

Make your own notes.
NEVER underline or
write in a book.

**SELECTING STORIES TO TELL: THE GATEKEEPING OF
INTERNATIONAL NEWS AT Safm**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts

in

JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

of

RHODES UNIVERSITY

by

ABEL AKARA TICHA

Supervisors: Robert Brand and Prof Guy Berger

June 2006

Abstract

The premise of this thesis is that the selection of international news to be aired on the bulletins of SAfm by SABC Radio News staff is influenced by more complex factors than could be seen solely from the prism of an empirical journalistic paradigm.

Drawing from data obtained through participant observation and interviewing, it is noted that there has been a revolution from a propagandist approach during apartheid to a professional approach following the demise of apartheid, in the selection of international news for bulletins on SAfm. Using Lewin's theory of forces in decision making and locating it within four out of five levels of a framework of gatekeeping analysis provided by Shoemaker (1991) and Shoemaker et al (2001), it is concluded that the delimiting well-tested routines of newsmaking act as powerful companions of individuals' selection decisions of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. However, these routines are adapted to meet the organisational demands of the SABC, which as a Public Service Broadcaster (PBS) has embraced the discourse of South African nationalism/pan-Africanism, as a major philosophy underpinning the Corporation's coverage of the world.

Therefore, some individual, routine and organisational factors influencing the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins, are predetermined and co-determined by the social system (the ideological/discursive structure), which is promoted by certain social institutions. Instances of spokespersons of such institutions as governments, international governmental and non-governmental organisations, etc., officiating the news abound; the gatekeepers use them to meet routine professional standards of journalism. This potentially works to sustain the hegemonic discourses of the powerful in

international affairs (in terms of core/peripheral nations relations, and elite class/ruled majority relations) though there is a conscious oppositional effort to modify or dwarf stories that explicitly promote imperialism and to hold rulers accountable to the public. It is posited that the time is ripe for newswriters responsible for the production of bulletins for SAfm to take the risk that may be necessary to inject a few changes in routine practices that could limit the engineering of consent to the powerful elites in the international arena.

Acknowledgements

I have accumulated so much debt to a number of people and institutions that helped in making this study materialise. I'm particularly grateful to my supervisors: Robert and Guy for their legendary commitment and rigour in making me concoct the right mixture of concrete for this scholarly foundation. I'm equally grateful to my lecturers Jeanne, Larry and Lynette whose inputs were *critical* in making me think *critically*.

This research would not have been possible without access to the study site. Hence, to the Head of SABC Radio News, Solly Phetoe, I say *kealeboga* for your benevolence. To SABC Radio News staffers who accommodated me in their Auckland Park newsroom, I say God bless you. I salute also SAfm's Manager Mapule Mbhalati for connecting me to the right people.

And it's all about people that I got to Rhodes at the first instance; so thank you 'big bro' P. N. Tayong for that initial contact. But without the patronising gesture of the Deputy DG of the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) Prof F Wete, how would I have taken this leap? Thank you prof!

To my parents, I say *miaaka* for the wonderful encouragements, understanding and visionary pieces of advice. Uncle Phil of Kumba, may God bless you and the entire family for all the boosters. To every member of my family, from big bro Demy, to small sis Caro; and friends: Mah, Victor, Gideon, Ferdinand, Podif, Simon, Albert, George, Ma Glo and 'The Friends', merci beaucoup! To Dr and Mrs Ogundare, plus baby Tofunmi, I say *ose*. As for every member of the Rhodes JMS MA Class of 2006, two words convey my feelings about you: wonderful people! Research fellow Lilian N Fokwang, you were magnificent!

Now, to the Supreme Intelligence of the Universe, thanks for giving me the inner balance and the pulsating thirst to sip from the bottomless pool of knowledge.

Financial Assistance

The financial assistance from the Belgian Government Scholarship towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to Rhodes University or the donor.

List of Tables

Title	Page
Table I: G15 and G16's samples.....	50
Table 1: News value criteria for selection.....	69
Table 2: Other factors informing selection (G15 and G16).....	70
Table 3: News value criteria for rejection.....	72
Table 4: Other factors informing rejection (G15 and G16).....	73

Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Financial Assistance.....	v
List of Tables.....	vi
Contents.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Statement of the Problem.....	1
1.2 Context of the Site of this Study.....	2
1.3 Research Objectives.....	3
1.4 Theoretical Support for the Study.....	4
1.5 Research Approach.....	5
1.6 Significance of the Study.....	5
1.7 Thesis Outline.....	6
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature.....	7
2.0 Introduction.....	7
2.1 What is International News?.....	7
2.2 The Structure of International News: Galtung and Ruge's Proposition.....	10
2.3 Lewin's Theory of Forces.....	15
2.4 Expanding Lewin's Theoretical Scope: a Model of Gatekeeping by Shoemaker and Shoemaker et al.....	17
2.4.1 The individual level.....	18
2.4.2 Communication routines level.....	19
2.4.3 Organisational level.....	19
2.4.4 Social-institutional level.....	20
2.4.5 Social system level.....	20
2.5 Review of Literature on International and Other News Gatekeeping.....	22
2.6 Conclusion.....	24
Chapter 3: Background to International News on SAfm.....	25
3.0 Introduction.....	25
3.1 South Africa: from Racialism to Democracy and Press Freedom.....	25
3.2 Development of Broadcasting in South Africa and the Road to SAfm.....	26
3.3 Examining the Possible Impact of SABC Editorial Policies on International News Gatekeeping for SAfm.....	32
3.4 Who is Responsible for International News on SAfm and how is the Selection Process Structured?.....	34
3.5 South Africa's Foreign Policy and its Impact on SABC's Worldview.....	36
3.6 Conclusion.....	38
Chapter 4: Methodology.....	40
4.0 Introduction.....	40
4.1 Philosophical Underpinnings.....	41
4.2 Perspectives on International News Gatekeeping.....	42
4.3 Methods.....	43
4.3.1 Field observation as the principal method.....	43

4.3.2 Sampling	44
4.3.3 Gaining access	47
4.3.4 Design and data collection	48
4.3.5. Data collection through interviewing.....	48
4.3.6 Interviewing based on selected and rejected stories from the wires by two editors.....	49
4.3.7 Coding and analysis – the broader picture	51
4.4 Conclusion	54
Chapter 5: Findings at the Individual and Routine Levels of Analysis	57
5.0 Introduction	57
5.1 The Individual Level Factors	57
5.1.1 Gatekeepers’ historical experiences.....	58
5.1.2 Gatekeepers’ rank, work experience, job function and level of education.....	59
5.1.3 Gatekeepers’ role conceptions	62
5.1.4 Gatekeepers’ models of thinking	63
5.1.5 Gatekeepers’ physical states of being.....	64
5.1.6 Gatekeepers’ personal inclinations and tastes.....	65
5.2 The Routines Level Factors	67
5.2.1 News values and professional journalistic ethos	67
5.2.2 Newsflow on the wires/editing	77
5.2.3 The format of news items/availability of airtime.....	78
5.2.4 Pressure from national stories/deadlines.....	79
5.2.5 Coverage of routine events	80
5.3. Conclusion	82
Chapter 6: Findings at the Organisational and Social Institutional Levels of Analysis	83
6.0 Introduction.....	83
6.1 The Organisational Level Factors	83
6.1.1 SABC policies/organisational structure.....	84
6.1.2 Editorial control and newsroom decision making	86
6.1.3 Organisational resources.....	87
6.2 The Social-institutional Level of Analysis	89
6.2.1 Sources: the space of officialdom	90
6.2.2 The influence of audiences	95
6.2.3 External regulatory bodies	97
6.3 Conclusion	98
Chapter 7: Discussion.....	99
7.0 Introduction.....	99
7.1 Individual Level of Analysis.....	99
7.2 The Level of Communication Routines.....	102
7.3 The Organisational Level.....	105
7.4 The Social-institutional Level.....	107
7.5 Conclusion	110
Chapter 8: Towards a Conclusion.....	113
8.0 Introduction.....	113
8.1 Recapitulating the Main Thread of the Thesis	113

8.2 Suggestions to be Considered by SABC Radio News Policy Makers.....	114
8.3 Suggestions for Future Research	116
8.4 Sizing up the Research Approach	117
Bibliography	119
Appendices	127
Appendix 1: Gatekeepers interviewed	127
Appendix 2: Interview Guide.....	128
Appendix 3: Example of field notes entered into an index card.....	132
Appendix 4: Example of Oral-interview coding at the routines level of analysis.....	135

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Inquiry into the sociology of news production helps to shed light on some subtle yet powerful and taken-for-granted underpinnings of signification championed by the media (Hall 1997, Hall 1982, Thompson 1995, Kellner 1995). The sociology of newsmaking is far more concerned with input than with output (Roscho 1975), suggesting the need to conduct gatekeeping research. Gatekeeping is “the process by which the vast array of potential news messages are winnowed, shaped, and prodded into those few that are actually transmitted by the news media” (Shoemaker et al 2001: 233). Among these processes, selection takes centre stage (Rosten 1937 in Shoemaker 1991); hence, the focus of this study is investigating the factors influencing news selection.

