events, then they must be identified" (Hall *et al* (1978: 54). The process of identification translates to placing the news "within a frame of meanings [presumed] to be familiar with the audience". This process -identification and contexualisation – is one of the most important through which events are "made to mean" by the media.

Lastly there is context which is central in making news. This refers to an expressed effort to explain why the story is important. This is largely an interpretation of events by the journalist or the newsroom. In many news rooms this is referred to as the 'so what paragraph'. Point is, stories have to be pepped up to make grade in journalism. If a man dies in a car accident that in itself does not pass as a 'good' news story. The 'so what paragraph' demand of journalists to pep up the story which can be achieved through a technique called scaling. A man dying in the accident is not itself a good story. It has to read: A man died in a car accident bringing to 10 the number of people who have been maimed in this road over the past month.

These features of news values have a significant bearing on the social role of journalism. They form the primary factors that determine the process of 'news manufacturing'. I have presented these news value factors to ascertain their usefulness in assisting the positioning of the *SA Mail* as a newspaper that serves the

South African public fairly and equitably. This is to test the objective expressed by The Editor of positioning the *SA Mail* in close proximity to its readers and to halt the tendency of mainstream media to prop up elitist interests.

This chapter was largely styled as an 'ethnography of intellectual' professionals with the primary purpose of showing how these workers thought process come to be influenced by broader and dominant social discourses. To do this the chapter had to delve into these discourses and then link them to language inside the *City Mail* newsroom in a process that tends to reaffirm social difference and inequality. This is a process described as cross fertilisation by Boyer. The chapter then delved into the actual news manufacturing process and found that this process, despite arguments to the contrary, is vulnerable to the establishments.

6. Trapped Inside Business

"I think there's a case to be made for newspapers not being owned by public companies at all. When you consider the contribution they make to democracy it may be worth ruling that only newspapers owned by trusts or something similar can register as newspapers with the Post Office" (Bruce, 2010)[39]. The out of character exclamation made by Peter Bruce, the editor of South Africa's largest business daily, came rushing to my head as I waited endlessly at the lobby of the Media Group office building in Auckland Park. Coming from, a militant defender of market economics, the observation screamed out as a push for desperate measures in desperate times. Peter Bruce expressed this view in his weekly column on the 8th of March 2010. So it was still fresh in my mind when on the 14th of June 2010, I embarked on that first trip to the *SA Mail* news room which is located inside a 'corporate fortress' made out of the Media Group building. I had been waiting for an hour at the lobby to secure entrance into the building and I have to say I was beginning to lose patience. My wait was blessed by a curious gathering at the same lobby. A group of about 30 exclusively black man and women had been waiting there before my arrival. They looked like 'outsiders' in this corporate environment. They were obviously waiting for some service and were gesturing exhaustion from the wait. They waited. Clouded by my own entrapment at the lobby, I remember asking myself: Shouldn't newsrooms be located closer to the people they serve and can they not be friendlier and more accessible than this?

[39] Bruce, P. 2010. Thick End of the Wedge: The Editor's Notebook. *Business Day.* [Online]. Available: http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=95579 [17 January 2012]

Across the world newspapers are grappling with diminishing readership numbers. This has come to disturb the financial model which has sustained the newspaper industry over a century or so (Meyer, 2004). Newspapers have been largely sustained by the model of gathering eyeballs through news and then on-selling them to advertisers (Meyer, 2004; Lacy & Martin, 2004). This model is crumbling as the readership numbers tumble. In Western Europe and the US, several newspaper titles have been pushed into financial distress over the past few years (Meyer). The global financial crisis which set in around 2007 worsened the situation. Dramatic cuts in advertising spent pushed a number of titles into liquidation (Harber, 2009). In South Africa the newspaper industry is also going through pain. Readers are disappearing and advertising revenues are also tumbling which has forced major titles into deep cost cutting measures and mainly through staff retrenchment. There are suggestions that newspapers are set on a path to extinction as captured in the title of Phillip Meyer's best seller: *The Vanishing Newspaper: Saving Journalism in the Information Age*. As such the question raised by Peter Bruce is pertinent. As has been observed for ages, private capital might not at all be an ideal home for journalism (McChesney, 1998; Golding and Murdock, 2000).

This chapter sets out to capture the positioning of the *SA Mail* newsroom against the crisis engulfing newspaper journalism and mainly the funding crisis as influenced by the liberal paradigm. Given the prevailing global economic crisis, the pain of the newspaper industry appears to be cyclical in nature which is bound to go away when the economy turns around. But there are suggestions that the crisis is fundamental in nature. This view says it is not necessarily the business of news which is in trouble

but the practice of journalism, as a coherent universe held together by a set of 'positivist principles' carved over the past two centuries. This is well captured by Fordred (1998) in saying that "the epistemological grounds of the industry [media] are melting" at the back of technological advancement mixed with social metamorphosis". Citizens seem to be claiming back the "right to information" which had for ages been deferred to the practice of journalism (Gauthier, 1999; Willis and Bowman, 2003). As such this chapter will highlight key daily movements inside the *SA Mail* newsroom and link these to the broader industry movements.

Trapped inside profit

Were it not for the intervention of a former colleague, SZ, who had moved on to become business editor of the *SA Mail,* there is a greater chance that my entrapment at the lobby of the Media Group building could have been prolonged. After an hour or so of the wait I phoned SZ on his mobile phone and explained my situation. My one hour long wait was due to the absence from work of the office administrator who was supposed to see me in. From the lobby there was no way of knowing whether, the administrator was at work or not. So the security kept ringing her number endlessly. My plea to the security to try an alternative line, anyone in the newsroom fell on deaf ears.

The security insisted that she can only help by getting through to the person I was appointed to. The other people in the newsroom are busy and she can't just barge into their schedule without an appointment. So I had the chance to observe the group of about 30 people entrapped with me at the lobby. This group stood out in character. They looked like outsiders in this corporate environment partly as a result

of their dress code which suggested working class background. There was also their apparently intimidated demeanour. They stood in stark contrast to the corporately dressed persons who were quickly served by the security, obviously helped by prior appointments, and signed into the building within seconds of arrival.

