

CHAPTER EIGHT

8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

8.1 An overview of the study

This study explores the relationships among news agencies within the context of a changing global social order characterised by ‘globalisation’. Competing definitions and conceptualisations are given by three ‘schools’ of thought on the concept, globalisation. These include the globalists, sceptics, and transformationalists (Held & McGrew, 2003; Hoogvelt, 2001). Globalists describe globalisation as the intensifying economic, political, and cultural relations among nations. They investigate inter-dependencies among nations and the re-configuration of structure and agency, for instance. They also characterise globalisation as, among other things, the compression of time and space. Transformationalists, on the other hand, while accepting the basis for these factors and social conditions as relevant to a process of ‘globalisation’ that is underway, also question the existing deep social inequalities that globalisation simultaneously entrenches. In this, their position differs from sceptics who do not accept that globalisation is a new orientation in world conditions different from previous epochs.

The main objectives of the study are to understand the relationships and role of news agencies in relation to global news flows, and secondly, to assert that changes in the broader social environment are affecting news agencies and transforming them and the product, news. An extensive review of the findings in previous studies on global news flows and on news agencies was undertaken in chapter two (with these objectives in mind). These studies reveal that global imbalances in news flows and in the relationships between media in developing and developed social contexts exist. As a further objective, the empirical investigation critically explored these imbalances. Testing relationships of imbalance in news flows would also indicate whether the relationships among news agencies, in their operations, structure, and ownership, are undergoing change.

Broadly, change is attributed to internal and external pressures and conditions of a transforming world order. This world order is based on the system of capitalism and relationships under capitalist production, which are in crisis and transforming. These transformations in the system include emerging global trans-national corporations, increased privatisation of structures within the public realm, excessive market competition in the accumulation of material goods, products and services, and convergences in the use of technologies all of which are influencing societal institutions and processes such as knowledge production. News flows, it is suggested in this study, is important to the process of global market capitalism and news has itself become a commodity of exchange within that system.

The diagram below represents and summarises the introductory arguments to the study. Firstly, world economic integration is presented as a condition of global capitalism and it is explained further under the phenomenon of an 'intermediary stage' of globalisation. This phenomenon of globalisation is characterized by the compression of space and time through the intervention of advanced technologies. It therefore, leads to various interdependencies in social relationships, and in the constructing of a 'global consciousness'. These issues are discussed at length in chapter seven, and they are introduced in chapter two.

Globalisation presents a dialectical process that results from and in turn, affects especially institutional social life. This includes information flows, news production and the organisations of news. The outcome of this dialectical process leads to further 'intermediary conditions', including continuities and shifts in the operations at news agencies and their having to adapt within the broader system. Intermediary conditions arise from the transitional nature of globalisation in the 21st century and include for instance, the ambiguity in the role of the nation-state within a globalising world. The adaptations at news agencies, however, also have consequences and outcomes. The study questions, for instance, whether news agencies facilitate and maintain unequal relations of exchange and monopolistic

behaviour over global news flows. The diagram presents a cyclical and dialectical relationship between news flows, the social world order, and evolving patterns of relations between agencies.

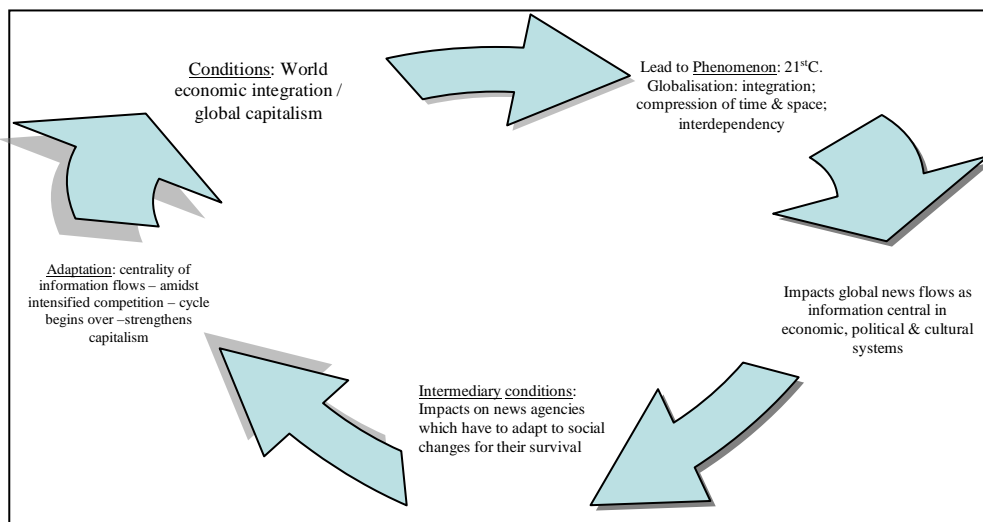


Figure 8-1: The cyclical and dialectical system of capitalism influencing the flow of information and changes at news agencies

