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The role of the media in transition to democracy: An analysis of the coverage of the alleged arms deal corruption by the Sowetan and the Mail&Guardian

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part discusses theoretical approaches to the role of the media in democratic transition. It focuses on liberal pluralism, gate keeping, Marxist media perspectives, the public sphere as well as the critical political economy approach. It further highlights critiques of the approaches provided, to draw attention to the reasons why it is not possible for a single approach to offer an absolute analysis of the role of the media in transition to democracy. In addition, the part provides theories of language, news and society to explain how social relations may contribute to bias and partiality in the language of news.

The second part provides a brief history of the South African print media before and after 1994. This is done with a view to locating the two newspapers under study—*Sowetan* and *M&G* – within a historical context and subsequently within a theoretical framework. As institutions that report on issues and events in the post-1994 transition, the press under study are also variously affected by many facets of the transitional process. The selected theories allow this study to analyse the historical contexts of the media landscape in South Africa with an understanding of how the political and socio-economic forces that have power over the media shape media content.

2. Media theories

2.1 Liberal pluralism

Liberal-pluralism asserts that newspapers should be objective and free from any political influence, whether from political parties or the state. This theory argues that politics and the political system of a country should not prevent newspapers from being objective and neutral. According to this perspective, media function as the 'fourth estate' because they play the important role of strengthening democracy by providing information that is independent from governments and/or political parties' influences (Bennett, 1982).

The Liberal-pluralist theory views the media as a neutralising “source of power which in liberal democracies prevent disproportionate power from being concentrated” in one section of the population or organ of government (Bennett, 1982: 31). According to this perspective, media are not monolithic (characterised by massiveness, rigidity, and total uniformity). It posits that the clash and diversity of the viewpoints contained in the media contribute "to the free and open circulation of ideas, necessary for opening up debate necessary for strengthening and maintaining democracy because in the debate process the governing elite could be pressurised and reminded of their dependence on majority opinion" (Bennett, 1982: 40).

Furthermore, this theory sees the media as an agent of information and debate and argues that the media facilitate the functioning of democracy, provide a channel of communication between the government and the governed and in this process help the society to "clarify its objectives, formulate policy, co-ordinate and manage itself" (Curran, 2000: 127-128). The approach argues that media perform the role of the ‘voice of the people’ because they brief audiences, stage the debate and pass on the public consensus to government (Curran, 2000). This process enables the public to supervise the government, and the latter is ‘forced’ to implement the will of the people (Curran, 2000). The assumption that guides this reasoning is that the broad shape and nature of the press is ultimately determined by no one but its readers because the press must respond to the competitive marketplace of what people want and express their views and interests (Curran, 2000).

Liberal pluralism assumes that media embody principles of intellectual autonomy and diverse ideas and viewpoints, and these help to promote public rationality based on dialogue and ultimately a system of self-determination informed by freedom of choice and the tradition of independence that comes from civic debate. According to this theory, there should be no political control of the media and there should be a maximum degree of tolerance among political elites for the unwelcome and critical things that journalists may say about them (McNair, 1998).

Basically, liberal pluralism sees the media as a ‘watchdog’ of the state and ‘the voice of the people’. It argues that the media should act as the check on the state, expose state activities and abuse of official authority (Curran, 2000). To the proponents of this view, the watchdog function supersedes all other functions of the media. They posit that such media should be privately owned in order to sustain independence from government (Curran, 2000). They posit that a free market

system allows the media to be independent and all significant views get an opportunity to be aired (Curran, 2000). This, they argue, allows good governance to be "fostered because decision making processes are exposed to the interplay of opposed opinions" (Curran, 2000:128). They argue that a free market system allows the media to "forthrightly espouse differing positions and set up their respective stalls in the market-place of ideas" and that this provides the public with powers and rights "to browse and buy as they please" (Louw, 1996: 361).

2.1.1 Critique of liberal pluralism

The traditional viewpoint of this theory fails to acknowledge the role that ownership, audiences, political commitment, leanings and the private interests of shareholders, advertisers, journalists and editors play in the news production process (Curran, 2000). As a result, it fails to acknowledge influences outside of media organisations. By focusing solely on the internal processes in media institutions, this approach neglects the pressures exerted on media by the political and economic factors and contradictions of the broader system within which the media operate. This approach assumes that the government is "the sole object of press vigilance" (Curran, 2000:122) and therefore fails to accordingly take account of influences and impact of structural (ownership and advertising) and non-structural factors that influence the media.

The notions of objectivity and editorial autonomy idealised by this perspective also present a problem in analysing media content. This school argues that journalists and editors have editorial autonomy and if left on their own can be trusted to exercise objectivity. Studies in the sociology of news production (Tuchman, 1978; Schudson, 2000; Gitlin, 1980, etc) have shown that various forces are at play in the framing of news. These forces are both *macro*, for example external, societal and so on, and *micro* such as the internal dynamics of news production.

While the watchdog function of the media is significant, perhaps it is not sensible enough to perceive it as paramount to all other functions of the media, especially in contemporary democracies. In contemporary democracies, the government is no longer the sole oppressor of the press. Curran (2000) posits that contemporary democratic governments are friendly to the media as they need friendly media because they depend on them (media) to campaign and gain mass electoral support. Curran (2000) further argues that the nature of the relationship between private

media and government has changed to a situation in which politicians and public officials are now involved in decisions that affect the profitability of private media organisations. He notes that the economic authority of shareholders and advertisers of media organisations need to be considered in any study that attempts to investigate factors that influence media content.

Liberal pluralism's assumption that the free market allows different views to be aired is disputable in contemporary capitalist societies. Curran (2000: 128) argues that "the free market now restricts the effective freedom to publish" as it is expensive to publish and therefore not possible for all views to be aired – and this ultimately reduces public participation. Furthermore, evidence from literature (Curran, 2000; Tomaselli, 1987a, 2001; Fowler, 1991; Baker, 2001; Pillay, 2004) proves that most media markets have developed in ways that have weakened consumer influence. This literature illustrates that factors such as the concentration of media ownership, resources that media corporations are able to bring to limit competition and managing advertisers' demands weaken the influence that consumers may have on media content.

Yet, these shortcomings notwithstanding, liberal pluralism still offers insightful frames of analysis of how the commercial media ought to operate in democracy. Its notions of objectivity and plurality of opinions offer a yardstick on how public rationality based on dialogue may be questioned, extended and developed. This theory therefore offers alternatives for developing an ideal media model that may serve all sectors of society.