It was my plan not to use, SZ, to announce my first appearance and introduction into the *SA Mail* newsroom as I had calculated that this could compromise my research activity. I know newsrooms to be littered with silly cabals. For what I know, my former colleague could be embedded into a cabal that could make other members of the newsroom treat me with suspicion. But then I lost patience after waiting for about an hour and called him on his mobile phone to sort out my situation. He duly did so and I was signed in within seconds after that call. I asked the person who came to sign me in about the status of the people who remained seated at the lobby. I found out that the group was largely made of readers of South Africa

S largest daily who have come for different reasons to the paper including pitching stories and to collect prices won in the paper's competitions for readers

And so I had to settle for the first tour of the *SA Mail* under the guidance of my former colleague which I had initially sought to avoid. The first thing I noticed during this tour is the unfittingly small size of the L shaped newsroom. It will be a struggle to fit in more than 50 people into the space allocated for the *SA Mail* newsroom. The space looked insufficient for an operation that produces a paper as big as the *SA Mail*. Once again I was coming face to face with the results of the corporatisation of news media. In my 10 years as a journalist I have watched newsrooms shrink significantly as a result of the overemphasis of profit considerations. For example the

newsroom of *Business Day* has more than halved between 1999 (when I joined the newspaper) and now. This is a global phenomenon where newsrooms are expected to run on shoe string budgets to justify themselves within profit seeking entities (Meyer, McChesney; Golding and Murdock).

My visits to the *SA Mail* came at a time when the commercial bite of newsrooms had increased dramatically at the back of the global economic crisis which ensued in 2007. Newspapers across the world had already been haemorrhaging. "It is clear that across the industry, newsrooms which were already under pressure, and many of which had already shrunk significantly in recent years, are going to get even smaller" (Harber, 2009). This trend has come to negatively affect the quality of journalism (Harber, 2009; Bruce 2010, Meyer 2004). The situation had become desperate forcing Peter Bruce, the editor of *Business Day* to make that out of character proposition. Peter Bruce had essentially suggested that a solution to the financial crisis faced by newspapers could be in their extrication from profit making organisation. He argued that the prevailing form of mainstream newspaper ownership was hampering their status as 'defenders of democracy'. He then suggested that newspaper ownership should perhaps be limited to purposefully designed trusts.

"At *Media Group*, they are merging the four newsrooms of their 'serious' Afrikaans newspapers into one multimedia operation which will provide the material to all these papers and their websites" (Harber). The *SA Mail* has not been sparred by this. Given its insufficient staff numbers the *SA Mail* increasingly relies on the centralised SA Media Group news to fill its pages. Addressing this trend one *SA Mail* staff

member said "By using more copy from that [Media Group] white newsroom we are losing our differentiating factor. This is the reason behind this 'non-racialism' thing. Essentially they [Media Group] want a situation where they can fill the *SA Mail* pages with copy that can be published across all their publications black or white".

The latter is a significant observation in the characterisation of the change in functional character taking place at the *SA Mail*. It denotes the 'supremacy' of commercial considerations, compared to 'journalistic imperatives', in the agenda of transforming *SA Mail* into a non-racial newspaper. This is a theme captured in Badat (2009: 2) where he argues that sociological concepts, and in particular non-racialism, have been dangerously deployed to "serve as quick fix solutions" in commercial ventures. There is little doubt that an *SA Mail* which is sold as a non racial read to the market has more commercial appeal for its owners. As noted by the latter informant, a non racial *SA Mail* can be produced with far lesser costs because it can be fed with editorial content that is supposedly 'race neutral' and produced in a centralised newsroom which then feeds various titles across the group. This is a cheaper option as opposed to maintaining an *SA Mail* whose market positioning demands editorial content by a specialised newsroom.

An *SA Mail* sold as a 'non racial' read is also attractive for its potential of generating superior profits than one focused on black readers. The *Sunday Times* has remained one of the most profitable newspapers in the country which is attributable to the calibre of its readers. Advertisers step over each others' toes to get space in the *Sunday Times*. This behaviour is justified by the 'reach and income levels' of the *Sunday Times* readers. The newspaper boasts about 500000 unit sales and close to 5

million readers. Its main attraction to advertisers is said to be the high income levels of many of its readers (Dreyer, 2006)[40]. This is a coded reference to white readers who for historical reasons continue to dominate South Africa's upper income levels. In the game of selling readers to advertisers, white is regarded as superior (Milne et al, 2006).

There is no doubt that the repositioning of *SA Mail* is largely motivated by profit factors which are represented in what appears to be an obsession to mimic the *Sunday Times*. In my conversations with the editor and in her several speeches to general staff members which I observed, I lost count of the mentioning of the *Sunday Times*. One of her statements made during general staff meeting best captures this point. "Every weekend, the *Sunday Times* is packaged like a gift to its readers. We need to up our game to compete in that space". This left me with an impression that the *Sunday Times* is the key reference point in *SA Mail's* transformation lane.

Is the *Sunday Times* a shining example of a 'non racial' newspaper in South Africa? This is a serious question which can only be sufficiently answered by a full research project. It is not my brief to do this but then I cannot avoid this question and will therefore attempt to tackle it briefly using particular anecdotal evidence, generalities and my own experience of being employed in the office building which houses the *Sunday Times* newsroom. A simple analysis that employs critical political economy theory, of the *Sunday Time's* social role, character and editorial output is most likely to yield a big No to this question. This is partly supported by an observation made in

[40] Dreyer, N. 2006. *A Century of Sundays*. Cape Town: Zebra Press

the latter paragraph that the *Sunday Times* generates superior profits at the back of its largely high earning white readers.

It is fair to assume that these white readers are attracted to the paper by a content which appeals to their social orientation and political interests. The *Sunday Times* is yet to pass the employment equity test in the composition of its staff which is regarded as a key factor in the non-racial discourse. The 2008 debacle which saw the *Sunday Times* fire its columnist David Bullard for penning an article which grossly denigrated South Africa's black people as 'savages' may seal this matter (Fray et al, 2008)[41]. It is not David Bullard that is on trial here but the institutional make up of the *Sunday Times* which allowed for airing of his views.