The ‘intermediary conditions’ in the above diagram, that are influencing news agencies, should not be seen in isolation to the broader global social context, which also gives rise to these conditions. Internal and external pressures to agencies’ main operations, which include news production, selection, and distribution, result in the adaptations at news agencies. These are seen as necessary to their survival within the social system. A new world order would lead to a fundamental shift in their structures and operations. This could mean even a threat to their continued operations. Yet, these organisations are vital to enabling news flows because they are key distribution and access points for information in world events.

The cycle of news production and information flows (in the above diagram) also reflects important changes within the capitalist system as well, which has become

global in character, since the fall of communism as an alternative socio-economic and political formation. These dialectical changes furthermore reflect an information revolution that is ushering in a new world order. Central to this 'revolution' are the use of innovative and advanced technologies including especially the Internet, and the emergence of new or different systems of knowledge, and their resulting application. A significant and important indication of the revolutionizing-effects of information technologies and new knowledge formation is the growing prevalence of new integrated cultural practices, or global social movements. These are indirectly influencing the position of news agencies in the global flow of news (see below).

8.2 The main findings and explanatory issues

A central finding in the study is that the global news agencies, especially, (including Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France-Presse and the Deutsche Presse-Agentur) are undergoing important transformations that are seen as the outcome of broader external changes within the world system of capitalism. Global news agencies are characterised as operating across nations in their networks of news exchange relationships that they have pursued with other non-global and mainly 'national' news agencies over decades. Global news agencies are associated more directly than the national and regional news agencies are with the capitalist system because of their trans-national operations and international reach. However, it is revealed that smaller national and regional news agencies are also significant in the system because of their relations (associations) with the larger and more powerful global news agencies.

News agencies operating in national contexts (for example the South African Press Association) are described as smaller operations or as geographically limited in their outreach of news distribution. These national agencies predominantly serve their local, national contexts. In another sense, the descriptive term, "national" also refers to an ownership pattern of news agencies. National news agencies can also refer to a state-owned and controlled news

agency, but in the case of SAPA, it is a nationally based privately owned news agency.

This differentiation in conceptualising news agencies emerged in previous studies in which the relationships between 'global', 'national' and 'continental' news agencies that are described in a hierarchical ordering. The global agencies were located at the top of the hierarchy and the national news agencies at the bottom (as in figure 2-1 in chapter two) with continental news agencies placed between these two positions in that hierarchic relationship. This study extended this analysis of a hierarchical relationship between news agencies that led to top-down flows of news and maintains that a dominant relationship does in fact exist, but that the hierarchical flow of information no longer does as the relationships are described as uneven, but co-dependent.

Global and national news agencies are co-dependent on each other for news. Global news agencies do not produce news for local markets outside of their country or region of origin. They do enter into exchange relationships, however, with national news agencies providing these with international news. They report news about national contexts by receiving local news and using their own staff reporters to cover local contexts. The national news agencies in Africa rely almost entirely on global news agencies for news from overseas. This co-dependency relationship does, however, favour the global news agencies position in global news flows and undermines smaller, national news agencies' positioning because they still set the terms of the exchange relationships, for instance.

News exchange relations between the global news agencies and the continental news agency in Africa, the Pan African News Agency (PANA), and between PANA and the South African nationally based news agency SAPA, are non-existent. This means that there are no contractual agreements of news exchange between PANA and the global agencies or with the national news agency in SA. PANA produces its news based on exchange agreements with national African

news agencies who are also subscription members of PANA. This means they are meant to pay PANA an annual fee for its circulation of news on the African continent.

In Africa, the continental news agency PANA is not as dominant or competitive as a news source as the global news agencies are internationally. There are at least two explanations for this: firstly, the PANA news product is regarded with suspicion by private and global news agencies because of its association with predominantly nationalised news agencies in Africa. Secondly, the global news agencies have established their own news bureaus in strategic capital centres throughout Africa. They employ their own journalists to report on these local contexts, but keep abreast of occurrences by receiving news tip-offs from the local media. They scan and survey what is taking place in these local contexts through the newspapers, radio broadcasts and television channels. Regionally based bureaus of global news agencies tend to select and produce their own news foci for international markets. The news that PANA produces is also geared towards an African media market. In other words, its focus is on Africa and not on events happening internationally, except where these events relate to the affairs in African nations (PANA Deputy-editor, 2006).