2.2 The Gate Keeping Theory

The gate keeping theory[1] attempts to explain the subjectiveness that goes with the news production processes. It creates a link between the choices of information that media give to the public to the powers conferred on the gatekeepers, e.g. editors and journalists. According to this theory, editorial gatekeepers choose what news to use and how to use them and these selection procedures inevitably result in the reflection of the gatekeepers' ideologies and organisational beliefs (McGregor, 1997).

1 Gate keeping refers to the choices and selections made by editors to determine what should appear and what should not appear in a newspaper's story.

The critics of the gate keeping theory argue that the press plays the crucial role of "opening the news gate to admit certain voices and ideas into the public view and closing it to other perspectives" (Bennett, 1996: 26).

In the early stages of gate keeping theory, its argument was based on and applicable to individual editors and journalists. It argued that journalists cover stories that they like and leave out the ones they do not like. With the meanings that are attached to define contemporary news and newsworthiness, this theory refers directly to gate keeping processes in the newsrooms and news organisations. The gate keeping theory becomes relevant if applied to the approaches taken by media organisations in reporting events. It is recognized that newspapers report similar events all the time but take different approaches and positions to report these events. This arguably is determined by many factors such as social and political biases and economic demands of shareholders, advertisers, audiences and gate keepers' views. Through gate keeping processes,[2] all newspapers get opportunities to advance their preferred views even though this is also subject to some limitations.

2.2.1 Critique of the Gate Keeping Theory

This theory offers a weak analysis of the media industry; it fails to pay attention to the broad political, economic and social structures of the societies in which media operate. The gate keeping theory reduces the news production processes only to the internal dynamics between editors and journalists. In doing so, this theory falls short of exploring the impact of dynamics and constraints that these gatekeepers are faced with, e.g. time frames, influences of advertisers, owners and audiences. [3]

Regardless of these shortcomings, gate keeping theory offers an insight into how powers bestowed to gate keepers may contribute to certain voices and agendas being privileged over others.

2 The research report acknowledges the existence of gate keeping processes but it is of the view that they cannot be limited to editors and journalists' likes and dislikes only. The research is of the view that there are variety of factors (structural and otherwise) that make newspapers take certain positions.

3 These are the researcher's views.

2.3 The public sphere approach

Another analytic category that is significant to the study on the role of the media is Jurgen Habermas's[4] disputed but useful hypothesis of the media as the public sphere. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), Habermas's study on the media as the public sphere was based on the middle class public sphere of the eighteenth century. This involved privileged private citizens who gathered together to debate and discuss public affairs in public places and reached public consensus that influenced government (Curran, 2000). Curran argues that the public sphere referred to by Habermas was not truly public as it was socially restrictive.

In his later work, *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), Habermas improved his notion of the public sphere to include and reflect the working of contemporary democracies. His contemporary public sphere is no longer made up of private privileged individuals gathering in public places. Rather, it acknowledges that a public sphere is comprised of a network for communicating information and viewpoints that link the public to the political system (Habermas, 1996). Unlike in his earlier works, Habermas's contemporary public sphere is organised and made up of public interest groups and professionals who identify and interpret social problems and propose solutions. These groups, according to Habermas (1996), are protectors of the society because they identify neglected subjects and produce counter arguments on behalf of the disadvantaged groups. He further argues that 'ideally' the press aid these groups with interventions that are likely to lead to critical public debate.

Habermas's updated notion of the public sphere implies that audiences have the power to stir up critical debate and that the media have the ability to be the vehicle of that debate. Habermas's conception of the public sphere (and the role of the media in contemporary democracies) suggests that the public sphere is an impartial space in society and free from both state and corporate control. Within this 'impartial' space the media should make information affecting the public good available and facilitate a free, open and reasoned public dialogue that guides the public to influence the political direction (Curran, 2000).

4 Jurgen Habermas began from a Marxist perspective but later his views deviated a little bit from this perspective. The research only speaks about Habermas's contribution to media in terms of initiating the 'public sphere' approach.

2.3.1 Critique of the public sphere approach

Although it remains important in academic discourse and in the analysis of the role of the media in democracies, the public sphere approach has been under criticism from those who advocate critical political economy of the media. The latter accuse the public sphere approach for failing to take into account the structures of modern democracy and for viewing public debate as a colloquium conducted through socially responsible media. They argue that the public sphere approach fails to reflect on how the media should be structured to best serve the requirements of democracy (Curran, 2000).

The premise upon which Habermas's public sphere approach is based is that readers play a significant role in determining content of the media because as a public sphere, the media publish what the public want and express their views and interests (Curran, 2000: 129). Studies in the political economy of the media (Tomaselli, 1991, 2001; Golding and Murdock, 2000; Curran, 2000; Pillay, 2004) indicate that various socio-economic and political forces are at play in the production and framing of the media content and that some of these forces weaken the public influence. Curran (2000:132) further argues that even in a case where a limited public sphere is possible, structural factors such as advertising limit it to those audiences with money as "advertising funding …exerts a gravitational pull towards upscale, profitable audiences". The public sphere approach also fails to explain how issues such as economic and political status, race, gender geographical location, etc., help to privilege certain opinions as 'public opinion' and suppress opposing views.

2.4 Marxist Media Theory

Orthodox Marxists have tended to see the mass media as a 'means of production' which in capitalist societies are owned by the ruling classes, which use them to circulate their ideas and world views and to curb different viewpoints. Although Karl Marx never talked about the mass media in particular, the concept of the mass media in Marxism emanated from his popular but contested argument that:

> 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…generally speaking, the ideas of those

> who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (Marx and Engels: *The German Ideology*, quoted in Curran, 1982: 22; *emphasis mine*).

The interpretation of Marxism in media theories is the cause of fierce arguments amongst Marxists who substantiate their interpretations of Marx and media differently. Their common view is that the media are institutions that are inherently sheltered into the power structures and basically act mainly in the interest of the dominant institutions of society. They differ in their determination of the media and on the nature of the media's power (Curran, 1982).

There are several strings of the Marxist media theories and some of the popular contending paradigms within this approach are the structuralists, culturalists and the political economists (Gurevitch et al, 1982).

The structuralists, of whom Althusser is a leading voice, concentrate on the internal features of media systems. Althusser's concept of mechanism of interpellation[5] posits that subjects are formed because of pre-given structures of the society and in that process ideology functions to shape individuals as subjects (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988). To Althusser, identities are conferred on individuals through what he termed 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISA) such as schools, families, churches, the media, etc, which give individuals a sense of identity and understanding of reality (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988).

Althusser's notion of interpellation allows the Marxist structuralists of the media to explain the political function of the media from the basis of the media messages as strong instruments for the formation of the subject. They argue that the power of the media lie in media contents (texts) which position the subject in such a way that texts and representations become internalised as reflections of reality (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988).