It is important to investigate the factors affecting the selection of international news in a world which McLuhan and Powers (1989) have termed a “global village”, marked by an increase in the interdependence of nations, partly thanks to technological leaps in the media. In urban ‘First World’ environments, the media have therefore become ubiquitous, playing a central role in cultural signification (Hall 1982, Thompson 1995). This is one reason why Galtung and Ruge (1965) consider the media to be the main makers of images of nations and argue that the news media have helped to sustain the relations of inequality existing between industrialised and developing nations. This study assumes that it is the duty of the media in Africa to use their public space to 1) address some of the imbalances created by the unequal flow of international news content between North and South (see De Beer et al 1996); and 2) inform public opinion on the complex issues surrounding international politics that is increasingly influenced by a few elite nations led by the US (Chomsky 2003, Nel 2002) as well as by the few who make up the powerful classes of society (Chomsky 2003). Finding out if the media are already doing this would necessitate an inquiry into their content output. In turn, such output is in part a function of their gatekeeping practices. A good place to start such an inquiry on the continent would be the media of South Africa, which Nel (2002) has termed a ‘middle power’ between the industrialised world and the ‘Third World’. In this regard, this study

assumes that SAfm would be the best medium for a case study for three reasons: 1) it is the radio station with the widest geographical reach of signals in South Africa (SABC Editorial Policies 2004); 2) as a radio station, it is the most affordable and reachable medium in a country beset by poverty and a 17.6% rate of illiteracy (Human Development Report 2005); 3) it uses the English language which, though not the most widely spoken mother tongue in SA, is the most commonly used language in the official and commercial public life of the country (SouthAfrica.info 2006, Silva nd). This logically leads us to a discussion on the context of the study which represents a qualitative snapshot of gatekeeping practices during a particular period at SAfm in early 2006.

1.2 Context of the Site of this Study

This research investigates the factors affecting the selection of international news for the bulletins of SAfm, but since it is the SABC Radio News and Current Affairs Division (SABC Radio News) that produces all the bulletins broadcast on the station, the site of this study is the central newsroom of SABC Radio News. SAfm and SABC Radio News have the same genealogy (given that they are all rooted in the creation of the radio service of SABC). SAfm is one of the 15 Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) radio stations within the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The station evolved from Radio South Africa and its news service came to be seen in time as the mouthpiece of the apartheid government (Bechan 1999, Nyamnjoh 2005). SAfm's history is therefore sourced from the creation of the SABC in 1936, which was only a radio service until 1976 (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989, Bussiek and Bussiek 1998, Mbhalati 2005). Given that 61% of the staff of the corporation before the end of World War II were English-speaking (and shared in Jan Smuts' support for Britain in the war), the selection of international news on the station was highly influenced by Smuts' government; hence much 'social-institutional influence' (see below) on the editorial decisions (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). Individual influence on the selection of international news also played a role, given the selection of material sympathetic to Allied forces views from the BBC by the English speaking staff, and the rejection of such material by Afrikaans-speaking staff, who were less supportive of the British war effort (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989).

In 1959, following Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd's appointment of Piet Meyer, the head of the Broederbond (the secret organisation aimed at promoting Afrikaner influence and interests) as the chairman of the Board of Governors of the SABC, the selection of international news on SAfm became tilted towards material that would discredit foreign governments that openly criticised the NP's apartheid policies. Meyer also made sure that his gatekeepers selected and presented news items that were scornful of black-ruled countries, in order to legitimate white domination in South Africa (Tomaselli et al 1989, Bussiek and Bussiek 1998). At this time, in the terms of Shoemaker's (1991) model of gatekeeping, there was a high degree of organisational, social-institutional (in this case the Broederbond and the government) and social-system (in this case NP ideology) constraints on foreign news selection.

However, following the fall of apartheid in 1994 and the democratisation of South Africa, SAfm has been transformed into what is now supposed to be a PBS station and its newscasts are entirely produced by SABC Radio News. SAfm and SABC Radio News are supposed to be governed by the Corporation's Editorial Policies (2004) to the effect that they see themselves as primarily concerned with repairing the warped image of Africa by Western media, by highlighting the continent's development. This suggests that there have been changes in the factors affecting the selection of international news for SAfm's bulletins.

1.3 Research Objectives

The general goal of this research, therefore, is to investigate the factors affecting SABC Radio News' selection of international news aired on SAfm's bulletins. In doing this, the study will also ascertain the extent to which the selection criteria differ from those that characterised the pre-1994 period at SAfm, following the transformation of the station from a government instrument to a PBS broadcaster. This will draw on a number of theories.

1.4 Theoretical Support for the Study

Theoretical support for this research is found in Lewin's theory of forces, Shoemaker's model of gatekeeping and Galtung and Ruge's theory on the structure of foreign news. Lewin argues that there are forces which predetermine the food selection decisions made by heads of families and that an understanding on the dynamics of forces can also be used to investigate professional communicators' choices. In the sociology of news production, therefore, forces act on newswriters to either facilitate or constrain the passage of news items through channels of communication, sections within those channels, and gates, to get to the newscast (Shoemaker et al 2001). These forces differ in polarity and intensity, and will ultimately determine whether or not a news item reaches the final gate, where it is disseminated to the public. The forces could also change in intensity and polarity. For instance, the difficulty in getting hold of a news source in a foreign country to give explanations for a certain event may act as a negative force working against the very selection of that story. But if, through persistence, the source is finally contacted and his/her interview recorded, the negative force automatically changes into a positive one.