It is safe to conclude that the *SA Mail's* drive towards 'non racialism' is motivated largely by profit factors and less by journalistic imperatives. With *Sunday Times* featured prominently as the target to unseat or mimic, the commercial considerations bounce back to impact on *SA Mail's* editorial direction, character and role. In one of our conversations The Editor mentioned that it was part of her mandate to make the paper attractive to higher income earners represented by the 7 to 10 LSM. The Editor also told me that her mission was to transform *SA Mail* into a serious political paper". This fits into *Media Group's* tendencies to "kowtow to a commercial agenda" as suggested by Van der Westhuisen (2010). McChesney (2000) argues the consequences of increased trend of a journalism that is pandering to a commercial agenda can be seen from an increased focus "on news of interest to desired upscale consumers and investors, and generally urging a journalism more

[41] Fray, P; Harber A; Kruger, F and Milo, D. 2008. A report by the Sunday Times Review Panel. [Online]. Available: http://images.businessday.co.za/SundayTimes.pdf [13 February 2012]

closely tuned to the bottom-line needs of advertisers and the parent corporation. The much-ballyhooed separation of church and state was sacrificed on the altar of profit".

Democratising the newsroom

In one of our conversations The Editor proclaimed that "the South African Media is yet to find a democratic voice". It was part of her mission to ensure that a democratic voice comes out of *SA Mail's* editorial content. This was to be achieved through an authentic representation of "ordinary people" in the papers news agenda. "We must be close to the issues and people we write about. That means we must spend more time in communities and away from the office. We must move away from internet journalism". In this, The Editor is invoking an old journalistic discourse of being 'a voice for the voiceless'. She advanced the ambition of finding a democratic voice further by declaring that the mainstream media tends to over represent elitist voices. "The tabloids like newspapers are doing a much better job at this. You must look at the people who gather here to interact with the tabloid newspaper. Those who condemn tabloid journalism are motivated by a snobbish and an elitist approach". She was referring to the 'alienated crowed' I encountered at the entrance during my first visit to the *SA Mail*.

The Editor's talk of democratising the newsroom makes for a major challenge, given evidence that news readers across the globe are increasingly rejecting the traditional newsroom model that *SA Mail* runs with. The *SA Mail* is essentially produced by a group of about 60 individuals who run with a presumption of knowing the information needs of the public. The model is increasingly being attacked as

inherently 'elitist and unreliable' (Willis and Bowman, 2003). "A democratised media challenges the notion of the institutionalised press as the exclusive, privileged, trusted, informed intermediary of the news" (Willis and Bowman: 2). The decline of the newspaper industry in North America and Western Europe is partly attributed to a trend of readers voting with their feet against the 'elitist propaganda' (Chomsky and Herman, 1998). This is made possible by the explosion of internet hosted news platforms which allows for more democratic participation of readers in the making and shaping of news agendas.

The people populating the *SA Mail* and mainly its leadership are very much alive to the threats emerging from the explosion of digital media. There is lots of talk about embracing the web and some steps wanting to be adaptive have been taken. During my stay at the *SA Mail*, The Editor constantly reminded the newsroom about the need to "embrace the web" in a way that will make the *SA Mail* "a truly multimedia product". "We need to be present across platforms to survive". *SA Mail's* attempt to adapt to the digital world is largely anchored by maintaining brand presence on the web. The editorial content of the website is mended by a single person who runs with the title web editor. While engaging other members of the newsroom I made sure to monitor her activities from a distance. She comes in earlier than most employees, around 8am, and departs just after 4pm. She was glued to her work station and in particular to her computer screen more than most other people in this newsroom. Had my wish been granted, she could have been one of my key informants. My wish was never granted because she had little time in between her duties to do talking. I was convinced that this condition was not staged for me as an

outsider but she generally did not interact with other staff members. As such she could be characterised as an 'outsider' herself. This is critical in defining the struggles of the newspaper industry in general to adapt their operations into the demands of the digital age.

The web editor mainly watches news wires and then captures stories which are thought to be in line with *SA Mail's* print product. She also transports the selected features from the Sunday print edition into the digital edition. The result looks like a photo copy of the *SA Mail* edition posted online. This is complemented by the serialisation of the *SA Mail* web presence across different 'digitilised social media platforms' like Facebook and Twitter. To a large extent the latter is driven by individualised initiative and appetite to go an extra mile for the *SA Mail*. Individual *SA Mail* journalists are expected to drive the social media interaction by putting out messages that speak to and about their newspaper and its editorial content. The editor is leading by example in her overenthusiastic interaction on different social media platforms. She is very active on her Twitter profile and in some days generated three postings which attract respectable number of reactions. She has developed a social media celebrity status judging by the number of people who follow her on Twitter and her Facebook friends.

When I quizzed the web editor during a formal interview about her role she communicated more frustrations than victories in her mission to make the *SA Mail* a "truly interactive digital media platform".

As a weekly newspaper the *SA Mail* is seriously challenged in coming up with a web friendly mode of operation. The web demands an almost live news publishing

strategy. This is a challenge for a team which is conditioned into a weekly production cycle as per the demands of the Sunday print product. And yet it may be that conditioning which turns the internet into a threat. The *SA Mail* gathers news from Tuesday up to Saturday and processes them for publication on Sunday. By the time it hits the street, most of these news, except for exclusive material, would have been spotted elsewhere, on radio, television and news websites by readers. As such most of the news captured in the *SA Mail* print edition come out as stale news by Sunday. The internet is more of a headache because it does not only steal readers from newspapers but it is also gnawing at its income generation model and chipping away its epistemological grounding (Willis and Bowman, Meyer).

The internet as a new medium of communication has essentially rendered the information market into something of a free for all phenomena (Vise, 2005). It has disturbed the power relations that have historically defined the art of communication by destroying the barriers which enabled a few to control the information market. "We often read during the roaring 1990's that technology and information had been democratised...The internet has taken this process another huge step forward, being a system where everyone is connected but no one is in control" (Zakaria, 2003: 15). Information has been made relatively free. In 2003 Bowman and Willis pointed out that there were more than 1 billion computers connected to the internet. "By the end of 2010 Intel predicts that more than 1,5 billion computers will be connected via high speed broadband and another 2,5 billion phones will have more processing power than today's PC".

This has had a sounding impact on the media market. In an era where information is free, consumers are increasingly shying away from the traditional media products and mainly newspapers. The logic is, why pay a fee to access news when they are freely available on the web. Thus newspaper readers have been migrating into the internet. This threatens to destroy the main pillar of the newspaper industry. The industry has survived all these years by selling eyeballs to advertisers who are now following readers onto the internet. A significant portion of advertising revenue has already been claimed away from traditional media platforms by internet based business like Google (Vise, 2005).