Most of the Marxist media theorists who take this approach fail to acknowledge that the subject may not be unified (there may be internal conflicts based on gender, race, class and sexual

5 Also see Bennett, 1982: 51 – 54.

orientations which may lead to disagreements among individuals) and therefore some individuals may resist their interpellation. In overemphasising the role of structures in the constitution of subjectivity, they tend to ignore or downplay individual agency in the making of meaning. Structuralists also fail to acknowledge the contribution of factors such as ownership, advertising, production and reception of media messages. They end up focusing solely on signifying approaches of media messages (Bennett, 1982). This implies that they end up analysing the media only in terms of their content, implying that the subject is passive and not looking at the broader structure of the media.

Another group, the culturalists, follow Althusser's structuralism and his rejection of economism,[6] but they go further by pointing out the experiences and influences of sub-groups in society. Culturalists put the media within the framework of the society which they see as inherently complex and view the media as a powerful device in shaping public perceptions (Curran et al, 1982). They also follow Gramsci's theory of hegemony to imply the dominance of one social class over others.[7] They argue that the dominant class has the political and economic power and therefore the ability to project through the media its way of seeing the world and in the process make subordinate classes accept its view as natural (Hall, 1982).

On the other hand, the political economy of the media approach argues that the media are political, social and cultural institutions, and that power relations that constitute the production, distribution and consumption of the media contribute to the range of representations in the media (Golding and Murdock, 2000; Moscow, 1996).

The approach explains the media content in consideration of the structural relationships and non-structural ones and interests that exist in, within, between and outside of media institutions and

6 Economism is the theory that argues that the economic base supersedes politics, ideology, class, etc. In media terms, this theory explains media culture in terms of their economic strength. The proponents of this theory argue that the ideas of those with economic power prevail in the media.

7 Antonio Gramsci uses hegemony to indicate the dominance of a social group or class within the social formation through cultural, moral and political leadership. He argues that consensus may be secured through a struggle and sees the media as an institution that negotiates identity in society. See Gramsci, 1971.

attempts to explain how their power and interests shape and define media content (Golding and Murdock, 2000). In addition, the political economy approach focuses on "the interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communications … (and) sets out how different ways of financing and organising cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to them" (Golding and Murdock, 2000:70).

The advocates of the political economy school argue that media content and the meanings carried by it are determined by nothing but the economic base of the organisations in which they are produced (Curran, 1982). To them, all other things are subordinate to the economic base - as the commercial media is forced to cater for the needs and demands of advertisers and owners (those who pay for the overheads). They argue that the media disguise the economic basis of class struggle and that ideology becomes a convenient path through which the struggle is 'wiped out' rather than the basis of the struggle (Curran, 1982). By this, they imply that the media mask the economic basis of the class struggle and hide behind ideology which in the actual sense is not the cause of struggle but only a convenient tool to deal with the struggle.

2.5 The critical political economy approach

The critical political economy approach is different from the political economy and other approaches because it tries to appropriate the best tenets of the existing media theories (liberal and radical approaches) into one theory. This theory is comprehensive in the sense that it takes into consideration the holistic nature of the media industry and links it to issues of "action and structure, in an attempt to discern the real constraints that shape the lives and opportunities" of the media industry (Golding and Murdock, 2000:73). This theory explains the factors that relate the media organisations to political, social and economic interactions and relates these factors to the internal dynamics of media organisations.

Boyd-Barrett (1995:187) argues that the critical political economy approach covers the "social whole or the totality of social relations that constitute the economic, political, social and cultural fields" in a manner that (in the context of the South African media) explains how the media are involved in the structures of power and society in transition. This approach also considers the

historical as well as the material environment and interrogates the unequal command of material resources and the implications of these inequalities to the symbolic media content (Golding and Murdock, 2000). By and large, the critical political economy approach of the media locates the power of media in economic processes and structures of the media and sees economic domination and ownership as foremost factors in determining media messages.

The historical considerations of this theory, applied to the South African context of transition, offer an important tool of analysis in terms of how the economic and political-historical processes unfold to accommodate the importance of full citizenship of the audience.[8] The critical political economy approach acknowledges that gate keepers (editors, producers and journalists) and audiences may have choices and that they do make choices, but admits that their choices are within certain parameters, given that the communication process is "structured by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources" (Golding and Murdock, 2000: 73).

This approach considers and transcends both the Marxist and the liberal perspectives. The former is apparent in how it approaches the society with an acknowledgement of power relations. The critical political economy approach goes beyond the simplistic approach offered by the Marxists. The latter merely see the media as an apparatus of the people with economic and political powers (Garnham, 1995). The critical political economy on the other hand interrogates the core functions of the whole advanced capitalist system (Curran, 1990). In an outline, it interrogates not only the components of the media product but the conditions of practice of how the product comes to being in consideration of morality, public good and equity.

The critical political economy approach goes further to highlight that the market system under which the media operates is deformed and characterised by inequalities, and suggests public intervention backed by the constitution and extended citizenship rights as a remedy to improve public knowledge (Golding and Murdock, 2000).

8 Golding and Murdock (1990:77) argue that citizenship involves "the conditions that allow people to become full members of the society at every level" (social, economic and political). They argue that media that allow people to become full citizens contributes to two aspects: First, "provide people with information … and enable them to register dissent and propose alternatives". On the

The critical political economy approach reveals how political and socio-economic forces that have power over the media and its content reduce/ limit or extend media objectivity idealised by liberal pluralism, the editorial autonomy emphasised by the champions of the gate keeping inclination as well as the public sphere responsibility promoted by the public sphere approach.

The critical political economy approach provides a starting point to critique the level of autonomy and independence of gate keepers and choices of audiences given the contradictions of the economic structures of the media. It also provides a yardstick to interrogate the extent of transformation in this sector in line with social, political and economic developments. The notions of objectivity, diversity, autonomy and public sphere that are idealised by liberal pluralism, gate keeping and public sphere models respectively offer a yardstick on which the critical political economy can measure the performance of the existing systems and formulate alternatives (Golding and Murdock, 2000).

Given the nature of the South African economic model[9], the critical political economy approach allows this study to analyse the content of these newspapers with an understanding of the discrepancies that may be in the system and make deductions in terms of how they may have impacted on the role of these newspapers (as public spheres) during the period under review. Furthermore, the holistic nature of this approach allows this research report to locate the role of the newspapers in the transitional period in a broader context.