A useful model that places Lewin's forces within an analytical context, and one that I will draw on for this research, is provided by Shoemaker (1991). She argues that forces acting on news items are located within five levels of analysis: the individual level, the communication routines level, the organisational level, the social-institutional level and the social-system level. While individuals and routine processes of the newsroom generally determine what goes through gates, organisations have a great influence on the gatekeeping process, given that they employ the individuals and make the rules (Shoemaker 1991). On their part, organisations exist within a context influenced by social institutions (such as sources, advertisers and governments) that influence the gatekeeping process. The social system level deals with culture and ideology, which shape the overall ways in which gatekeepers select and reject items for the news (Shoemaker 1991).

A further understanding of how the gatekeeping of the news in general, and international news in particular, works, can be obtained from Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal study on the structure of foreign news which offers an insight into the routines of

communication work. These authors enumerated 12 values as the routine parameters for selecting international news stories universally: frequency, unambiguity, meaningfulness, threshold, consonance, composition, unexpectedness, continuity, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative. Although the taxonomy of news values proposed by Galtung and Ruge has received criticism from some scholars, Herbert (2000 in Harcup and O'Neill 2001) posits that it is the most useful categorisation of news values in the gatekeeping process. Galtung and Ruge's metaphors therefore provide additional context for this research, which is approached through qualitative methods of data collection.

1.5 Research Approach

The most helpful ways to study the daily gatekeeping processes of newswriters in a specific context are the techniques of field observation and interviewing (Tuchman 2002, Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Deacon et al 1999). This triangulation of methods allows for leads drawn from one data source to be supported with insights from the other data sources (Hansen et al 1998, Deacon et al 1999). On these premises, notes from 12 days of participant observation at SABC Radio News headquarters in Johannesburg and interviews with 16 gatekeepers considered to be most of those primarily concerned with the gatekeeping of international news stories that are read on SAfm's bulletins, have been used to inform the research discussions. Participant observation was made easy thanks to the design of field logs (Hansen et al 1998, Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Deacon et al 1999), while semi-structured interviews were facilitated by an interview schedule (Fontana and Frey 1994). While the notes from the field logs were read through and categorised into index cards, representing Shoemaker's levels of analysis, the interview responses were coded separately into headings representing these levels of analysis. Best examples illustrating response trends, as well as best examples representing deviations, have been used to add depth to the observations made for this research.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Investigating the factors behind the selection of international news at SAfm opens up a new vista for international news determinant research in Africa, given the concentration

on news flow analysis by most studies on international news on the continent, and the generic approach to news gatekeeping so far. This study may also provide some important variables to be investigated in future. It is hoped that policy makers at the SABC would find the discussions helpful in future adjustments of their editorial policies. Gatekeepers of international news for SAfm's bulletins could also become more aware of the discursive nature of selecting, which is a moment of the process of signification but is often taken for granted. Such awareness could help SABC News limit the social inequalities sometimes fostered by routine news practices (e.g. the recourse to mostly official/elite sources). It may also help them meet their challenge of warding off non-African hegemonic discourses (hence reducing some social and regional inequalities), and, more importantly, in promoting African renaissance.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This study has been presented in eight chapters, the first of which has established the terrain and *raison d'être* of this inquiry. Chapter 2 strives to unpack the dynamics of (international) news gatekeeping. This theoretical framework is followed by a third chapter that places us in the historical context of SAfm, within a wider framework of SABC Radio, while the fourth chapter motivates the methods used to satisfy the needs of the research. Chapters 5 and 6 present the findings of the field study while Chapter 7 teases out meaning from the data presented. They are followed by a conclusion that states the position of this thesis, and offers recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

2.0 Introduction

Selectivity and control dominate the mass communication process (Gerbner 1972 in Motta 1977), hence research into factors affecting news production is needed in order to explain how social infrastructure, institutions and their interests are transcribed into news texts (Tuchman 2002). The theory of gatekeeping affords the researcher the possibility to carry out this task. The media's role as first-rate international image builder (Peterson 1981), necessitates a look at the factors responsible for the selection of international news in a specified context. This chapter therefore attempts to define and describe international news especially through the metaphors of news values categorised by Galtung and Ruge (1965). It visits Lewin's theory of the forces that influence gatekeepers to select or reject units of news. Lewin's theory is placed within an analytical context provided by Shoemaker (1991). This is followed by a review of literature relevant to this study.

