

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. Introduction

A central concern in democratic theory of all stripes is how people can have the information, knowledge and forums for...debate... The solution to this problem is found, in theory, in systems of ...media. But then the nature of the media systems comes into focus as a crucial issue. If these systems are flawed and undermine democratic values, it is awfully difficult to conceive of a viable democratic society...Within democratic theory, there are...indispensable functions that journalism must serve... [It]... must provide a rigorous accounting of people in power and people who want to be in power... This is known as the watchdog role... [In addition,] media must provide reliable information and a wide range of informed opinions on the important social and political issues of the day... Unless a society has a journalism that approaches these goals [and others], it can scarcely be a self governing society of political equals... Decision making is an inescapable part of the journalism process, and some values have to be promoted...while [others] ignored... Our job is to make media reform part of our broader struggle for democracy, social justice...We have no time to waste (McChesney, R, 2000: 1 – 9).

Media outlets, particularly the press, are facing unprecedented challenges; they need to transform to be relevant to the demands of democracy while satisfying readers, shareholders and advertisers. In a transition from authoritarian rule to democracy and/or in democratic states, the media are amongst others, expected to assist to maintain democracy and act as the mediator between citizens and the government, yet media organisations are still accused of undermining democratic principles and failing to inform citizens accordingly. To address challenges facing the media in democracies, media scholars such as McChesney (2000) are appealing for a fundamental rethinking of the role of the media as well as a continuous assessment on how the media perform in democracies.

In exploring the role played by the South African media during the transition from apartheid to democracy, this research report carries out a comparative qualitative content analysis of the *Sowetan* and *The Weekly Mail and Guardian* (thereafter, *M&G*) articles on the alleged corruption in the arms deal in November 2001 with a view to determining some of the factors influencing media coverage of an important political topic. The reportage of the arms deal – a critical issue of national debate – is analysed within the theoretical framework of the role of the media in democratic transition.

The research notes that transition to democracy is a multi-faceted process and therefore no single approach is able to offer an absolute analysis of the role of the media in such a dispensation. The research is located within the theories of the media in democratic transition. It focuses on liberal pluralism, gatekeeping, Marxist media perspectives, the public sphere approach as well as the critical political economy approach. These theories applied in totality complement the nature of qualitative content analysis method (which has been used as the methodology and discussed below). Each reveals a small but useful aspect of the dynamics of news production. Studied in totality, these theories reveal that media content should be studied within the entirety of the system rather than looking at one aspect in isolation – as media messages depict the internal operations of the news production process, social life of producers and receivers and manifestation of economic and political powers.

These theories also tie well with the nature of content analysis. The gate-keeping theory on one hand suggests that the gatekeepers in media organisations determine what gets to the public and what does not. This process includes choosing words and pictures that will appear in articles and how they will appear.

Marxist media theories argue that the views of the group that owns and controls the means of production (including the media) have influence on what gets to the public and how it gets there. More so, literature used in this research proves that individual and group beliefs and cultures influence choices and selection, and that any selection is influenced by beliefs and ideas of the discursive community. All these should be studied in relation to the totality of the system that governs and controls the news production processes.

The critical political economy approach on the other hand, examines the context within which media content (messages) are created and consumed. The totality of the critical political economy allows the researcher to look at the media content within the spectrum of the entire system of news production rather than looking at one in isolation. This theory contends that media messages construct the meaning available to consumers in determinate ways – of the unstructured and structured factors of the whole system of news production. Schiller observes that all media messages are “commodities and ideological products, embodying the rules and values of the [entire] market system that produced them” (1989:33). Qualitative content analysis points out that the creators of materials create materials with self-consciousness since most of the materials are created “for specific audiences and with specific intentions as to their effect on those audiences” (Stark and Roberts, 1998: 18) and that each word in media performs a calculated task.

This report approaches the media as both the watchdog of the transition and as an institution that is itself in transition from apartheid to democracy and notes that the *Sowetan* and the *Mail and Guardian (M&G)*, as institutions that are in transition and that report on issues of transition, have variously been affected by the many facets of the transitional process. The report employs Marais’s (2001) and Berger’s (2001) model of transition. These scholars view transition to democracy not only as the political struggle to replace apartheid but as the entirety of the process to form a truly ‘rainbow’ nation and alliances that are able to ensure broad transformation of social, political and economic realms aiming to create and manage a national consensus to deal with the legacy of apartheid. This amounts to transformation of everyday values, practices and all institutions of the civil society.