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second level, it enable them to know and understand their rights and choices on how they could be pursued effectively as well as participating in political and socio- economic developments.

9 South Africa adopts two contradictory modes of economic systems. One allows for free enterprise and the other calls for state intervention to ensure that wealth and economic participation are shared evenly. The government intervention is regarded as necessary in this regard to counter the racist element in the economic participation and to ensure that the powerless and previously disadvantaged members of the society are accommodated. State intervention includes measures such as the Affirmative Action, BEE, etc. One could call this mode of economy a 'mixed' economy. See Pillay (2004: 1) who posits that the transition from apartheid to democracy was shaped by "a liberal form of representative democracy (which) facilitates elite rule and economic growth through private enterprise and a more radical form of participatory democracy that incorporates liberal freedoms (while putting emphasis on fair) distribution of economic surplus through substantial state intervention".

Given that this research is analysing the content of the newspapers (*M&G* and *Sowetan*) in an attempt to discover the role they played during the transition from apartheid to democracy, the critical political economy approach makes it possible to make deductions on factors such as advertising, ownership and socio-political environment (besides and ideological leaning) that may have influenced the content of these newspapers during the period under review. In a nutshell, the critical political economy approach may assist this research to deduce how political and socio-economic forces that have power over the media and its content may limit or extend media objectivity idealised by liberal pluralism, the editorial autonomy emphasised by the gate keeping perspective as well as the public sphere responsibility championed by the public sphere approach.

Given that this research is analysing how the newspapers under review used language to report the alleged corruption in the arms deals in November 2001 and argues that each word in news performs a considered task, this research links the theories of news production discussed above to theories of language, news and society (discussed below). The former theories assist the research to understand the dynamics, rules and values of the system within which news are produced. The latter theories connect language to social relations that are inherent in the system within which news are produced and draw attention to how social relations impact on language and affect complete 'objectivity' in news.

2.6 Theories of Language, News and Society

The research borrows from Fowler (1991), Beard (2000), Lee (1992), Kress (1990), Fairclough (1992), Foucault (1980) and Hall's (1997) models of language, news and society. These scholars – though at different levels and applying different methodological approaches to reach their conclusion – agree that language is a communicative tool that is not only received but also interpreted by writers and receivers and that social relations are maintained, reproduced and established during the communication process (written or verbal). Accordingly, these scholars argue that social relations are realized and passed through the language. In their different readings, they correspondingly agree that language is semiotic and comes from beliefs, contains ideas and thus the arrangement of words into sentences pronounces how ideas have been shaped, reality and neutrality affected. Moreover, they point out that articulation of events in a particular way limits other ways of representation. Applying their argument and applying it to the discourse of news,

news becomes world factual events through language, and because language is selective and semiotic in nature, news conveniently shapes what it says.

Language, as Fowler (1991:5) contends, "Influences thought, in the sense that its structure channels our mental experience of the world… [It] offer[s] choices; these choices are made with systematic regularity according to circumstances, and they become associated with conventional meanings". Developing Fowler's assertion, Beard (2000) further notes that language comes from beliefs, thus it cannot be separated from the ideas it contains. Beard's contention is that the way language is used and arranged says a great deal about how ideas have been shaped. In addition Lee (1992:9) articulates that language "evokes ideas [and]…. is thus not [a] natural map of consciousness or thought …and is highly selective and conventionally schematic map" to reality.

The research report reasons out that meaning of texts are extremely influenced by the writers' and readers (receptors) world views and that by studying the meanings in words, beliefs and biases may be discovered. Kress (1990) argues that texts are produced by socially situated speakers and writers. In this process, meaning comes about through interaction between readers and receivers – as users of language bring with them different dispositions towards language which are closely related to social positioning. Fowler (1991: 3) argues that:

> Between human beings and the world they experience, there exist systems of signs which are products of society. Signs acquire meanings through being structured into codes, the principal code being language…Codes endow the world with meaning or significance by organising it into categories and relationships which are not there 'naturally', but which represent the interest, values, and behaviours of human communities… Language…[has] a cognitive role: [it] provides an organised mental representation of our experience…Whatever …structure of the world, … we handle it mentally, and in discourse, in terms of the conventional meaning-categories embodied in our society's codes.

On the same note Fairclough (1989) and Foucault (1980) argue that discourse should be understood as social practices that link language with other social experiences. These two foreground the understanding of language as a system of meanings conditioned by the signifying practices of

culture. According to Fairclough, all values, beliefs, assumptions and background knowledge people use to understand their social relations shape social phenomena. To Fairclough, language is a system of representation that signifies the structure of culture, social struggles and ideologies.

To Fairclough, people use linguistic patterns to reproduce their experiences and ideologies. In Fairclough's view, writers of texts (newspapers included) use language unconsciously and consciously in text production to conceal their background knowledge. Foucault (1980) develops the concept of discourse more broadly than Fairclough and Fowler. To Foucault, discourse is a systematic way of representing a topic in a particular way at a given point in history, limiting other ways in which it can be represented, and consequently shaping perceptions and social practice. Furthermore, Foucault (1980) and Hall (1982) agree that discourse reproduces knowledge, ideas and beliefs through language. Therefore, it should be understood as a peculiar frame to social knowledge used by a (discursive) community within which the discourse originates.

Hall (1982) further notes that social relations have to be understood and passed through speech and language to accepted meanings that are brought forth as a result of the existing social relations. This view implies that language is a communicative tool that is not only received but also interpreted by the receivers of the message and during this process social relations are maintained, reproduced and established. Hall's analysis of language implies that language is a shaping tool, thus it always presents ideas from a certain point of view. In addition, Fowler (1991) argues that different newspapers know their readers and when news are compiled they (newspapers) imagine the subject position that they want their readers to occupy and that the comfortable reader will also be recruited to the newspaper that serves his/ her ideological stance.

Although this research report does not specifically apply discourse analysis, it concurs with the logic of discourse analysis that, "news is a representation of the world in language… [and language] imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin on whatever is represented. News is a representation in the sense of construction" (Fowler, 1991: 4). The advocates of discourse analysis contend that wordings in media texts have their reasons and that differences in expressions carry ideological distinctions (Gunter, 2000). This analysis suggests that underlying ideological positions, perceptions of relations and levels of interests can be determined from the

textual structures of media content (Ibid). This contention is supported by Kress's argument that socialisation and ideology indicate how “discourses are to be valued, or ranged in relation to each other, how their contention is to be resolved, to what extent and how either is to appear in the text" (1990: 83). Kress points out that ideology is not a matter of mere surface content as expressed in the kind of words chosen but is everywhere entirely involved with the textual aspects of the text.