Despite the so-called 'compression of the world' used as a descriptive characteristic of the concept of globalisation, ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, and, essentially, identities, remained strong, but are slowly splintering in the global social realm (Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 291-3). The world may be growing 'smaller' but this does not necessarily mean that it is growing homogenous. This supports the argument (discussed in chapter 7), that a growing phenomenon described as 'global consciousness' does not mean the automatic collapsing of boundaries and cultural differences between nations. On the contrary, global consciousness leads to the celebration of differences in a more globally informed world, about these differences.

Another emergent finding concerning the role of PANA in Africa supports previous studies that emphasized problems of funding and a lack of credibility as a news source because of its contentious ownership. The global news agencies indicated a mistrust of 'PANA news' because they believe that PANA is fundamentally controlled and fed news by government owned news agencies in Africa. The researcher also experienced problems in gaining access to PANA, to get their voluntarily participation in the study, to challenge these perceived stereotypes.

The little contact between the researcher and the PANA representative who agreed to do an interview resulted in the participant asking to be paid a fee for giving out information about the organisation. Further participation and involvement from PANA was withdrawn when this 'fee' was not forthcoming. This situation confirms either problems of a funding crisis at PANA, or the lack of commitment to openness and transparency in its operations.

In Africa, news agencies are predominantly nationalised by their governments meaning that media and information are controlled, regulated and censored. African media systems are bound with the historical and political history of colonialism on the continent. The post-colonial independence of African states played a central role in nationalizing their media operations (Karikari 2007, Nwosu et al 1995). Most African news agencies emerge from that post-colonial history and furthermore, communication between state and civil society is strictly regulated through the media.

PANA was the outcome of this post-colonial history of state intervention in the institutions of African societies. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union (AU), established PANA in the late 1960s. The attempt by this organisation of independent African states was to produce and maintain their own continental news agency that would provide an alternative source of news about Africa to Africans than relying on the Western-based news agencies. This

approach weighed heavily on the credibility and authority of PANA with its integration in the profession of journalism as this is practiced throughout the world. PANA as a source of news about Africa was seen as bound up in ideological rhetoric. The main aim of having an African continental news agency (as in the case of South America with the CANA, Caribbean News agency, and in Asia with the OANA, Organisation of Asia Pacific News Agency), was to produce an independent, self-reliant and Africanised news operation.

The exception to the state-owned news agencies in Africa is the South African Press Association (SAPA) that was set up by the independent, liberal and mainly English-language newspaper groups in SA. Even under the racial system of apartheid, the English-language newspapers were able to maintain their distance and independence from government control and regulation despite censorship laws. The newspapers were privately funded mainly by private big- businesses in SA, and they were and are managed independently of political and government officials. In the early years before the apartheid government (and during that racial system of governance) SAPA was still a co-operative, non-profit organisation owned by the SA newspapers to serve the newspaper groups. Under that cooperative ownership pattern, it shared a similar history to the Associated Press (AP) global news agency that was established by the private American newspapers as a cooperative.

Both AP and SAPA started out as cooperatives and both have had to abandon their main cooperative function, but for slightly different reasons. In the case of SAPA, it became non-viable financially for the newspapers (who are also SAPA owners) to maintain the agency as a purely cooperative structure. This meant that SAPA had to now find a niche and begin producing its own news than be a conduit and network of exchange for the SA newspapers. The situation was similar with AP, but AP began selling its news content to non-media clients (who were not part of that cooperative venture) and this resulted in a change in 2000 in the cooperative function at AP even though the American newspapers are still the

main clients and associated members of AP.

8.2.1 The 'adaptive responses' from (global) news agencies to a transforming global news environment

An important finding regarding the transforming global news environment affecting especially the operations of the global news agencies is the adaptive strategies that they use to compensate for or survive external change. These changes are intrinsically related to the transformations in global capitalism discussed above. Various strategies are adopted as a response by global news agencies. These include the development of niche areas in news production, and the expansion of their operations to different news markets at regional bureaus. The latter is attempts to enter direct news agreements with local retail media and therefore compete with local news agencies on their home territory. As a result of this last mentioned adaptive strategy, competition for news markets and to distribute news widely intensifies.

Chapter 5 focussed on the 'commoditisation of news'. This is characterised by intensifying competitive relations amongst global news agencies in vying for news markets from around the world. Global news agencies also compete with each other to be the main sources and distributors of news. Commoditisation indicates the transformation of the product 'news' into a marketable commodity that can be sold and exchanged in the market like any other product on a supply and demand basis (see also Croteau & Hoynes, 2001, Herman & McChesney, 1997). This supports the evolving and transforming capitalist production process, which, in the new millennium, is dependent on specific types of information about nations, their involvement in trade relations and agreements, their development potential and GDPs and generally, world relations or international relations. News covers all of these issues.