2.1 What is International News?

To define international news, one has to start by defining 'news'. Journalists find it easier to pursue than to define 'news' (Roscho 1975). News is approached by communication scholars within the empiricist tradition as the presentation of a series of facts of reality (see Tuchman 2002, Soloski 1997, Dahlgren 1992). According to Manning (2001: 20), "... a slightly larger proportion of journalists cling to such a naïve empiricism". In contrast, scholars within the constructivist tradition consider news to be the construction of events and issues by media organisations (Manning 2001). As Hartley (2002: 166) opines, "...news is a creative product, rather than a mere reflection of reality". This view is shared by MacDougal (in Davidow 1999: 8), who posits that "news... is the account of the event, not something intrinsic in the event itself". In agreement with Manning, Hartley, Hall and other scholars in the constructionist tradition, this study postulates that 'facts' that happen in the world are defined, taken up, restructured and packaged by human beings emerging from particular socio-cultural, educational and ideological backgrounds before being relayed to an audience. In other words, this research is

positioned within the constructivist tradition of what news represents in the sphere of signification (see Bennett 1982, Hall 1982).

Talking about signification is tantamount to talking about the use of language, which in this case refers to the catalogue of words, images, sounds, and all signs used by humans within a specific culture, in sharing their conceptual maps of the world (Hall 1997). According to the constructivist approach, things in the material world do not mean anything on their own account. It is the language used by members of a society that ascribes meanings to things (Hall 1997). Hence, in signifying events and issues of the world through the news, the media are seen as constructing rather than reflecting, although, to an extent, their job also often entails the constructed reflections of other constructions (such as those of sources).

A series of news values have been laid down to describe what a news story entails. But since news workers depend heavily upon official statements through routine channels, journalists present to the public what institutional elites define as news (Reese 1997). This puts to question the transparency of the news since people in high positions who advance definitions on contentious topics will have their ideas easily validated by newswriters than those in less privileged positions (Manning 2001). News is, to some extent therefore, a “reality-constructing activity governed by elites” (Schudson 2000: 184). Even when the news media represent the ideas of the unprivileged sources, it is done through hegemony; i.e. the subtle means through which members of the society are engineered by the media to consent to the very ideas (propounded by those in power) which they may oppose (Manning 2001; see also Hartley 2002, Hall 1982, Good 1989). Privileged news sources in this regard, use the media to govern the way a social issue can be meaningfully talked about during a particular epoch (Foucault 1980 in Hall 1997). One may therefore contend that the definition of news revolves around what journalists consider to be the newsworthiness of an event, which in turn, depends to some extent on what they obtain from sources and institutions, what their organisations and professional peers see as newsworthy, and what they anticipate would interest their audiences.

In a good number of instances, journalists emphasise the deviant in selecting news (Soloski 1997). This is a component of (international) news values proposed by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and regarded to be stable within the creed of journalism over a long period of time, irrespective of the ideologies espoused by different news professionals (Westerståhl and Johansson 1994). According to Galtung and Ruge (1965) an event would be defined as news if it possesses any or a combination of these values: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, personification and negativity. Like many other scholars preoccupied with the nature of (international) news, Galtung and Ruge (1965) simply provide a taxonomy of news values but not a definition of the concept. A former editor of the New York Times argued that “news ... is something you didn’t know before, had forgotten or didn’t understand” (Roscho 1975: 9). On his part, Soloski (1997) posits that journalists consider the unexpected as the essence of news. However, as we shall see in Galtung and Ruge’s taxonomy below, many items defined as news are also anticipated by gatekeepers. Galtung and Ruge’s taxonomy, in a sense, constitute a plausible definition of news whereby an issue/event seen by journalists as bearing one or more of the twelve values makes it news.

Having charted the various approaches to what news represents and having stated that this thesis is positioned within the constructivist approach, it is time we discussed what international news is. The adjective “international” is defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary (Soanes and Stevenson 2004: 742) as: “existing or occurring between two nations”. This definition is shared by the Collins English Dictionary (2005: 846), which proceeds to offer a second version of ‘international’ as “...of, concerning, or involving two or more nations or nationalities.”

International news may therefore be described as information on events and issues happening in a country or between countries different from that of the media organisation that disseminates it, or that which happens in the country where the disseminator is based but has implications for more than one country and is regarded as meeting some minimum standard of newsworthiness from a newsworker’s point of view. An operational parameter for ‘international news’ in this context, will therefore be: any piece

of news that happens outside of the borders of South Africa (SA), but becomes relevant to SABC Radio News and is broadcast on SAfm. It will also refer to events/issues that may happen in South Africa but involve players from another nation (or other nations) who are not domiciled in SA but appear there essentially for the purpose of the event or the issue itself, or news that literally transcend SA's borders. The justification for excluding foreign residents in SA from this operational definition (save for diplomatic representatives whose lodges are considered foreign territories) is that such residents have been domesticated and form part of the daily life of the country. It is also argued here that the concept 'international', in a news sense, is broader than and subsumes the concept 'foreign', given the definition of 'foreign' by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary (Soanes and Stevenson 2004: 556) as "from, in, or characteristic of a country or language other than one's own". In this sense, this study argues, 'foreign' is beyond SA's borders but doesn't necessarily involve *interaction* as '*international*' does. This argument gains tacit support from Peterson's (1979: 120) statement that "the majority of foreign news is domestic news about foreign countries, not international news".