To Kress, ideologies determine the arrangement of discourses in a text in response to the demand brought by the larger social structures (1990:83). He argues that writing is about using words in ways that reflect certain ideologies, because writing implicitly shows the writer's way of thinking. In a nutshell, Kress argues that the assumed writing position would entail certain assumed, "taken for granted and therefore more or less implicit knowledge" and these affect decisions of what becomes thematic in a sentence, and what does not (83). On this point, he argues that the decision to have one system rather than another is an ideological decision that is related entirely “to the kinds of social and economic structures of a given society” (76). Kress posits that any text reflects the ideological categories of the economic and social system into which the reader is being socialised, hence readers do not read texts from nowhere, but the social structures in which they belong make what they will read predictable.

Kress’s analysis implies that the language used by the two newspapers is not accidental for it has been developed from their “well understood past, about which there is a common sense” (76). To Kress, the assumed writing position would entail certain assumed, taken for granted and therefore more or less implicit knowledge. These, according to Kress, affect decisions on what becomes thematic in a sentence and what does not. To Kress, every text reflects the ideological categories of the economic and social system into which the writer and the intended reader are socialised.

In addition, Roelofse (1983) who argues that a social group is identified by its form of communication also supports this view. Roelofse posits that the network of values, ideas and beliefs by which people communicate is manifested in the 'patterns of behaviour, and in the institutions peculiar to that social group. Roelofse rightly argues: “Society is continual discourse which affects communicators as much as their communication and the values which feed these expressions” (1983: 7-8). Volosinov (1973) who came before Kress (1990) and Roelofse (1983)

argued that linguistic experiences are not only a discharge of, but also an exchange of ideas linked to other social experiences. It is therefore significant to observe how the transition to democracy in South Africa impacted on the transition in the media industry and how the economic, political and social structures of this process related to the linguistic structures of the broader system within which news are produced.

3. The South African Media and the Transition to Democracy

3.1 The SA media: A historical context

A brief historical discussion of the press in the pre and post-1994 era is important as it provides the broader political and economic context in which the press operated. This can also help sustain the argument that the press has been implicated in the transitional process. The rationale for tracing these historical and contemporary trends begins with the assumption that newspapers mirror and act against (at times) the socio-economic and political values and ideals of their societies and audiences. To fully understand ideological leanings of any newspaper, it is essential to understand the socio-economic as well as the political and historical contexts in which they were established and function under, including the target audience that they seek to address.

This approach enables one to figure out bias in the content of the articles under review with an informed view backed by a historical perspective. The view of this research is that there are variety of factors that influence the content of newspapers. These factors range from socio-political environment, economic structures (e.g. ownership, audience and advertisers' views and needs) to the internal dynamics of the news production processes.

Newspapers and the news they produce are, as Park notes, "...a form of knowledge, [that] contributes from its record of events not only to history…it contributes something not merely to the social sciences but to the humanities" (1955: 83). This implies that newspapers cannot be separated from other spheres of life (political, social and economic). Like all institutions of society, newspapers reflect, reproduce and shape public, economic and political consensus.

Before 1990, ownership of South African newspapers was largely dominated by white capitalist forces of the time which can be categorised in language terms. The first group consisted of English language media outlets, namely, Argus Holdings LTD and Times Media LTD. These English language newspapers were predominantly owned by Anglo American Consolidated[10] (Tomaselli, 1991, 2001; Berger, 2001). The second group consisted of Afrikaans language newspapers owned by Perskor, Nasionale pers and Sanlam (Tomaselli 1987a, 2001).

Beside mainstream newspapers, there was a group of newspapers which constituted the "alternative press". These newspapers were termed alternative because they were not owned by the 'mainstream'[11] newspaper owners. Secondly, their content and their target audience were different from that of the 'mainstream' newspapers. The alternative press was the outcome of proposals by those who sympathized with the liberation movements and found it necessary to establish the media system that would reveal pain and distress of black people under apartheid and tell their aspirations and stories to the world. Among the alternative press were *Golden City Press*[12] and *Drum*[13]owned by Jim Bailey (it later ran short of funds and got swallowed by the big publishing companies), *Ukusa* published in Durban, *The Eye* (Pretoria) *and Izwi Lase Rhini* (Grahamstown), *New Nation, Vrye Weekblad, South*, the *Weekly Mail, Nemato Voice*, *Grassroots* and *Cape Dokta* (Cape Town) (Sparks, 2003; Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

Within the "alternative press" camp there were also categories based on their role against apartheid and their relations to the market. Newspapers such as *The Eye, Ukusa, and Izwi Lase Rhini* were among those that were categorised as the 'left alternative press' (Tomaselli, 1987b). Tomaselli and Louw (1991) argue that these newspapers were the voice of the oppressed masses, were linked to leftwing political movements, especially the United Democratic Front (UDF), and did not rely on

10 Through Argus and SAAN Anglo American Consolidated owned and financed *The Star, Pretoria News* and *The Cape Argus* (were under Argus) and *Cape Times, Sunday Times* and *Business Day* (under SAAN).

11 By mainstream media, I am referring to the two groups that I have identified (the English and Afrikaans media groups of that time).

12 *Golden City Press* was an alternative newspaper though commercial. Some of the alternative newspapers were not interested on profit and they survived on donor funding but this was not the case with *Golden City Press*.

13 *Drum* was not a newspaper but a magazine, but it was part of the 'alternative' media in general.

sales and advertising. Rather, they depended on subsidies and grants from various foundations, trade unions, churches and embassies. *New Nation*, which Manoim (1996) described as the unofficial bearer of the UDF and Cosatu, also fell within the 'left alternative press' category, although it operated on a commercial model and relied on advertising support.

Within the left commercial category, there emerged another significant group of newspapers which Tomaselli and Louw (1991) categorise as 'independent social democratic press' of which the *Weekly Mail* was an example. The *Weekly Mail* deviated from 'traditional' alternative press in the sense that the latter only criticized apartheid and was lenient to the 'left movements'. The *Weekly Mail* on the contrary, criticized apartheid as much as it criticized the mistakes of the left movements (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991).

During the apartheid era, ownership of the media was strategic. The English media under the arm of the mining giant Anglo American was aimed at perpetuating the English (Anglo-Saxon) role in the economy and securing their interests of free market trade during an era of "rising Afrikaner National Socialism" (Tomaselli, 2001: 134). The English wanted to protect primarily their economic interests whereas their political and cultural interests were secondary though not insignificant. The Afrikaners on the other hand were upfront about protecting their cultural, economic and political hegemony in the old South Africa. The alternative press's mission was also strategic in the sense that these newspapers were the outgrowth of the initiative of the oppressed groups who sought to establish a media system that would reflect and communicate their aspirations and anguish under apartheid difficulties.