Markets like the US and Europe are already showing a strong trend of the migration of advertisers on to the internet. A global study conducted by consulting firm PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) found that internet based advertising revenue grew by more than 30% between 2003 and 2008 (PwC, 2008)[42]. Old media businesses have tried with little financial success to pursue their customers onto the web pages. "The newspapers' biggest problem is their inability to make much money from their web sites. Web advertising generally pays 10 cents for every $1 earned from print ads. And, of course, there is no circulation income" (Brinkley, 2009)[43].

SA Mail is certainly struggling to grow. The newspaper reached the 200000 copy sales figure in 1988 (Tomaselli, 1991). It has remained trapped around this figure

[42]PriceWaterhouseCoopers. 2008. Global and Entertainment Media Outlook. [Online]. Available: http://www.pwc.com/extweb/pwcpublications.nsf/docid/5AC172F2C9DED8F5852570210044EEA7 [5 January 2012]

43 Brinkley, J. 2009. How to save the newspaper industry. Printed Matters. [Online] Available: http://burden.ca/blog/2009/02/20/paywall-madness-dec-2008-feb-2009 [5 June 2009].

since then. This could be a function of the fact that the South African media market has opened up a bit allowing for entry of several new news media products from broadcasting to newspapers. Competition is tighter in the post 1994 South Africa. Most recently in light of the repositioning, the *SA Mail* seemed to be sliding further down in copy sales. The 2011 ABC circulation figures showed the *SA Mail* sliding by about 10% to 148000 (Daily Maverick, 2011)[44]. That makes for more than 50000 decline in about five years. During one of our conversations and also in one of her address to staff, *SA Mail* editor did talk to this decline. She gathers that the "sharp decline" is partly caused by the repositioning of the newspaper. "This is largely defined by the pursuit of the 'non racialsm'. It is natural for this to happen when you reposition a product. We were expecting that there will be a sharp drop in sales but in time they will stabilise and pick up again as we draw on new readers".

The situation has been exacerbated by the prevailing economic crisis which has slashed universal advertising revenues. The situation in the US and Western Europe is dire. "Several newspapers in large US cities have closed in recent months..." (Kirchhoff, 2009) [45]. New York Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger was recently quoted by AFP (2009) saying print media could "peter out" by 2012. Investment guru Warren Buffett told investors that the sustainability of the newspaper's business model was being eroded. "I do not see anything on the horizon that sees that erosion coming to an end" (Reuters, 2009)[46]. US based 'new media' scholar Vin

[44] De Waal, City Press hits up the battle for Sunday's press market. *The Daily Maverick.* [Online]. Available: http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2011-09-26-city-press-heats-up-the-battle-for-sundays-press-market [12 February 2012]

[45] Kirchhoff, S. 2009. The US newspaper industry in transition. Congressional Research Service. [Online]. Available: http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/126872.pdf [12 January 2012]

[46] Reuters. 2009. Buffet offers bleak outlook for US newspapers. [Online]. Available: http://mobile.reuters.com/article/topNews/idUSTRE5412M920090502?src=RSS-TOP [13 February 2012].

Crosbie predicted the demise of the newspaper industry in the US before 2021 while Meyer has said that daily newspaper readers will run out in 2030 (AFP, 2009)[47]. For the traditional media industries, this is a crisis of biblical proportion in the making.

South Africa is generally thought to be on the verge of an internet explosion. As things stand the country has barely scratched the surface in light of global internet usage trends. Latest figures place South Africa's internet penetration around 15%. So the digital journey is only beginning. That could mean the country's newspaper industry woes are also only beginning. This seems to be more the case for newspapers which are targeting the top end of the market. SA mail is certainly going for this market as expressed by its editor to me. She said; "We want more of the LSM 7 to 10 market." It is important to note that the *SA Mail* is also facing a different challenge at the lower end of the market being the explosion of the tabloid newspaper market. The phenomenal growth of 'tabloid journalism' driven newspapers introduces an interesting dynamic into this narration. Launched in the mid 2000's these newspapers have grown at break neck speed. For example the Daily Sun was has grown to become the largest newspaper in the country and by 2008 had reached copy sales of more than 500000 giving it readership base of about 5 million (Wasserman, 2010). This may be taken to suggest that the South African newspaper market is far from maturity even in the face of the migration of news into the internet experienced around the globe. Wasserman argues that the advent of tabloid newspapers in South Africa suggest that the country's newspaper market is not necessarily trapped inside the trajectory shaping the fate of newspapers in

AFP. 2009. Web-only newspapers? Don't junk the presses yet. [Online]. Available: http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gNWMgJlA_nGzgiPMdFYtQZhNJ_Kw [13 February 2012].

Western Europe and the US. This opens a huge debate which cannot be accommodated in this report. But my take is, tabloid newspapers exploited a gap left by mainstream titles like *SA Mail* and made out of elitism. In exploiting this gap, tabloids are yet to fully address the transformation demands faced by the news media fraternity in the post 1994 South Africa.

7. Seeking to Balance Expose and Development Journalism

My stay at the *SA Mail* newsroom for the purpose of this study was fortuitously timed as coinciding with a remarkable revival of the old debate: The role of the media in the post 1994 South Africa. In mid 2010 the debate had flared up one more time as largely sparked by intentions of South Africa's ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC) to introduce a media appeals tribunal. The ANC reasoned that South Africa's mainstream news media behaved maliciously against the post 1994 democratic order (Khanango, 2010[48]; Cronin, 2010[49]). As such, the ANC and its ideologues argued, a statutory intervention was necessary to correct the situation. The ANC's thoughts were rejected from many quarters with the news media fraternity taking the lead. The *SA Mail* editor was making one of the loudest objections by arguing that the ANC was out to censor exposure of corruption within its ranks. She made this point while acknowledging that South Africa's news media, the *SA Mail* included, needed some transformation and to move away from being 'prophets of doom'. In here lives a debate which has haunted post colonial societies. Bruised and battered by colonialism, these societies can certainly use a 'constructive media' to carve out of their populace a coercive force for development (Fordred, 1998). This requires of the media to buy into some 'patriotic agenda' which can contradict the traditional watchdog role of the media.