Logically, it is argued here that foreign news (that has crossed the border into South Africa, i.e. travelled internationally) selected for SAfm's bulletins therefore falls under 'international' news. But what traits should stories possess to be considered worthy of selection as international news by professionals?

2.2 The Structure of International News: Galtung and Ruge's Proposition

In their study of the treatment given to three international crises of the 1960s (the Congo, the Cuba and the Cyprus crises) by four Norwegian newspapers, Galtung and Ruge (1965) drew up a taxonomy of the selection of foreign news. These factors are regarded as the most "influential explanation of news values" (McQuail 1994: 270 in Harcup and O'Neill 2001: 67; see also Hjarvard 2002: 94). Since journalists use these values as terms of reference for selecting news, they can be studied within Shoemaker's (1991) communication routines level of gatekeeping analysis. These values include:

1. *Frequency*: Events that take place in accordance with the news cycle of the media organisation receive more meaningful coverage. An event that takes a longer life

span to unfold will go unrecorded until it reaches a dramatic climax. But the point at which the event begins may be considered important.

2. *Threshold*: The more dramatic the event, the more space and time will be given to it by the media. Operationally, the more violent the murder, the more newsworthy it is. In a second sense, the progressive increase in the number of people infected with bird flu after the initial coverage makes it gain gatekeepers' attention.
3. *Unambiguity*: The less the ambiguity of the event, the more likelihood of media coverage.
4. *Meaningfulness (cultural proximity and relevance)*: What is within the cultural framework of the audience is privileged. A gatekeeper would pay more attention to facets of a story that are culturally familiar. Peterson (1981: 146) posits that media organisations devote a huge proportion of international news coverage to what involves their own countries; a phenomenon called "narcissism".
5. *Consonance*: More attention is given to what the newsworker predicts will happen or what s/he wants to see happen. For instance, some journalists may have predicted and wanted to see Nelson Mandela elected as South Africa's president, following his release from prison in 1990 and the negotiations between his party, the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) government.
6. *Unexpectedness*: The unexpected and the rare are given the most attention in situations where meaningfulness and consonance are the lead selection criteria.
7. *Continuity*: Once something has hit the headlines as news, it will continue to be defined as news for as long as the event or issue produces more developments (for instance America's military involvement in Iraq since 2003).

8. *Composition*: Items of diverse characteristics within the news menu are favoured. An editor may have edited three stories from the wires about corruption trials in three different countries which s/he considers very newsworthy but could decide to drop one of them, and instead take on a bizarre/human interest story to vary the perspective of the news.
9. *Reference to elite nations*: Galtung and Ruge consider industrialised nations (the members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD) and the world's nuclear giants, viz. the US, Russia, Britain, France and China (BBC 2000, Evans and Newnham 1998), as elite nations.
10. *Reference to elite people*: According to Peterson (1979: 120) "The elite possess a natural salience which raises them above the threshold necessary before an actor and the act will be perceived". The elite in this sense refers to political leaders, such as heads of state, and celebrities such as pop star Michael Jackson.
11. *Personification (reference to persons)*: The more the event is seen as connected to the action of specific individuals, the greater the attention. It is easier to identify events with individuals. Personification makes it easier for modern techniques of journalism to operate; it is easier to take pictures (or interviews) of individuals than those of a whole structure. It is easier to pin down individuals in time and space. Hence newswriters favour human agency over structure.
12. *Negativity*: The negative here refers to events or issues that have an unwelcome quality for the human actors directly linked to it and involve destruction. The more negative the consequence of the event, the more attention it gets:

There is a basic asymmetry in life between the positive, which is difficult and takes time, and the negative, which is much easier and [in many instances] takes less time – compare the amount of time needed to bring up and socialise an adult person and the amount of time needed to kill him [or her] in an accident: the amount of time needed to build a house and to

destroy it in fire, to make an airplane and to crash it and so on (Galtung and Ruge 1965: 69).

The last four factors in this taxonomy were considered by Galtung and Ruge to be most peculiar to news organisations in the West, while the first eight factors were considered universal. Should these 12 factors be separated and news items rated according to the number of these characteristics in them, then the concept of the 'newsworthiness' of an international event could be measured on a scale of 0-12, giving rise to what Galtung and Ruge term the "additivity" hypothesis (1965: 71). Consequently, events with the highest score on the scale of 12 would make headline international news, while those with the lowest score would possibly not be selected. The authors hypothesise that there are four categories of complementary news values that account for the largest amount of international news selected by news organisations worldwide (giving rise to the complementarity hypothesis). These categories are: elite people in elite nations, negative news of elite nations (big power conflict), negative news referring to elite people (struggle for power, etc., at the top of society) and negative news referring to persons (scandals). An additional hypothesis is the exclusion hypothesis; i.e. if an event lacks any of these news factors, it will not be selected as international news (Galtung and Ruge 1965).