The intensifying competition between news agencies, discussed in chapter five, emerged as a central aspect in the role and relationships of news agencies. They

compete for news sources, resources, and to be main distributors of news by out-selling competitors in the field. Another related and important aspect in the competition between agencies is the emergence and development of specialised areas of news foci, so-called niche areas for news production. By acquiring a niche area in news production that competitors cannot compare with, means that a particular news agency has developed a business sense of the news environment and for new news markets (that is, creating a demand). A niche also develops when a news producer recognises a gap in the news industry. The case of the development of the Bloomberg financial news provider is such an example. Bloomberg is one the main competitors of Reuters' financial news focus.

Being able to meet a specific need for specialised news and information (demand and supply) and by offering a product that serves a particular market's needs over and above other competing news agencies makes a news agency more competitive in the news environment. What are highlighted here, as a main aspect in creating niche areas of news production, are the significance of news as a commoditised product and the changing nature of news in a highly competitive media market.

The Reuters global news agency out-strategizes and out-manoeuvres its main competitors, AFP and AP. It has adapted to market pressures by finding an indispensable place in the global news market by expanding and diversifying its news product. Reuters separates its (human, financial and technical) resources and news production into two inter-related areas of production. These include general and political news production, and a focus on providing straight financial and economic news. In a competitive and market-driven context, this business strategy has served the Reuters' news agency well and placed it ahead of the other global news agencies.

The more recent globally competitive news agency, DPA, has a strongly emerging expansionist tactic as well. DPA it is not in the same ranking, in terms of access to media and news markets as Reuters, AFP and AP are, but DPA has made a

remarkable entry in the European news market, as well as in Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East in a shorter time than it initially took its competitors. Part of the reason for this is the changing news environment, and operating in an age of advanced technologies. The original 'big three' news agencies, AFP, Reuters and AP have longer histories than all the other news agencies. However, despite this, DPA together with EFE (the Spanish news agency) and ANSA (the Italian news agency) and a sprinkling of smaller European national news agencies have emerged as global news competitors (see Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 2000).

The AFP news agency has expanded its operations in Africa to compete with the other global agencies, and to maintain its strong links with the francophone post-colonial African nations. This study confirms the finding of previous reports that all of the global news agencies, AFP, AP, Reuters and even DPA are competing with the local news contexts and markets for news about (in) Africa (see Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen 1998, Rantanen 2004, Boyd-Barrett 2000). The difference is that the global agencies serve overseas news markets, and the local South African news agency, SAPA, provides its news service mainly to the SA media market. The niche area in news production at SAPA is for it to be a comprehensive news agency offering news in the national context. In that sense, SAPA is the dominant news agency in South Africa with several smaller agencies not as competitive in the domestic context. This would make an interesting further case study.

Under market pressures, the private newspaper groups in SA have rationalised their management and ownership of the SAPA news agency (see discussion in chapter four). Because of this change, SAPA has had to cut back on costs to its organisation such as staff recruitment and other resources and this has had a direct impact on their news product. Cutting costs has negatively affected the news product where almost no investigative journalism is undertaken as part of the role at SAPA as a news provider to the South African news market.

8.2.2 Regionalisation: the extension of global news agencies' operations across the globe

Regionalisation in news flows is the fragmenting or zoning of geo-territories in the operations of global agencies in a bid to acquire a wider access to more diverse news markets. Regionalisation is a survival strategy of global news agencies to cover news from as many geo-political areas as possible and using the least resources available to them in order to save on costs and simultaneously to generate revenue from new sources. Regionalisation goes hand in hand with the competitive drive of global news agencies. It stems from competition between these media organisations.

News agencies have also inherited the description of 'global' because of this expansive reach and spread of their operations across national geo-territories. Hence, regionalisation is an outcome of competition and it describes the global character of international news agencies. The following implications of this process of regionalisation in news production by the global news agencies are provided below.

Firstly, regionalisation results in an agenda setting of news where the same events are extracted from the same regions by different news agencies. They cover the same issues and present these as news to overseas audiences. This tendency is repetitive in their operations across the globe. The result is that similar or the same news events are reported on by all the global news agencies. This has the effect of homogenizing information and reinforcing the same message (that is, the news event).

News from the regional bureaus of global news agencies also passes through a filtering process at the main headquarters of global agencies' editorial desks. This occurs before this news is distributed to their clients. Only a few news items (per day) are chosen from a specific region by the global news agencies despite the large volumes of information (approximately hundreds of news stories) that they

each collect on a daily basis. For instance, in Africa, a news agency operation may collect over two-hundred stories on any one day, but only two or three of these events will make the news headlines of retail media. The selection process of news at news agencies was discussed at length in chapter six. It was found that the selection process despite relying on a set of news values, that which decides the newsworthiness of an event, is a subjective process. Editors and sub-editors are identified as gatekeepers in the selection process.