## **2. Methodology**

The research report examines how *Sowetan* and *M&G* used language and pictures to convey information on the alleged arms deal corruption to their audiences. The qualitative content analysis method allows the research to scrutinise concealed meanings behind the textual surface and explore the hidden meanings of words in the articles under review. The analysis permits the research to develop ideas and insights from the language used and draw a parallel to how meanings and interpretations affected notions of ‘bias’ and ‘balance’ in the reporting of the alleged corruption in the arms deal. Qualitative content analysis emphasises the capacity of the text (words and visual

images such as pictures and diagrams) to convey different meanings. The application of this analysis to the media grew out of semiotic studies attempting to assess the meaning of language in terms of its implicit ideological assumptions.

The qualitative content analysis puts more focus on subjective meanings, definitions, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of specific cases (Neuman, 1994). It emphasises the importance of the social context for understanding the social world. It posits that the meaning of social action or statement depends on the context in which it appears (Ibid). It argues that if a statement is removed from the social context in which it appeared it may lose its social meaning and becomes misrepresented and that events or behaviours can have different meanings in different cultures or historical eras (Neuman, 1994).

The rationale for selecting the qualitative content analysis method is influenced by the fact that it is holistic and flexible enough to be applied to different theoretical approaches that attempt to explain how media texts produce meanings and ideologies in societies. Kellner (1989) relates two choices to qualitative content analysis. First, it allows the researcher to observe the recognised qualities that are grounded in the tradition of formalist literary criticism such as it assists to extort central meanings, values and ideologies from the formal qualities of style, verbal imagery, characterization, narrative structure, point of view and images in a given text (Kellner, 1989). The second choice is that it allows the researcher to embark upon an enquiry that may reveal how meanings are encoded into the language of a text and serve to transmit ideologies (Kellner, 1989).

The research report therefore applies the qualitative content analysis method to determine how the two newspapers used language and pictures to convey information on the matter to their audiences. This analysis aims at assessing whether the two newspapers under review showed any bias in the coverage of the alleged corruption in the arms deal. The qualitative content analysis provides the research report with the choice and ability to reveal potential and hidden meanings conveyed in the articles under scrutiny, and enables the research to make inferences that reveal the extent to which the principles of “fairness and balance” were feigned and/or maintained by the newspapers under review. This helps the research report to explicate (make clear) on the role played by each newspaper within the transitional period, with reference to the arms deal debate. This reveals if the

newspapers under review played the role of encouraging vigorous debate, providing fair and balanced information to its intended audience, in line with their watchdog role.

From the articles, the research report looks at:

- Choices of words used in the headlines by each newspaper and their implicit and explicit meanings.
- Metaphors: a metaphor is a figure of speech in which an expression is used to refer to something that it does not literally denote in order to suggest a similarity. The rationale behind this argument is Kress's contention that metaphors are powerful instruments in ideological disagreement, "a means to bring an area into one rather than another ideological domain"(1990:71). Kress argues that metaphoric activity occurs "at sites of difference, in struggles over power, whenever there is contention of an ideological kind, whenever an attempt is made to assimilate an event into one ideological system rather than another" (71). The analysis of metaphors helps in this research report to decode basic ideological stances inherent in the articles of the newspapers under review and consequently enables it (the report) to make inferences about the ideological positions of the newspapers under review. This conclusion of the research is only limited to the articles scrutinised.
- Type of information foregrounded (introduced early in the story, form part of main ideas and more forthright) and backgrounded (complementary, inferred and not expressed as extremely important) in each article. Whose voice is foregrounded and whose backgrounded? The rationale for this analysis stems from the position that foregrounded and backgrounded information has ideological implications for the audience hence what people read first registers importance in their minds and will hold it as such (Chen, 1998). The contrary applies to the backgrounded information (Chen, 1998). The research report compares articles covering similar topics from these newspapers and deduce where they have placed the information making news.
- Pictures used and the message they convey: This helps the study to correlate the relationship that exists between pictures and verbal text. The principle upon which this is based is that pictures in media texts can lead viewers (audience) to certain evaluative directions (Chen, 1998).