[48] Khamango, T. 2010. 'Overwhelming support' for tribunal. *Mail & Guardian*. [Online]. Available: http://mg.co.za/article/2010-08-24-anc-overwhelming-support-for-media-tribunal [10 February 2012].

[49] Cronin, J. 2010 Do we need an independent media tribunal?. *Umsebenzi*. [Online]. Available: http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?ID=3242 [10 February 2012]

The positioning of the media in post colonial societies has received much scholarly attention. The big question has been centred on the orientation of news media in these societies in a debate that links with age old normative theories of the media. Many post colonial societies inherited a media clad in liberal theory as a legacy of domination by western European polities (Berger, 2000). This theory emphasises the "watchdog" character of the news media. "The principal democratic role of the media, according to liberal theory is to act as a check on the state" (Curran, 2000: 121). In this frame of thinking, journalism is most effective if it is 'independent' from those who wield power in society and mainly menders of the state. This theory can stand in opposition to calls for the media to play a 'developmental role' in post colonial societies for the benefit of the populace (Ndebele, 2007). But then, one has to acknowledge that the concept of 'developmental journalism' can play into the hands of ruthless dictators who want journalists to dance to their tune under the guise of national interest (Berger, 2000; Good, 2002). With the advantage of being the last African country to decolonise, many newspapers in South Africa express the intention of achieving a balance between developmental journalism and playing the watchdog role. For her part, the Editor of the *SA Mail* says this much: "Our coverage should be balanced and fairly reflect the country. This is not a country in crisis. The glass is half full".

This chapter is designed to capture the orientation of the *SA Mail* in relation to these big debates about the role of the media in the post 1994 South Africa. This calls for characterisation of the philosophical outlook of the *SA Mail* newspaper as affected by its 'social location'. But then the latter is a theme which permeates throughout

this research paper and as such will be economically sprinkled within the narrations of this chapter. The chapter will mainly focus on exposing the orientation of the *SA Mail* newsroom in practice. This will be achieved through drilling deep into certain thematic experiences. This I hope will help in avoiding being lost in the apparent gap between what people pronounce and the actual trajectory that the paper find itself in. This charter will show that while key people in and around the *SA Mail* pray for a mix of development and watchdog journalism, the latter remains dominant for a variety of reasons mainly the overbearing historical legacies. All this will be set against the background of the fierce debate about the role of the media in the post 1994 South Africa which was raging while I was walking the research field.

Covering the 2010 World Cup

My site visits to the *SA Mail* newsroom began when South Africa was engulfed by the 2010 Soccer World Cup craze. My site visits began on Monday the, 14th of June, two days after the 2010 Soccer World Cup was kick started. On Tuesday, 15th June, the first working day of the week for the majority of *SA Mail* newsroom employees, I attended the general editorial meeting, a weekly occurrence designed to review the immediate past edition and to mull over ideas of the upcoming edition. On this particular day, the general editorial meeting seemed be in one mood with the country in being hypnotised by the 2010 World Cup craze. Close to 20 minutes was spent on reflecting the *SA Mail* coverage of the inaugural event which took place the previous Friday. In covering the event, the *SA Mail* had dished out a 'happy' brand of journalism. It was marked by an editorial splash on the front page. The page was anchored by a large picture, capturing the moment of goal by South Africa's striker

Simphiwe Shabalala in the country's match against Mexico. The match ended in a 1 – 1 draw living hope that South Africa was still very much in the competition for what passes as the most glorious sporting event in the world.

On the day of reviewing this coverage the often fiery editor of the *SA Mail* was dishing out accolades to her staff. "We did well," she said holding up the colourful picture of the 2010 Soccer World Cup. One staff member added her voice to the accolades by noting: "Our picture was far better than the *Sunday Times*". The *Sunday Times* had splashed the picture of Diego Maradonna on its front page. The Editor followed up the patriotism in her column on the edition of the 20th June 2010. "It was a wonderful opening and a magical Mzansi weekend, so who wants to rain on the nation's parade?" It was a strong statement in its symbolism. This time around the *SA Mail* had decided not to rain on the 'nation's parade' as it usually does.

In this jubilant mood, the *SA Mail* was arguably in tandem with the dominant mood in the country. The 2010 World Cup did spawn what can be regarded as 'national jubilation' in South Africa, if the large carnivals that accompanied the event are anything to go by. Multitudes expressed their joy in these carnivals hosted across the country and in different social landscapes from Soweto to Sandton. Black and white celebrated as united the arrival of the soccer tournament. It was the eminent Bishop, Desmond Tutu, who perhaps captured the dominant interpretation of the moment. "I'm dreaming, I'm dreaming. It's so beautiful. Wake me up! We want to say to the world; thank you for helping this ugly, ugly worm or caterpillar which we

were, to become a beautiful, beautiful butterfly" (Sport24)[50]. In connecting with this bubbly mood, the patriotism I observed at the *SA Mail* was no flash in the pen. The South African media had since the country was announced as the host four years ago lend its hand to make success out of the event. This was particularly visible when South Africa's media went out of its way to deflect the racist, sensationalist, hyperbolic coverage from some of the western counterparts. An SA Mail editorial published in May 2010 is useful:

> "South Africa is a different country today. We are free. We are about to host a splendid soccer World Cup next month. While those fearful citizens who hoard baked beans and predict Armageddon wait for what they believe to be an inevitable race war, we prefer to live in and celebrate a South Africa making strides in the arts, music, design, democracy and empowerment. As a great South African wrote: it is a long walk to freedom and both empowerment and democracy sometimes feel as if they are just out of the starting blocks.[Our] role has been and always will be to be a place that reflects honestly the journey to genuine freedom and a much greater shared prosperity" (SA Mail, 2010)[51].