Despite high entry costs to potential newcomers, competition between the English and Afrikaans media groups of the time was controlled and regulated. Ownership of the media during that time was a predominant middle class white male space and excluded people of colour, women and the working class people. The environment was also cruel to those who managed to break the ownership barriers and entered the media arena as independent owners. Jim Bailey's publications and the *New Nation* mentioned above are cases in point.

Many factors contributed to the unhealthy media environment in the pre-1994 era. These ranged from limited advertising support to the then repressive political system. The alternative newspapers tried to speak to and for the oppressed groups most of whom did not have much disposable cash, and were therefore not of interest to the advertisers. As a result, advertisers were not attracted to these newspapers and this impacted negatively on these newspapers' sustainability. The political environment was also unbearable as these newspapers faced closure, fines and confiscation of property by the apartheid government. The sad and unfortunate scenario is that the alternative press virtually died with the advent of democracy as the donor community channelled their funds to education and social development projects (Sparks, 2003)

Notwithstanding the above stated bleak picture of conditions under apartheid, the fact that private media ownership under apartheid era was possible indicates that the apartheid regime was not completely totalitarian (Sparks, 2003). As Sparks (2003:70) puts it, the apartheid government:

> wanted an illusion of democratic institutions and processes. While it created a police state, it also created the independent judiciary, … [while it] refused to grant franchise to people of colour, it maintained a white Parliament with regular elections and a small but articulate anti-apartheid opposition that punched above its weight; and while it tried to limit and control what the press reported it did not snuff it out altogether.

3.2 Transition to democracy

The early 1990's saw radical changes on the South African political landscape as the government was moving towards granting political, social and economic rights to the majority of the black population subsequent to the 1994 democratic elections. Institutions of society, including the media, were expected to undergo transformation to reflect the new landscape and to be representative of the general population of the country. In the broader sense, transition in South Africa implied rebuilding (transforming) the society from a racist past to a non-racial 'rainbow' society based on multiparty democracy, where all South Africans of all genders would have access to political, economic and social rights (Sparks, 2003).

The term "transition" is used differently in different contexts by different classes and structures of the South African society. [14] In the context of this research, transition means conversion of the South African society from a racist society based on unfair prejudices and discriminations that were grounded on class, race and gender.[15] Berger (2001) argues that, transition in the South African context means moving from unfair discrimination to 'fair discrimination' and application of corrective measures (political, social and economic) to correct the imbalances caused by apartheid policies.

In addition to Berger's articulations, this research report views apartheid policies not only as racial but as also based on gender discrimination (see footnote no 15). This is further emphasised by Marais's (2001)[16] argument that the key to liberation in South Africa was political transformation which, once achieved, aimed at gradually wiping out social and economic inequalities. Marais further posits that the transition from apartheid to democracy was surpassed by the shared ambition to develop an approach that could talk to the inheritance of apartheid. Marais recommended that a necessary solution to the transition process "required more than revising the political basis for hegemonic consent" but that it demanded co-ordinated social and economic restructurings (86). Morris (1993:8) rightly articulates that transition to democracy was "about political struggle to forge a new nation and new alliances that can ensure the broadest basis of social consent".

Marais (2001: 97) pronounces that the transition to democracy which resulted with the 1994 elections "marked a sea-change – but in ways and to degrees that far exceeded conventional assumptions". He points out that the dynamics to radically shape the struggles to decide the

14 Sparks (2003) notes that transition from apartheid to democracy was not about the creation of the non-racial society and scratching apartheid laws only, but much more complicated that this superficial notion. He identifies other phases of transition in SA as: (a). Redrawing geopolitical map of the country. This process included incorporating former homelands and transforming them into provinces. (b). Transforming South Africa from an 'isolationist siege economy' to an active player in international markets, and (c). Transforming the economy from primary producing economy to export based economy (Sparks, 2003:19).

15 Apartheid laws were oppressive to women particularly black women. White women were not regarded as equal to white males but they had better privileges than their black counterparts. During the apartheid era an unmarried black woman was not allowed by law to own a house. This scenario led most black women to a situation whereby they had to agree to marry anybody even those that they could not have married under 'normal' circumstances. Furthermore the scenario forced these women to stay in abusive marriages.

16 Hein Marais is former deputy editor of *Work in Progress*.

direction and scale of transition in South Africa were assorted and included "the political breakthrough of the settlement, the opening of new political and social spaces for activity, the assimilation of the new into the old, the ostensible shift from conflict to conciliation, the restructuring of state- civil society relations, the realignment of affinities along class and other lines (even among customary allies in the democratic movement), weakened ideological cohesion and confidence among the democratic forces, South Africa's weak standing in the global economic system" (Marais, 2001: 96 – 97). To Marais, these dynamics required more than mere political agreements and in certain circumstances they initiated new and sometimes increased existing trials and problems.

Transition has also entailed a level of economic redress and development, especially involving those groups in society who were previously disadvantaged economically by apartheid racist policies. Economic development according to Berger (2001:151) "designates socio-economic change that improves people's lives, and especially spreads economic benefits to sectors previously excluded to them". What emerges from Berger (2001), Marais (2001) and Sparks (2003) is that transition from apartheid to democracy should not only encompass the political replacement of the apartheid regime by the multi party democracy, but should also address the economic and social imbalances that were created by apartheid policies. Marais (2001: 85) further points out that a conclusion to transition from apartheid was dependent on "a political settlement which could enable the reconfiguration of the ruling bloc around a political axis capable of constructing and managing a new national consensus" as well as guiding South Africa out of economic and social crisis. To Marais, a transitional process to democracy in South Africa needed to take two probable directions. Marais (2001: 96) recommends "a gradual dismantlement of the country's 'Two Nation'[17] character through the distribution of resources, power and security …" The second option involved establishing methods whereby the rich and the poor co-exist precariously.

There is a view particularly by COSATU that argues that transformation has only occurred at the broader political level and that economic transformation has not happened to include other sectors of the society particularly the majority of black people who are still living in dire poverty. The

17 By the country's 'Two Nation' character Marais referred to a state whereby there is a "small, increasingly multi racial enclave of privilege and a massive impoverished majority co-exist precariously" (Marais, 2001: 96).

proponents of this view argue that the economy is still in the hands of whites and has merely created a handful of 'black elites' (elite economic transition). According to Sparks (2003: 5), "it is easy to find disenchanted blacks who will tell you that the new regime has done too much to appease the whites and that for them 'nothing has changed'. They see whites still dominating the economy".