In setting the news agenda, that is in deciding which news stories are important news agencies inadvertently preserve and reinforce images of local contexts to international audiences. A content analysis of news filtered through news agencies to retail media is suggested for further investigation as this was too broad an area to cover in this study. A content analysis of news selection would determine if the content selected from news agencies has to do overwhelmingly with negative or stereotype images of other countries. This would confirm previous studies' that found on an imbalance in news flows in the overwhelming biased presentation of developing social contexts. However, it was deduced in this study that because only a few stories are selected from a few hundred stories on a daily basis that some form of filtering is taking place.

Secondly, regionalisation results in the fragmented production of news from the social contexts in which news is reported. This means that the meaning of an event in its broader context is lost. This has the double-effect of undermining the historical context of that region and presenting the news from that region as isolated events rather than as broadly connected to and often related to historical processes. This fragmenting of events further presents a distorted view of a situation and can hinder the interpretation of other related socio-economic and political processes within the region.

This finding confirms that news agencies do not do investigative reporting which is seen as intrinsic in news production in providing the fuller picture or details of

an event to audiences. The exception to this is the alternative news agency, the Inter Press Service. A lack of investigative reporting presents fragments of the full meaning of an event and prejudices the interpretation of the event. This finding also confirms the views expressed in previous research by media critics concerning the bias in news flows and in presenting an event from the particular perspective of a news organisation. It also strengthens the argument that there cannot be objectivity in news reporting because a particular interpretation or perspective will always exclude other interpretations or meanings, or favour one position over another.

For instance, the internal conflicts and civil wars in African nations are not historicised or given their full contextual meaning. They are not presented in news as historical outcomes of prolonged mass struggles for independence, but are presented as 'spot-news', as isolated events and as spontaneous outbreaks of violence. News agencies do not fill in the details of an event. They fragment the event.

Fragmented news reports de-contextualise situations such as civil wars and political unrest. Superficial coverage of such events has the potential to be misinterpreted. Even more importantly, confirming previous studies, this bias (unevenness) in reporting disadvantages these nations, which are interpreted by potential business investors as unstable or unsuitable for trade. News agencies inadvertently contribute to the disparities between nations. This occurs in how they present them in news reports.

Thirdly, regionalisation stems from competition, which is characterised as competing news organisations seeking to acquire diverse and a wider access to audiences, to news sources and news clients. This translates into local news agencies and media, which often are not in a position to compete with global news agencies, being further marginalised from expanding their media operations either regionally or (unthinkably) directly to overseas clients. Local news producers are

sabotaged in their attempts to operate at the global level of news production simply because they do not have the economic and human resources to compete with the larger and longer established news agency operations.

The global context in which news developed alongside industrial capital does not provide an easy means for smaller operations to enter the international news scene. The global news industry developed as a competitive and an almost exclusive environment for those with capital and the related business sense. This describes and confirms previous studies' findings of a global oligarchy of news control by a few large corporations and a monopolisation over the news product.

In the local (domestic) context, this tendency applies as well. To use SAPA and Reuters as an example, the national news agency SAPA had historical ties with the Reuters Africa bureau. In fact, the SA newspapers bought the early Reuters-Africa bureau from Reuters and established SAPA from this deal. Before then, the Reuters news bureau decided all international news circulating in and from the country, and events and issues about the local context were selected and distributed to overseas audiences by the Reuters bureau. Once SAPA was set up, they decided what news Reuters would obtain about the domestic context through news agreements and contracts. Reuters' news agency was not compliant with this situation and tried to set up their own South African news bureau to compete with SAPA on their home ground and provide news to the local media. SAPA had the advantage of the support of the South African newspapers' who were the owners of SAPA. Eventually, Reuters closed that domestic news office.

Global news agencies in Africa are 'foreign media' in the host countries (or host regions) such as in Africa, Asia, South America and the Middle East because they are covering the local contexts but for overseas markets rather than for the domestic news markets. With the intensification of competition amongst global news agencies, which means acquiring wider audiences, sources and clients of news, they are inevitably competing with the local news suppliers.

At the local or national level, SAPA and the South African print media, because of their independence, private ownership and democratic and relatively stable structures, can access local and regional domestic markets for overseas audiences. But this is costly. More recently, in August 2007, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC, a public broadcaster) has launched two satellite centres, one in Kenya and another in Nigeria. A third satellite centre was launched in Washington, D.C in December 2007. A critical evaluation of this in the future will gauge whether the SABC monopolises news flows in and from Africa.