Although Galtung and Ruge's schema continues to be cited as "prerequisites" of news selection (Herbert 2000: 72-73 in Harcup and O'Neill 2001: 167), it has been critiqued by some scholars. Their classification, it is argued, gives the impression that international news coverage is limited to events alone, whereas many items on international news are not events at all (Curran and Seaton 1997: 277 in Harcup and O'Neill 2001: 265). One could aver that this point is flawed because even if the values were inspired by events, there is nothing intrinsic in them that limits their use to events alone. Newswriters must have a set of criteria they use to select stories, be they events or not. In Hall's (1973) view, such a list helps us to identify the formal elements in the construction of news but it does not inform us of the ideological meanings behind the news. He maintains that Galtung and Ruge's categorisation makes news values appear to be a set of God-given routine practices, but there is need to find the ideological structure from which they

emerged; to “examine these rules as the formalization and operationalization of an ideology of news” working in the interest of the powerful (Hall 1973: 235). While this study supports Hall’s proposition that there is need to examine the ideological structures from which news values emanate, it defends Galtung and Ruge’s catalogue as a facet in the broader process of investigating news production. Further, Galtung and Ruge’s point that the adoption of these values by newswriters sustains the global class order is a recognition of the ideological character of the news selection process.

Another question is what kind of social process in the real world of international newsmaking is being uncovered by the analytical use of Galtung and Ruge’s news factors? Is it processes at the micro level (that of individual gatekeepers), the meso level (the working/routine structure of an entire news organisation) or the macro level (the level linking the media organisation and social institutions/systems) of news selection (Hjarvard 2002)? McQuail (1994: 270 in Harcup and O’Neill 2001: 265) opines that Galtung and Ruge’s approach seems to indicate that there is a “given reality out there” to be selected or excluded by journalists, whereas journalists construct the news, rather than simply reflect what goes on in the world. One could charge that McQuail’s point is quixotic given that journalists cannot simply select international news from their imaginations. Another problem with Galtung and Ruge’s categorisation, according to Harcup and O’Neil (2001), is that they isolated just three international events to formulate a catalogue of news values and, as such, were not in a good position to make general claims about their validity to universal situations. This study argues that this charge ignores Galtung and Ruge’s (1965) warning that these values are simply ‘metaphors’, i.e. suppositions, meaning that room is open to research for verification.

These critiques have led media researchers to identify alternative but similar values to those identified by Galtung and Ruge. These include: *sex* and *humour* (Herbert 2000 in Harcup and O’Neill 2001), *hero stories* (Gans 1980 in Harcup and O’Neill 2001) and *the desire for a scoop* (Bell 1991 in Harcup and O’Neill 2001). The position of this study is that Galtung and Ruge’s metaphors were the outcome of research into three important international problems of the post-World War II world, in which we are, and cannot be

dismissed as irrelevant. As has been pointed out by many scholars (e.g. Herbert 2000 in Harcup and O'Neill 2001), Galtung and Ruge's taxonomy has stood the test of time. This set of news values was advanced within the context of the Cold War, which made the authors to insist on the importance of the complementarity hypothesis ("big power conflict"). That may only be marginally relevant today, following the thaw of the Cold War, but contemporary problems such as the US showdown on Iraq/Iran/radical Muslims have once more generated some tensions among the big powers (notably the G8). All these point to the relevance of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) values to a study as this one. These news values constitute part of the bigger picture of forces that act on the gatekeeping of international news. It is a theory on these forces, which we now turn to.

2.3 Lewin's Theory of Forces

In the 1940s, American physicist/psychologist Kurt Lewin postulated people's behaviour could be examined as a function of a group of factors constituting a dynamic whole (Shoemaker 1991). Identifying the forces that operated within channels of gatekeepers, he averred, could enable one to produce social changes in a community, including the food consumption habits of the populace (Shoemaker et al 2001, Shoemaker 1991).

Lewin (1947 in Shoemaker 1991, Shoemaker et al 2001) maintained that members of society do not have equal say in determining what people eat. In order to change people's eating habits therefore, heads of families charged with deciding what gets to the table each day could be targeted. This would entail investigating the routes through which food items travelled and the points at which they were gradually transformed before reaching the family table. In Lewin's formulation, before food gets to the family table, its units would have travelled through various gates and channels, with all sorts of forces acting to constrain the passage of some its units, while allowing others through the various gates. These forces may range from high cost (negative force) to attractiveness (positive force) as the food units travel through various gates e.g. the counter or buying gate, etc.