The research report's rationale for analysing the above aspects of language is the argument that each aspect of language, wording and metaphors in news has a reason and those different expressions carry ideological distinctions. In this respect, the research report draws support in Fowler's (1991:7) observation that "news is a construct which is to be understood in social and semiotic" and *economic and political* terms (words in italics are my addition) and that language plays a pivotal role in the process of construction.

To support or challenge the account achieved through content analysis beyond interpretation, qualitative interviews were conducted with two political editors and chief sub-editors (one from each of the newspapers under study) who were involved in writing and editing the news stories under study. Two journalists (one from each newspaper) were also interviewed to add an extra institutional perception that highlights some of the dynamics of the newsroom. Last but not least, two independent media analysts were also interviewed to provide an independent analysis of how media outlets work and how they perceived the articles under scrutiny.

The interviews with the political editors and sub-editors inform the research report about their organisations' ideologies and the attitude their organisations adopted in reporting the arms deal in November 2001. From the political editors and sub-editors, the research report raised questions on the style, tone of the language and how words were selected to report the alleged corruption in the arms deal in November 2001 by their respective newspapers. The political editors and sub-editors were also asked for their opinions about the ideologies of the respective newspapers and on how that influenced the stance they took in reporting the alleged corruption in the arms deal. The main reasons for conducting interviews with this group were to achieve the following:

- To identify the factors that were considered in reporting the alleged corruption in the arms deal. They were asked questions about their opinions on the ideologies of the respective newspapers and on how that influenced the stance(s) they adopted in reporting the alleged corruption in the arms deal.
- To explore whether there were other factors that compelled the newspapers under review to take the particular stance.
- To find out their perceptions on the role of the media in the period under review.

The rationale for conducting qualitative interviews stems from Patton (1990) and Lindlof's (1995) argument that qualitative interviews allow the researcher to enter other people's worlds. These two argue that qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the position of others is meaningful and needs to be made explicit.

## **2.1 Data sample**

The research employs qualitative content analysis method to scrutinise the articles that on the alleged corruption in the arms deal that appeared in the *Sowetan* (a daily) and the *M&G* (a weekly) in November 2001. The sample does not include editorials and comments it only covers articles that appeared under the News section. The *Sowetan* had five articles (Appendix A) on the alleged arms deal corruption in that month. These are:

- Charges will follow Arms Probe (November 16, 2001)
- Arms: MPs Clash (November 16, 2001)
- Arms Deal Inquiry, no cover-up, says Ngcuka (November 19, 2001)
- Arms Deal: Shaik faces suspension (November 19, 2001)
- Conflict of Interests (November 22, 2001)

The *M&G* (Appendix B) also had five articles. These are:

- How Joe Modise Wangled Jet Deal (November 2 – 8, 2001)
- Report could expose state to litigation (November 9 – 15, 2001)
- More a cock-up than a conspiracy (November 16 – 22, 2001)
- Chippy Shaik blasted in arms report (November 16 – 22, 2001)
- Chippy Shaik meddled in arms probe (November 23 – 29, 2001)

The *M&G*, November 16 – 22, 2001, had a cover with a headline that reads “Arms Deal: Chippy shaiking in his shoes”. The meaning of this cover headline is also scrutinised.

### **2.3 Justification for selecting a weekly and a daily newspaper**

Naturally, the comparison of a daily and a weekly is anticipated to present a methodological problem due to varying frequencies since the daily produces more articles than the weekly. The methodological problem that comes with the selection of a daily and a weekly is more apparent in two interrelated concerns. First, there is an assumption that it makes it difficult to select similar articles for comparative analysis as it is anticipated that the article from a weekly will be more balanced than the one from a daily, although this is not given. The reason for this is obvious and is based on the time frames available for deadlines and therefore the time available to contact sources and engage in research. Second, there is an assumption that the number (quantity) of articles to compare within a selected period will differ as the daily is likely to have many (up to twenty in a month) and a weekly few (sometimes less than four in a month). In the case of the two newspapers under study, both newspapers had five articles on the matter in November 2001. In addition, the content of the articles was the same and comparable.