8.2.3 Innovative news production processes, new cultural formations and the future of news agencies in an emerging post-industrial world order

Transformations in global market capitalism that are having an impact on news agencies and leading to adaptive strategies are also theorised as leading to a qualitatively different, post-industrial society. The main factors indicating a post-industrial shift include the changing production relations and processes, innovations in computer technology, emerging forms of knowledge production and an 'information society.' Another important attribute of the post-industrial society is 'global social consciousness' in which people in all localities take a more active role in their societies.

There is a two-pronged effect of this on news agencies. Firstly, news agencies are merging their production processes to incorporate different media formats. This includes a move towards more inclusion of computerised technologies and 'online news formats'. The use of the internet in distribution of news has the impact of broadening the subscription client-base to non-media clients. Since the 1990s, most news agencies have already established their own online web pages and news sites on the internet.

The second effect, which is disrupting rather than contributing to the role of news agencies as the main suppliers of global news, is that this new media technology

including the internet allows more freedom and accessibility of information retrieval and information production within the public realm. Ordinary citizens and non-media specialists are producing their own information on the internet, described as 'blogs'. The prevalence of 'citizens' journalism' or public journalism has become a reality because of ordinary citizens having access and the ability to use technologies usually associated with the field of journalism such as the video-camera, photographic equipment and distribution technology such as computer networks.

The Internet has revolutionised the way information is produced and exchanged. It has also contributed to the compression of time and space in the retrieval of information (or data). This technology can be associated with ushering in a post-industrial society because it goes beyond the mechanistic instrumentation associated with industrial production, to embrace meaningful usage of the technology in the lives of people. The Internet provides a vast 'knowledge field,' for instance, which users can access 'on demand'. In the industrial phase of development, technology was seen as an extension of practical (or hard) labour. In a post-industrial society, technology is seen as an extension of mental (applied) labour.

Several authors have referred to the post-industrial society as a third wave of human development (cf. Bell 1979, Toffler, 1980). It is characterised by new forms of knowledge, with an emphasis on mental labour and referred to in such terms as 'cyberspace'. This term is the symbolic representation of a virtually existing society or communities. The impact of information technology has indeed affected the creation of new types of communities not bound by time or space. The most sociologically relevant examples of virtual communities created on the internet for instance, are new types of social movements organised in combination with the use of technologies and characterised as contributing to the constructing of new and alternative identities. These 'cyber-communities' are indeed new cultural formations.

In news production and news flows, citizens' journalism or public journalism have the potential to foster a new global order, a global consciousness or awareness amongst diverse and geographically separated communities. This phenomenon of citizens' journalism arises because of the disillusionment with news and information provided by conventional mainstream media. News agencies and retail media alike are not meeting the information needs of the broader public. In fact, these are both associated with commercialism and market extremism on the one hand, and on the other hand government owned news media meet the needs of the elite officials in various societies. Public journalism is creating the alternative space in which voices from the public realm are representing the concerns and issues of ordinary people.

The integration and convergences of technology in human relations has previously been postulated as leading to a global village or an informational network society. These concepts describe a new emerging global cultural formation representing social relationships extending across the globe, across nations and various other previous divides. The world is not becoming one culture but rather people of different cultures are becoming more aware of, more in touch with, and developing more understanding of other peoples' cultures different from their own.

This phenomenon is de-stabilizing institutional and community structures established in the so-called second wave of industrial development. This second wave of industrialism in a similar manner replaced the older traditions and forms of production during the first wave of agricultural development. The process of human development is visible in these dialectical processes of change. However, if older and more traditional institutions in the second wave are now being 'replaced' in the third wave of development then news agencies as they currently operate are faced with extinction unless they find the means to adapt and integrate in the new emerging system.

Several other authors have however associated the post-industrial society with transformations in the capitalist system. Capital is re-inventing itself in a higher and more complex form. These views, presented in the analysis in chapter seven, are taken as presenting a system of knowledge. How we think about society is transforming and that is visible in the new 'tools' and 'implements' synchronized with new forms of production and human relations. However, while some authors celebrate these changes others caution and warn against embracing a new system that merely replaces the old but still maintains all of the problems such as exploitation, mass poverty, illiteracy and environmental devastation, associated with the old world order.

Post-Marxists, such as Michel Foucault, speak therefore of the complete annihilation of the old order, and the complete freedom of the individual from all forms of social control including self-imposed incarceration and conformism. This is an extreme form of bringing about isolationism, the deconstruction of traditional institutions and a reformulation of human culture.