Sparks further argues that unemployment is also an indicator that economic transition still needs attention of the government. On its three day conference held at Gallagher Estate on the 5th – 7th of March 2005, COSATU also highlighted the issue of unemployment as a critical matter that the government needs to look at and address. Marais (2001) maintains a similar view and says that the situation in the post-1994 South Africa is contrary to what was articulated by the ideals and commitments of the struggle. He points out that the black economic empowerment benefited and continues to benefit few black elites. Having said this, Marais further accepts that the black economic empowerment was necessary for post-1994 South Africa as it "expounded on the grounds that transformation within a capitalist system will be sold short if the heights of the economy remain exclusively in white hands"(240). This, according to Marais rested on the anticipation that "racial solidarity (in this case with the African poor) would eclipse class solidarity and become the wellspring of a 'patriotic' capitalism" (240). This means that the profit seeking prospect of the black economic empowerment could be synchronized with the paramount obligation and promise (an ANC vow of a 'better life for all') of a better life to create opportunities and improve the living conditions of the majority of blacks (Marais, 2001).

3.3 Media transformations during transition

In the view of this research, it was significant for transition to also occur in the media. This is due to, amongst others, two significant reasons. Firstly, the media as watchdogs of society need to be transformed and reflect democratic principles to enable them to play their role freely. Secondly, the media should reflect and provide a mirror of the society they are an integral part of.

Changes of ownership in the SA media in the post-1994 era cannot be isolated from the broader context of what was happening in the political arena of the country at the time. Sparks (2003) notes that the transformation of the media depended on the successful growth of the whole economy.

This may be attributed to a number of interrelated factors. Firstly, advertisers target audiences with disposable income and if there are still people who live below the 'bread line', commercial newspapers will not reflect and talk to them because they will not be the target group of advertisers. Commercial newspapers depend hugely on advertising revenues for their economic sustainability. This would impact negatively on the role of the media as a public sphere because they would become an exclusive (middle class) public sphere.

Secondly, if the economy is not equally distributed and capital is still concentrated in the hands of 'the selected few' particularly whites and few black elites any transformation of the media would be impossible because only their views would still be prevalent in the media. In this case, the media would not contribute to transformation in general, as it would only speak to the needs and aspiration of those who are targeted by advertisers.

Thirdly, if the majority of the people are still poor then it would mean that their children will have limited choices of getting tertiary education and therefore limited choices of being employed in the media sector as professional staff. This scenario also impedes transformation of the media in terms of staffing, hence it means that content and editorial orientation will not reflect the changed political, social, economic and class context.

In 1996, the democratic government also introduced one of the most liberal Constitutions in the world to guarantee freedoms and liberties to citizens and civil society organisations. With regard to the media, Section 16 of the Bill of Rights allows for freedom of expression which includes 'freedom of the press and other media'. The extent to which these rights and freedoms become possible and practical remains with the Courts of Law[18] in terms of how they interpret and pass judgement on them.

18 In the 1998 libel case against City Press (Bogoshi vs. *City Press*), the *City Press* had published an article about a lawyer, Mr Bogoshi whom it accused of defrauding clients and the Road Accident Fund. The case went to court and the court ruled in favour of *City Press* arguing that newspapers have freedom to publish news stories if they are able to prove that their facts are based on truth and are to the interest of informing the society (Sparks, 2003; 76-78).

Transformation of ownership of the media started in the early 1990s. In 1994, Argus sold 35% of its shares Tony O'Reilly[19] the Irish owner of Independent Newspapers who later acquired up to 59% in 1995 (Berger, 2001). Later O'Reilly bought a chunk of shares in newspapers that are currently operating as Independent Newspapers[20] (Berger, 2001). The entry of international ownership of the SA newspapers included UK-based Guardian Group, buying shares in the *Mail* and *Guardian* in March 1998, and UK-based Pearson PLC acquiring half of *Business Day* and *Financial Mail* from TML (Berger, 2001).

The entry of international companies into the SA media ownership neutralised ownership of the two dominant forces that were prevalent in this sector during the apartheid years. It signified a transition in the sense that media ownership during apartheid years was primarily national and the post-1994 era provided space for the participation of international capital in the South African media landscape.

In 1993, the Argus group sold 52% shares of the *Sowetan* to the black empowerment company, Corporate Africa, a group that owned 75% of New African Investment Limited (NAIL), claiming it was an indication of their commitment to black empowerment (Tomaselli, 2001). Tomaselli interprets the result of this unbundling (of Argus) as a "redeployment of allocative control[21] as a means of shaping structural processes" (Tomaselli, 2001:131). Later during that time, Anglo American sold off Johnnic[22] (a holding company of Times Media Limited[23]) to a group of black businesspeople and labour unions; 13% to the National Union of Mineworkers, 10% to SA Railway and Harbour Workers Union and 11% to NAIL. The latter acquired shares through their insurance company, Metropolitan Life under the auspices of National Empowerment Consortium (NEC) (Tomaselli et al, 1991).

19 Tony O'Reilly is an Irish businessman.

20 Independent Newspapers include *Cape Times*, The *Natal Mercury* and the *Pretoria News*.

21 Tomaselli (2001: 131) defines allocative control as a corporate activity that covers among other things, "the formulation of overall policy and strategy" and "control over the distribution of profits, including the size of the dividends…"

22 Johnnic Communications owns the following newspapers: *Sunday Times*, *Business Day*, *Financial Mail*, *Sunday World*, *Daily Dispatch*, *The Herald*, *Ilizwi*, *Weekend Post* (Eastern Cape), Algoa Bay (Free distribution paper in Port Elizabeth) and *Our Times* (Port Elizabeth and Plettenburg Bay), (Source: Johnnic Communications Website).

23 British based Pearsons also bought 50% of TML titles (*Financial Mail* and *Business Day*).

Another significant transformation of ownership in the South African Media was in 1996 when predominantly Afrikaans Nasionale Pers (which owned a huge chunk of Perskor at the time) started selling shares to black owned businesses. At the time, Naspers indicated that 51% of its black targeted newspaper, *City Press*[24] was to be sold to black investment groups. This resulted in Kagiso Trust Investment (a strong ANC supported NGO) acquiring major shares of *City Press* in 1997, although the deal was reversed later. Kagiso was later absorbed by NAIL.

Tomaselli (1991:134) acknowledges that the transformation of ownership that characterised the South African media landscape post-1990, which enabled black people to buy shares in media houses, "signalled new communities of practising joint partnerships in which the one party sought economic empowerment and the other political protection". This scenario reveals a media landscape where power (political and economic) is an effort to build and restore alliances in pursuit of relevance, political correctness, acceptance and influence.