The selection of the two newspapers was further motivated by the two newspapers' interesting historical backgrounds which are different but comparable in the sense that they were both – though at different times and to different degrees – sympathetic to the struggle against apartheid and critical of apartheid albeit on different levels. The two newspapers tried hard under apartheid to present a counter balance picture of the South African society, objected and challenged the basic premises of apartheid, revealed the inequities of apartheid and gave the then political dissidents an arena to articulate their views. The two newspapers although formed within different historical contexts – initially formed to achieve different financial and political objectives (see the chapter on histories) were amongst the few newspapers that distinguished themselves with reporting and editorials that reflected issues that faced South Africa under apartheid, the kind of reporting that placed them into trouble with apartheid authorities. It makes an interesting case therefore to see how these newspapers relate to the status quo and progress under the new dispensation.

## **2.4 Justification for selecting November 2001**

November 2001 was selected because it marks an important month with regard to revelations and arrests made pertaining to the corruption scandals associated with the arms deal. Through its scanning of news during November 2001, the research report discovered the following. November 2001 is the month where:

- Chippy Shaik, the former chief of acquisitions at the Department of Defence and a brother to Shabir Shaik was suspended for favouring his brother's company over other bidders.
- Chippy Shaik was arrested for releasing sensitive Cabinet information to his brother Shabir Shaik without authorisation.
- Tony Yengeni was arrested and released on a bail amount of R10 000.
- The head of EADS, Michel Woerfel, was suspended from the company on charges of corruption and fraud arising from the arms deal kickbacks.
- The forensic report on the investigation of the arms procurement process was released by the 'Scorpions (the section of the National Directorate of Special Prosecutions) and the Auditor General.
- The forensic report confirmed that there was a conflict of interest in respect to the role Joe Modise played in the arms deal bidding process and that there was wrongdoing.
- The relationship between Shabir Shaik and Jacob Zuma and how it links to the arms deal bidding processes was also revealed – though the nature of the relationship was only confirmed in court in 2005 as a 'corrupt relationship'.

## **3. Limitations of the methodology**

The research report has its limitations and these are apparent in the fact that it analyses how the newspapers under review covered the arms deal during only one month whereas the deal is a long and ongoing process. As a sample, the period under study may arguably not offer a definite and representative analysis of the nature of the selected media's reportage of the arms deal.

The other limitation is that the research report predominantly focuses on qualitative content analysis and qualitative interviews with media analysts and practitioners whereas the matter under scrutiny is a very complex one involving politics, economics, legal and social aspects which cannot

be captured solely by qualitative content analysis and interviews. It is a multifaceted issue requiring a wide range of methodological approaches.

These limitations notwithstanding, this research is an attempt to open up debate on the institutional role of the media with respect to socio-economic and political transition in South Africa. The research only intends to provide a framework within which the media's representation of political issues in the transition may be explored.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This introduction has outlined the aim of the research, methodology employed by the research and the link between the methodology and the theories that are applied by the research report. The methodology employed in the research highlights the main approaches and methods of data collection and analysis, defines the sample and maps out the rationale for choosing a weekly and daily newspaper. It further provides a rationale for selecting the period selected (November 2001) and for selecting the particular methodology, as well as highlighting the link between the methodology and the theories employed by the research. Finally, the limitations of the methodology which are closely related to the limitations of the whole research report are also highlighted.

In Chapter Two, the research report outlines the Literature Review and Theoretical Framework and Chapter Three provides a historical background of the *Sowetan* and *M&G*. Chapter Four applies the qualitative content analysis to the selected articles on the alleged corruption in the arms deal that appeared under the news sections in the *Sowetan* and *M&G* in November 2001.

Chapter Five considers the sociology of the newsroom and provides an analysis of interviews conducted with the political editors, sub-editors, journalists and media analysts. The interviews provides the research report with information pertinent to the organisations' ideologies and attitudes adopted by the two newspapers under review in reporting the arms deal in November 2001.

On the basis of the conclusion that the two newspapers under study attempted to democratise and open up space for dialogue and critical debate from two different angles, albeit the ‘space’ is dominated by particular ‘voices’ and sources at the expense of the whole society, the research then offers an analysis of how the media may be structured and financed to ensure that they perform a public sphere role. Appendix A and B are relevant articles from the *Sowetan* and *M&G* respectively, Appendix C provides detailed breakdown of LSMs for November 2001 of the two newspapers from SAARF and Appendix D consists of pictures from the two newspapers analysed in the research report.