News agencies are keeping up to date with global change because there is awareness even within these media organisations that their operations are not as separate and independent from the social world as they would like to believe it is. They are also competing with unconventional sources of news from the public realm. To speak about the independence of news agencies in a global society is an oxymoron. The adaptive strategies by news agencies furthermore attest to the interdependencies of these organisations on societies and social processes.

8.3 Some methodological considerations and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research

This study uses a different empirical approach to data collection and analysis than that used in previous studies. The main reason for this difference is the specific foci of the researcher and how the research problem has been formulated. In

previous studies the focus has been on the content of news, hence news was the focus of these investigations. These included quantitative and qualitative studies on the content of news, generated across different socio-economic and political contexts (see for example Sreberny-Mohammadi et al 1985, Sreberny and Stevenson 1999, Chang 1998, Chang et al 2000). Content analysis of news typically uncovered imbalances in news flows when comparisons in the production of news in different socio-economic and political contexts were undertaken.

This study focuses on news production at different news agencies but with a focus on the relationships and roles at news agencies rather than on the news product. The focus is on the qualitative nature of these relationships in association with broader and external social change. Therefore, the in-depth interview was the appropriate method to understand these relationships and address how news agencies operate, produce, select and distribute news.

One might question how reliable is the data in this study collected from the subjective responses of participants. According to Babbie (2007, p. 145) to overcome the problem of the reliability in collecting data from interviews and from the subjective way in which information is gathered one can ensure that the respondents or participants are familiar with the issues under investigation, know what they are talking about and offer first-hand experiences. This can be done in how participants in the study are selected. The purposive or judgemental sampling method was used to ensure that the best possible or most relevant participants at news agencies were interviewed. Purposive sampling is described as a non-probability type of sampling, which means that the relevance of the particular cases under investigation rather than its representativeness is the deciding factor for the researcher (Neuman, 2006, p. 220). Purposive or judgemental sampling uses the judgement of the researcher in selecting cases (Neuman, p. 222)

Another way to ensure reliability according to Babbie (2007, p. 145) is to use

methods of data collection that proved reliable in other studies on the same phenomenon. Boyd-Barrett and Thussu (1992) produced a study on news agencies that was commissioned at UNESCO. They used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and their study was triangulated. In-depth interviews with participants were one of the main methods they used for data collection. That study was endorsed by UNESCO and used in several later studies as a historically accurate study on news agencies. A follow-up study in 1998 by Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen confirmed many of the findings of that 1992 study.

Triangulation was not possible or an option for the researcher in this study under the constraints and limitations of a fixed budget and a limited time frame. The focus of the study and its central area of investigation namely relationships amongst news agencies could not be 'observed' directly or even observed in the practices of individual participating agencies. Documents, financial records and other secondary data at most of the news agencies (apart from SAPA and IPS) proved difficult to obtain because of the confidentiality of making this information available publicly, or worse to competing agencies.

Previous studies relied on small teams of researchers all contributing over a longer period to investigate and draw up their findings and report their results. These were research teams usually commissioned by a specialist organisation such as UNESCO. They therefore worked on a contractual basis to produce these studies and were not limited by finances and other relevant resources.

The accuracy of information becomes an issue even if the method of data collection is reliable because participants can lie or withhold information relevant to the study. 'Accuracy' refers to the extent of 'truth' in news. It also refers to whether the data actually fits the real situation as it exists. However, this aspect is only marginally problematic in this study because the participants all voluntarily chose to participate and give their own interpretations based on their own experiences in their profession. There would be no need to lie because the study

was not investigating the activities of individual participants nor singling out individual perceptions about their organisations. In fact, quite the opposite happened, participants were eager to share how much of knowledge and experience they had accumulated working in their respective organisations.

On the other hand, accuracy of the data is always a problem particularly in qualitative studies that are dealing with human participants and in which meaning and interpretation are critical to the formulation of ideas. Participants could be distracted on the day of the interview and forget things they would otherwise have contributed; they could feel not up to being interviewed. This is why the same or similar issues and questions were repeatedly covered during an interview to crosscheck differences in initial responses, and several interviews were held with some participants who were willing to be re-interviewed.

In the analysis of data, one might also question the coding method. That refers to how the researcher generated relevant and related categories to reconstruct the focus of the study. Coding involved various stages of open categorisation, relationship categorisation and in which the lengthy and detailed responses from participants were broken down into simpler and many different categories. The researcher focused on making sure that coded categories actually measured what was being asked in the research questions.

Questions on validity also arise in qualitative and quantitative studies. Validity refers to whether the method, of in-depth interviewing for instance, is a valid measure of the concept or phenomenon under investigation (Babbie 2007, p. 144). Babbie (p. 146) describes validity as “the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration.” Several concepts were empirically immeasurable such as globalisation, global consciousness, and global capitalism, but they were inferred through other processes and relevant factors.