Ownership changes that the South African media underwent since 1990 indicate a breakthrough in the sense that the media that were owned by big private corporations could now pass into the hands of middle class individuals who are interested in making profit to protect and increase their income levels. In Tomaselli's (2001:112) view, the cross racial ownership of the contemporary SA media is "likely to bolster capitalist interest as they have in the past" and will continue the class based social establishments as financial survival is determined by amongst other things readers and advertisers. The implication of Tomaselli's assertions is that transformation of ownership in the media is unlikely to bring changes in the content of the media as long as the media they own do not attempt to transcend racial and class audience barriers that they were initially targeted at. This view implies that a total transformation of the media is only possible if it allows for the media to transform in terms of audience they are targeting. The *Business Day* case (discussed below) illustrates the point clearly. The National Union of Mineworkers is a significant shareholder of this newspaper but the newspaper is still addressing and talking to the needs of middle class people

24 *City Press* was established in 1982 as *Golden City Press* and was the first national Sunday newspaper aimed at the black market. In 1983 the name of the newspaper was changed to *City Press.* The owners at the time were Jim Bailey and the South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN). When SAAN withdrew, Jim Bailey became the sole proprietor of *City Press*, *Drum* and *True Love*

who do not share the views and aspirations of the same class of people that are represented by the National Union of Mineworkers.

Furthermore, Tomaselli (1987b) points out that in determining the ideological stance of a newspaper other factors may be involved but it is also important to take into consideration the economic constraints facing the media industry. He argues that it is a flaw to regard the press as a free agent within a society. Tomaselli further posits that economic constraints play a role that forces the press to take a particular stance. This argument takes us back to the question of ownership, audiences and advertising as it implies that economic survival of the newspapers is a crucial constituent that plays a significant role in determining the ideological stance of a newspaper, particularly if that newspaper is a commercial newspaper.

This implies that audiences who are also consumers of the advertising products are significant to the survival of newspapers as advertisers advertise in newspapers with the aim of reaching that audience and that the price advertisers pay for space is determined by the size and social composition of the audience (Tomaselli, 2001; Curran and Gurevitch, 2000). No commercial media can survive with circulation revenues from readers only (Pillay, 2004; Tomaselli, 2001; Berger, 2001; Fowler, 1991). These organisations depend largely on revenues from advertisers and in this process they are forced to "produce audience maximising products" (Baker, 2001:17). Furthermore, Fowler (1991) points out that economic conditions lend shape to the ideologies of newspapers. To Fowler, the crucial purpose of newspapers is to sell advertising space and from the advertisers' viewpoint "the textual content must be broadly congruent with the product to be advertised" (121).

However, these arguments notwithstanding, the research argues that the new owners of the SA newspapers brought with them progressive views on editorial independence. This subject was put to test in 1999 when the editor of the *Financial Mail* (owned by the ANC-aligned National Empowerment Consortium) during the 1999 elections endorsed the United Democratic Movement

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magazines. In 1984 *City Press* experienced financial problems and was bought by Nasionale Pers. At the completion of this research, *City Press* has 2,5 million readers, of which 97% are black.

(UDM). The matter did not please some of this newspaper's shareholders but the editor retained his job (Berger, 2001).

Business Day's case also presents a very convincing case in this scenario. The black mineworkers (through the National Union of Mineworkers) constitute a significant shareholder of *Business Day*, but the newspaper continues (arguably) to cater for the interest of the middle class whites most of whom believe in the capitalist mode of production whereby workers are expected to work and produce profit, should not strike (as strikes are bad for the business and profit) and should not demand wage increases (as wage increase limits profits). Even under the part ownership of unions, *Business Day*'s content is still not aligned to the aspirations of workers. A change of content may result in a loss of some of its current readers, which may lead to a loss in advertising revenue, causing financial difficulties for the newspaper.

The case of unions (predominantly black) making profit from the white middle class, as is the case with *Business Day,* also constitutes a form of transformation in media ownership as discussed above. During the apartheid years, whites owned the media (even those that were targeted at black audiences) but the *Business Day* case reveals a scenario whereby blacks are now generating money from whites (Berger, 2001). It is also a case in which the workers generate profit from the middle class. This development presents a dual transition. Firstly, it is a literal transformation of ownership. This newspaper is still not very friendly to workers' grievances in its coverage. For example, if it covers a strike, it does so from the perspective of how it negatively impacts on the economy. Secondly, it is transition in the sense of reversal of roles whereby predominantly black unions are making money from the middle class – therefore reversal of economic benefits.

The post-1990 ownership transformation of the media indicates a visible transformation with regard to race and class. New owners particularly blacks progress to a higher class in terms of their economic status. This makes up an important measure to development and de-racialisation of the SA society as it implies that people (black) who were previously not allowed to own the media have now entered this arena. In this context, transition also implies that ownership of the SA media post 1994 is still transforming from being white middle class to a situation where it is diverse in terms of race and economic class.

Berger (2001: 163) argues that the diverse ownership constitutes "a more fertile foundation for more racially representative media content, even though the latter does not necessarily follow the former". The implication of this is that transformation of ownership does not necessarily imply that the content and ultimately the role that the media plays will change. Nevertheless, diverse ownership opens up a conducive space for plural/ diverse views in content although this may not be a linear process due to the economic dynamics facing the press.

The other factor that emerges in the discussions of transition is the issue of gender representation in media ownership especially in relation to black women. It would make an interesting study to look at how far transformation of ownership has gone in terms of gender representativity. The existing research on gender and the media only focuses on gender representativity of media personnel (Goga, 2000) but very little has been done on investigating gender representativity in terms of ownership. According to Goga, black women constituted only 6% of top management (not owners) in 1999. The profile of media personnel especially in junior positions (journalist and junior management positions) is also changing to include women and blacks (Goga, 2000). Much of these owe credit to the Employment Equity Act of 1998 which requires companies to reach a certain percentage of race, gender and disability in their employee profiles.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical framework that guides the study. Liberal pluralism, gatekeeping, public sphere, Marxist media theories, the critical political economy of the media and language, news and society approaches have been selected as functional theories for this study. In analysing these theoretical approaches, the study highlighted conceptual approaches that guide it on the analysis of the role of the media in transition. The study approaches the media as both the watchdog of the transition and as the institution that is itself in transition from apartheid to democracy. The proceeding chapter offers historical backgrounds of the *Sowetan* and the *M&G* with the aim of contextualising the evolution of these newspapers in the transitional process.