Albeit set around a tricky if not clumsy theme (2010 World Cup) the mood I observed during the general meeting of the 15th June 2010 and other related events can be taken to represent a brand of journalism that is bubbling under the surface made of 'expose journalism'. The *SA Mail* had clearly made a choice to dish out an editorial tone designed to massage the 2010 World Cup bubble. To some degree, this approach represented an endorsement of the 'fairy tales' which accompanied the

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[50] Sport24. 2010 Tutu in Dreamland. Sport24. [Online] Available: http://www.sport24.co.za/Soccer/WorldCup/NationalNews/Tutu-in-dreamland-20100610 [10 February 2012]

[51] City Press. 2010. A fresh new look for old City Press Values. City Press. [Online]. Available: http://www.citypress.co.za/Opinions/Editorials/A-fresh-new-look-for-old-City-Press-values-20100501 [12 February 2012].

rationale to bring the 2010 World Cup to South Africa (Badat, 2009). These are well known fairy tales which positioned the World Cup as catalyst for development. There are many problems in this 2010 World Cup discourse but it is not my brief to delve into them here. Mine is to say, the *SA Mail* did buy into the World Cup paradigm and its many promises of economic development. In soothing the World Cup bubble, the *SA Mail* was playing as an 'interested party' and had for a moment dropped its guards as a watchdog. Were it not so, the *SA Mail* had plenty other choices on that Sunday. For that matter the paper could have, on that Sunday, juxtaposed the glitter of the World Cup inaugural event against a picture representing multitudes of destitute South Africans. It chose to be 'positive'.

In a way, this choice links up with many calls for the news media fraternity to balance out its editorial coverage with a more humanist approach and developmental journalism (Ndebele, 2007). On this point Ndebele makes a compelling submission. I find it necessary to quote him extensively. "For my part, I find that I'm increasingly impatient and exasperated by more news of struggling organisations and corpses of dead reputations. I have come to expect that the historic forest through which we are looking for a direction is likely to be littered with such corpses. They tell me nothing new anymore. Instead, they may have become the new frontier of conceptual constraints that has to be pushed back towards newer boundaries" (Ndebele, 2007).

Fordred's study (1998) of media coverage of the 1990's political violence in KwaZulu-Natal makes for a telling albeit extreme representation of the latter position. She argues that the approach of holding the mirror to society to view itself turned out to

be complicit in the violence when there were options to deliver a "far more human approach" (Fordred: 27). She concludes that "Models that represent media as purely informational are misleading". This model led to what she calls "body count journalism" which played into the hands of a colonially prejudiced view of portraying the violence as a purely "black on black violence", underplayed orchestration by the colonial state and ignored other critical social factors fuelling the violence. Fordred takes this point further in noting that the "black on black violence" theme was fuelled by "cultural politics of journalism in South Africa" where racial prejudice remained to define news.

Digging for dirt, winning awards

Ndebele and Fordred submissions stand against the 'gung ho' stature of journalism which dominates the *SA Mail*. This approach is largely represented inside the theme of investigative journalism. The Editor came to the *SA Mail* with a strong stomach for hard hitting investigative journalism. Arguably, this is largely due to her tenure at the *Mail & Guardian*, a weekly newspaper which tops its peers by far in its sweep of investigative journalism awards (25 years of the M&G, 2010)[52]. During her five year tenure at the *Mail & Guardian*, The Editor oversaw the publication of some of the bravest journalistic pieces the country has ever seen. These ranged from the exposure of corruption in South Africa's multi-billion rands arms deal to tender corruption. She is proud of this legacy but has on various platforms including interviews for this study, expressed the need to balance expose journalism with the development type. In her contribution to a publication celebrating 25 years of the

[52] 25 Years of the M&G. "I take my Freedom Seriously". Cape Town NB: Publishers

Mail & Guardian, The Editor points out that her brief from *Mail & Guardian* publisher Trevor Ncube was to introduce some love into the paper which had a reputation of being "anti just about everything".

"The Weekly Mail had been crafted as an anti apartheid newspaper geared to fighting the system. It celebrated freedom when she arrived in 1994 but struggled with defining a different identity in a democratic state. It was good at its watchdog role over the new state, but too often its tone was the same cynical and sneering one that was right for the fascist apartheid state but altogether wrong for the constitutional state" (25 years of the M&G).

It is important to note that The Editor wrote these words from her *SA Mail* office where the challenges of achieving this balance persist. In moving to the *SA Mail,* The Editor expressly stated a mission of jacking up the paper's investigative journalism abilities. "I hope to inject a touch of Afropolitanism into the paper and to bring with me some of the investigative journalism I have learnt at my alma mater, the *Mail & Guardian*" (IOL, 2009)[53]. When I got there she was in the process of establishing a new 'investigative journalism' team. In 2011 the *SA Mail* beat everyone to the business ventures of ANC Youth League president Julius Malema. Following the SA Mail publication the story spread like wild fire.

On the other hand The Editor expresses the need for the *SA Mail* to pursue the balance between 'development journalism' and a sharp 'watchdog role'. In capturing this, she said "Our coverage should be balanced and fairly reflect the country. This is

[53] Sapa. 2009. Ready for new Challenges. Mail and Guardian. [Online]. Available: http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/haffajee-ready-for-new-challenges-1.438694?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot [12 February 2012].

not a country in crisis. The glass is half full". This aspiration was widely expressed by the majority of my informants at the *SA Mail* newsroom. The development character of the *SA Mail* was largely expressed in comparative terms, as in measuring *SA Mail'* editorial character against other mainstream newspapers which are condemned for overemphasising the watchdog role to an extent that suggest resentment of the post 1994 democratic era (Ndebele, 2007).

Invariably the 'half full glass' discourse demands a buy-in into the state led development objectives of the post 1994 South Africa. This comes at the back of concerns that mainstream media has overplayed its watchdog role and thus positioned itself as a 'racially prejudiced' opposition to the post 1994 democratic order (Braude, 1998; Durrheim *et al*, 2010). This discourse is well captured in the storm which engulfed the news media in the early 1990's, when the Human Rights Commission initiated an enquiry about the prevalence of racism in the sector (Braude). The HRC was set off by a complaint laid by organised black professional entities including the Black Lawyers Association against the *Mail & Guardian*. The language deployed by the editorial collective which found *The New Age*, a newspaper launched in 2010 with an editorial policy that claims to be "broadly supportive of government" as far as it upholds the principles behind the establishment of the democratic politics in 1994. *The New Age* team promised to serve editorial content that is "constructively critical" of the government.