A “criteria” for measuring the quality of a relationship for instance, amongst news agencies, would be reflected in the number of news items (or news stories) that are exchanged between them in a year or in a day. A criterion for establishing the nature of news agency relationships can also rely on the number of contracts or agreements that they have entered into over a specific length of time (see Babbie, 2007, pp. 146-7).

The initial topic for this research aimed at a comparative analysis of the media systems and role of the news agencies of two Southern countries, India and South Africa. Despite their inherent differences, these two countries are seen to share certain significant similarities in their histories and in the development of their media structures. For instance, the print media in both countries have played a proactive role in their individual emancipation during colonialism and further in consolidating their independence and democratic formations respectively of their nation-states (cf. Tomaselli et al 1987, Tomaselli 1997, Joseph and Sharma 1994).

However, because of the enormity of such a project including cost, logistical and time constraints the South Asian media system and news agencies could not be included in this study as a comparison of a developing context with and alongside the African context. It is mentioned here however because of the enormous potential for further cross-cultural and comparative international research in the area of news and information flows. Comparative studies have also become an increasing trend since the 1990s particularly with the interest shown in the process of globalisation.

Golding and Elliott (1979) who used a participant observation method of observing newsrooms confirm that the researcher is always an ‘outsider’ in newsroom settings. Participant observation means neither more reliability nor more accurate information than the method of in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Golding and Elliott (1979) describe the intrusion of the presence of the social researcher as they encountered in their study of newsrooms:

...to extend the analysis to the long-term, routine process which underlie the daily task of news production, (...) require[s] time, the longer the better, to observe the difference between the accidental surface events of a particular period and the more fundamental practices which persist beyond them. This is a luxury rarely available to researchers. (...) it requires long-term access to journalists and their working environment. Intruding on someone's work, observing what they do, asking difficult, awkward, occasionally ignorant questions, with every likelihood that the end product will be a questioning or critical account of what has been observed, is to place a very great strain on tolerance and hospitality. It is well for sociologists studying media professionals, and indeed occupations in general, to imagine how they would react to a request from a student of the sociology of social research who wanted to perch obtrusively by their desk for a couple of months. Add to these practical and personal restraints the invariable sensitivity of [newsrooms] and it is not difficult to understand the scarcity of studies of production. (p. 14)

An extended case study approach rather than participant observation was the method of observation used in this study. Extended case studies seek to provide in-depth analysis of the findings from data collected and to offer a further comparison across previous case studies of the same phenomenon.

Several references are made to the potential for further research that extends this study or in areas relevant and related to news flows. These are mainly embedded in footnotes but are also in the body of the text. An area for further investigation falls with the 'psychology of news', in other words, the effects of news production on audience cognition, interpretation and in the construction of identities. Benedict Anderson (1983) made an important observation of the construction of nationhood in the effect of print media on societies. The idea of new information technologies interfacing with human and social processes such as in the construction of knowledge would be interesting for further research.

The broadcasting sector in Africa and in South Africa is an area deserving further studies. Vast improvements in information and communications technology are influencing the future of ownership of electronic media. The SABC, which is a public broadcaster, has had an interesting history of transforming from being a state propaganda network to becoming a public sphere network. Its news channels have evolved (as has its programming) and would make an interesting case study.

There is a growing interest in the phenomenon of citizen's journalism, and further and future research in this area would enrich the fields of communication and sociological studies. The phenomenon of 'online social movements' are particularly an interesting phenomenon. The two studies mentioned in chapter seven have integrated mass media technology, such as the internet, in social movements. These include studies on the Zapatistas (or Chiapas) movement in Mexico, and the mass democratic movement, and dissident political movements in South Africa, that gave rise to 'alternative' news reporting especially in the mediums of print and video broadcasting media (Talk Radio 702 and Capital Radio in the 1980s). These examples provide the groundwork for further extended studies and comparative research.

Alongside the use of new and innovative technologies, several authors (Dyson et al 2004, Castells 1996, 1997 and 1998, and Masuda 2004) mention that new forms of knowledge are being constructed in the post-industrial society. Neuman (2006: 32) differentiates between "instrumental knowledge" and "reflexive knowledge". The former refers to the extension of old research techniques or the invention of new techniques in research. The latter, reflexive knowledge, refers to a "self-aware, value-orientated knowledge [which] build on specific moral commitments, consciously reflect on the context and processes of knowledge creation and emphasize the implications and uses of new knowledge" (Neuman 2006: 32). New social movements that result from the interfacing of technology with human action can be said to give rise to or create a reflexive type of knowledge. This deserves further investigation in future research.