Telling the Truth

For her part, The Editor acknowledges that the South African media landscape reflects "a clash of ideologies about the role of the media in society". In one of our

conversations she argued that the evidence of this split can be seen in how key media personalities have engaged the ANC's call for a media tribunal by the South African National Editors Forum. "There is clear disagreement in this debate about the role of the media in [post 1994] South Africa". On one hand she clearly took a stance against the ANC's push for a media appeals tribunal. She described the initiative as "a red herring to intimidate journalists and to stop them publishing embarrassing stories on government corruption" (Business Day, 2010)[54]. On the other hand she told me that "I'm a bit uncomfortable with certain voices that formed part of the campaign against the media appeals tribunal". She pointed to the character and the tone of opposition pushed by Raymond Louw, the founding director of the South African National Editors Forum, who she said espoused "extreme liberal views" about the role of media in society. "This is not helping the situation," she said.

Raymond Louw's liberal views are well publicised and belong to the traditional school of thought which pushes for 'absolute independence' of journalism. This view assumes that effective journalism is about objective processing of information 'without fear, favour or prejudice' (McNair and Berger). It is a view predicated on the status of journalism as a 'fourth estate', a totally independent purveyor of news, a watchdog accountable to no ideological agenda. "In these terms, a journalist should be accountable primarily to his or her own journalistic conscience..." (Berger, 1997: 5). The 'journalistic conscience' here referred to is holding the mirror for society to view itself.

[54] Langeni, L. 2010. Ambassador warns over media tribunal. *Business Day.* [Online]. Available: http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=118388 [12 February 2012].

As such the fact that newspapers are dominated by stories of social decay and deviance (sex scandals, crime and murder etc), is only a reflection of the truth. I found many *SA Mail* newsroom members to be strong purveyors of this approach to journalism. However some renege when the subjectivity of their truth telling capacity is raised. An extract from my interview with SMK shows this. In all my interviews with *SA Mail* journalists I ensured to ask the following question. What role do you see for yourself as a journalist in the post 1994 South Africa. In his response SMK said. "The answer to that relates to the basics of journalism which have remained the same. We are here to inform, entertain and educate readers. And we do our best to stick, to tell the truth and only the truth so help us god. The only thing that may be, that may have changed is that prior to 1994 one needed to be vigilant because of the laws of the time. Now we are free to do our thing to tell the truth".

I probed further: Which truth? Is the truth not relative?

He answered: "Yes there are many ways of describing what the truth is. I'm a great believer in the saying that there are three sides of the story. The truth lies somewhere there in between. The South African situation is more complex because of its history. The truth can be affected by who you are writing for"

SA Mail managing editor KWB said "my role is to make a difference in people's lives by providing useful information for people to make informed decisions. We are holding government accountable". Several other *SA Mail* journalists see themselves as 'defenders of public interests' in a language that extricate them from public interests. The editor of entertainment pages LYM said "I'm here to highlight stories in way that is "giving voice to the voiceless". Even MSB who writes for the naturally

elitist business section said "Our stories must make a difference for the most vulnerable people in society".

This 'speaking truth to power' discourse is taken to new heights by SA Mail chief sub, KFM, who has been with the *SA Mail* since 1994 and commands journalistic experience stretching back to the 1970's. He told me his journalistic career was "unfortunately disturbed when he "branched off to what is known as a freedom fighter". He added "I then rejoined journalism in 1986, outside the country, while I was in exile". The chief sub delved deep into his biography without much prompting from me. I take it that it was his way of communicating authority on the subject matter. In 2010, he was occupying the position of a chief sub at the *SA Mail*, a key 'gate keeping' position within the newsroom. A chief sub is the last line of defence of 'journalistic values' within a newsroom. The position comes with a license to 'interfere' with copy by tweaking words, here and there, in a process that can significantly modify meaning in a story. KFM's description of his function is as follows. "The idea of subbing is to remove the chaff without necessarily changing the story. You must never sub the writer out of his story".

In response to my role of journalism question, KFM started with a definition. "Journalism should be treated as a profession like the legal profession and that is why it is called the fourth estate. In the olden days people will come in and be thoroughly trained before they are given huge responsibilities. They will start by reporting courts in a daily newspaper which is very important to this profession. Now unfortunately people come from nowhere and are elevated to the top. I have seen people fresh from school coming here, they start running before they learn

how to walk. This is bad. Journalism has been infiltrated by mediocrity. A few months down the line they are called to disciplinary hearings. Well trained journalists should know what they should be. They should burry their political allegiances 1000km below surface level. There should be nothing in their work to gesture their family allegiances. They must be objective. Our profession is about building trust, confidence and credibility".

Truth be told, I was startled by this talk and so at some point I interjected. If journalism is what you say it is, how do you explain the racial prejudice carried in journalistic work in the pre 1994 era? KFM responded. "Some people are intrinsically racist and they found their way into journalism but this is counter the ethos of journalism". You could swear that KFM was reading text from liberal pluralist theory of the media. His talk fits neatly into the long established tradition of thought which locates journalism within positivism, the epistemological claim that knowledge production can get closer to an 'objective truth'. Where journalism is concerned the claim is that newsroom production routines are objective. McNair (1998: 64) states that journalism boasts "socio-historical roots" linked to the development of positivism which "asserted the existential separation of the observer and the observed" thereby imposing a scientific method which can discover the truth". "It [objectivity] is the oldest and still the key legitimating professional ethic of liberal journalism" (McNair: 65).

It is important to note that the supreme reign of positivism within epistemological discourse, especially within human sciences, has encountered serious challenges since the birth of 'relativism' in the early 1900. As McNair acknowledges, the theory

of relativity came to challenge the view that there exist tools to access universal truth particularly within social affairs. Post modernism and radical constructivism have also come to gnaw away at the dominance of positivism within the arena of human behavioural studies (Schweizer, 1998). The point is if positivistic thinking stands to be questioned within mainstream human sciences, an attempt to claim 'truth grasping' abilities by journalists become highly problematic.

This chapter has explored the orientation of *SA Mail's* approach to news production. It did so by focusing on two broad themes. These are the philosophical outlook of the SA Mail newsroom as understood and expressed by its inhabitants. Many communicate the need to achieve a balance between expose journalism and development journalism. My observation suggest that development journalism suffers during the daily production grind which is largely defined by traditional 'pac instinct' of journalism.

8. Conclusion

The main objective of this research paper was to characterise social action in and around the *SA Mail* newsroom as set against the transformation demands faced by South Africa's news media fraternity in the post 1994 era. This mission was realised through the roll out of ethnographic material gathered mainly inside the *SA Mail* newsroom and by following the newsroom connections with its social surroundings. The research paper considered different tools of theoretical analysis to make sense of the material gathered from the research field and from this emerged a synthesis of established analytical approaches. This then allowed the paper to mainly argue that the *SA Mail* in all its claims to have historically served black interests and in its ensuing repositioning into a 'non racial read' has largely served to prop up 'historical dominations'. In a way this conclusion is easy to reach when launched on the basis that newsrooms are very much reflective of power relations surrounding them (Hall, McChesney, Boyer, Golding and Murdock, 2000). Nothing was taken for granted in the organisation of these power relations and not even the historical relations of domination as flowing out of imperialistic politics.

It was important for this paper to characterise the phenomena and in so doing it borrowed from Golding and Murdock (2000) who submit a compelling contribution towards the making of what they call 'critical political economy of the media'. In this approach the newsroom passes as a part of the 'cultural industry' and can be better understood as a space that hosts "interplay between economic organisation and political, social and cultural life" (Murdock and Golding). This is an important observation in separating the approach taken by this paper away from what

Schudson (2000) criticises as "flat footed functionalism". The main argument of this paper was thus build out of an approach which understands newsrooms as dynamic basis of power, where power is very much reflexive. In this, the paper comes close to endorsing Foucault's submission (1997) that power should be seen as an "overall unity" as opposed to it being seen as a relationship of force or dominance deployed through various apparatuses or "local tactics" which "support one another, relate to one another... converge and reinforce one another in some cases, and negate or strive to annul one another in other cases" (Foucault, 1997). In simple terms power is reflexive and therefore can be better understood through observation of people as they go about in their ordinary daily activities.

History was important for this paper not only because of the claim that critical political economy is 'historically located' but largely because informants in the field of study were talking history left right and centre. Thus, while this was an attempt to capture a snap shot of events as and when they happened, conversations with people dragged this paper down the historical lane. This was always going to happen in delving to a field rich in 'politics of identity' and in this case definition of 'blackness' in the post 1994 South Africa. Institutionally, the *SA Mail* newsroom screams for a connection with a history that has become popular and almost wrapped in 'myths' within South Africa's public spheres. This is the history which has come to be folded under the theme 'Drum era' title as flowing out from the chronicles of the legendary *Drum* magazine. The paper showcased an institutional link between *SA Mail* and *Drum* as informed by the capitalistic ventures of Jim Bailey,

the 'white man' who is generally recognised of jumpstarting black commercial media (Stein, 1999; Johnson, 1991; Horwitz, 2001).

While the *Drum* history tends to be romanticised, this paper established that this history produces a mixed picture of constrains and opportunities in the evolution of black media and as a factor of resistance against colonialism. It is Couzens (1976) who makes a compelling submission about the 'ambiguities' of black and protest journalism which is located within colonised and colonial institutions. This picture is made clearer through an analysis that juxtapositions *SA Mail* against alternative and leftist black media. The main argument here is; the history of black media is not homogenous. Its heterogeneity makes for a worthwhile characterisation of *SA Mail's* role in history against other black media. Also key here is the fact that this other black media which was arguably more of 'protest media' than *SA Media* may have been forced out of the market by the SA Mail type media products which were established with an expressed intention to sanitise resistance against apartheid (Johnson, 1991).

It is interesting to note that informants, mainly people inside the *SA Mail* newsroom, seem to carefully select chapters of histories which are agreeable to their contemporary agendas. All informants who were big in history ushered aside the 'problematic' aspects of *SA Mail* history and mainly the influence of The Media Group, unless directly questioned. Even when questioned, some informants insisted to cast aside the influence of The Media Group. The *SA Mail* is largely remembered as a newspaper which has unwaveringly served the struggle against apartheid by informants. This is important in fashioning the view of informants about the

newspaper's current and future role. Having said; that it was not the objective of this paper to debunk historical myths. This would have been counterproductive because myths and history tend to mix to inform social realities (Sharp). It is these realities and mainly accompanying discourses which the paper set out to capture.

Flowing out from the latter, one of the key discourses captured by the paper came through the following questions: How is it that a newspaper which is deeply embedded within what can be described as colonial capital set up with an expressed intention of advancing the interest of 'white domination' came to be remembered as a pro black publication? The paper's attempt to answer this question was largely guided by the narration emerging from Comaroff and Comaroff (1991). This narration is well captured in what the Commaroffs call "colonisation of consciousness and consciousness of colonialism in South Africa". From this; springs one of the main arguments of this paper being that black consciousness is very much informed by colonial realities. This goes towards informing the transformation discourses in the post 1994 South Africa. The paper did argue that transformation taking place at the *SA Mail* is largely defined by a paradigm of 'accommodation' of black interests within the plane of white dominations and privileges. This then feeds into the paper's main argument being that the *SA Mail* in its attempt to transform to better serve the post 1994 polities end up perpetuating pre 1994 dominations. This point is made through theoretical tools that to some extent acknowledges structural factors but also account for human agency factors.

A number of key themes were used to arrive at this conclusion. The first and most critical theme is the repositioning of the *SA Mail* into a non racial read. The main

point here is, it is not the pursuit of 'non racialism' that is problematic per se, but the discourses surrounding it. The bigger problem here is an approach which demands accommodation of 'blackness' within historical domination of whiteness. This is reflected in both the transformation mode of the SA Mail newsroom itself and how its 'intellectual professionals' editorially process and cover transformation. This is a reflection of a dominant definition of transformation in the post 1994 South Africa as largely captured within the Black Economic Empowerment discourse. This makes for a critical example showing how this newsroom is connected to its social surrounding in a process referred to as "cross fertilisation" in Boyer 2001.

In acknowledging that a lot has been said around structural factors of media, this report mainly focused on what I call the 'small stuff' which generally passes as insignificant daily routines and showed how these actually feed historical dominations. Interestingly some of these daily production routines, are identified by liberal pluralist scholars, like McNair (1998), Schudson (2000) and Berger (1997), as key pillars of journalistic objectivity are exposed as the very culprit of purveying historical dominations in this paper. It is tempting to argue that the idea that a group of professionals can know better what the rest of society in its complexity wants to read as news is dead in the water both at epistemological and practical levels. At practical level, the advancement of technology which allows citizens to become reporters of their own social experiences in their own style is a serious challenge to professional journalism and the industry which carried it over the past century or so.

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