These processes in the gatekeeping of food units, Lewin proposed, could be applied to communication. The concept was taken up by David Manning White, to investigate the

forces acting on a newspaper editor's selection of news items from the wires in 1950, and has since been greatly used in media and communication research (Shoemaker et al 2001, Shoemaker 1991, Schudson 2000). According to this view, there are forces which either facilitate or constrain the passage of news items through channels, sections within those channels, and gates, to get to the newscast (Shoemaker et al 2001, Shoemaker 1991). Channels are communication linkages through which news units travel (such as the route between a source-journalist relationship) or within the media establishments themselves (Shoemaker et al 2001, Shoemaker 1991). Information gets to a news organisation through three main channels: routine, informal and enterprise channels. Routine channels include official proceedings such as court trials, press conferences, press releases and planned events such as demonstrations and speeches; informal channels include background briefings, non-governmental proceedings, reports from other media establishments; and enterprise channels include spontaneous events which a reporter witnesses firsthand or the reporter's independent research initiative, including quotes from books, etc. (Sigal 1973 in Shoemaker 1991). Anyone who carries a news item from a source into a news organisation (e.g. a news reporter who investigates a story and proposes it to her/his input editor), or from a news organisation to the audience (e.g. the output editor or news presenter), is a *boundary role* gatekeeper (Shoemaker 1991).

On their part, sections are events or states of being occurring within a channel (e.g. the editorial conference or the editing process) and gates are the decision making points (e.g. the input editor's desk, or studio where a bulletin is presented) (Shoemaker et al 2001). The doorway to a channel or section is also a gate (e.g. the office of the foreign news editor could be the first gate along the source-journalist channel, in the context of receiving press releases from international organisations). The progress of a news item within a channel is controlled by a single or several gatekeepers. Different forces act on the selection of a news item in different sections of the overall communication channel (Lewin 1951 in Shoemaker 1991). These forces differ in polarity and intensity, and will ultimately determine whether or not a news item reaches the final gate, where it is disseminated to the public. Forces could also change in intensity and polarity; e.g. if a story is difficult for journalists to reach, this will create a negative force working against

the passing of the story through the first gate. But if against all odds, the elements of the story are reached, the force becomes a positive one (Shoemaker 1991).

It could be stated that the news 'metaphors' identified by Galtung and Ruge constitute the force of newsworthiness in the passage of international news through channels and gates before reaching the studio for broadcast, the newspaper, wire or online copy. In the gatekeeping of international news, the force of newsworthiness may not push a news item through a communication gate solely on its own accord. Rather,

...if an event [highly characterised by the force of newsworthiness] requires much expense and/or unavailable technology to produce the story, this may work against passage through the gate. Whether the event becomes news depends on the relative intensity of these two forces, along with other forces yet to be identified (Shoemaker et al 2001: 234).

Like Lewin, Shoemaker (1991) argues that forces and gatekeepers are not isolated characters but have an interdependent relationship. In Shoemaker's (1991) view, Lewin failed to mention four important aspects about forces: forces may retain their polarity (e.g. stay positive) after passing through a gate, forces may differ in potency, some in conflict with others; forces may contain a bidirectional power (with those behind gates influencing those in front and vice versa) and, forces influence not just selection, but the whole gatekeeping process (including editing/shaping and presentation). A group of analytical levels has been provided by Shoemaker (1991) and Shoemaker et al (2001), to explain the dynamics of forces in gatekeeping.

2.4 Expanding Lewin's Theoretical Scope: a Model of Gatekeeping by Shoemaker and Shoemaker et al

Lewin's theory is of great value to understanding the gatekeeping process, but it would be beneficial to place it in a context of levels of analysis, to facilitate the explication of the observation of a gatekeeping phenomenon or in building theory (Shoemaker 1991). Below are the five levels of analysis outlined by Shoemaker (1991) and Shoemaker et al (2001) as crucial in news gatekeeping.

2.4.1 The individual level

This level of analysis examines the extent to which individuals influence news selection by looking at their models of thinking, their approach to decision making, personalities, background/values and role conceptions (Shoemaker 1991, Shoemaker et al 2001).

- a. Theories of thinking include the mechanisms of thought that inform the individual gatekeeper's decision select or reject a news item. They include associationism, gestaltism and information processing. *Associationism* is a linear thinking process that enables the decision maker to generate ideas similar to ones generated in the past; hence, if a gatekeeper remembers passing an item similar to one s/he is confronted with today, s/he will probably select it as news. This should not be conflated with the news value of 'composition', for composition affects the set of stories at hand for a given newscast/newsprint while associationism concerns decisions made in a relatively distant past. *Gestalt* theory indicates that a gatekeeper pays attention to the entire selection process rather than pin down their decisions to single units before connecting them. It is a holistic way of thinking. *Information processing* involves grouping news items into categories as a way of coping with the tough task of managing a huge bulk of items.
- b. Decision making theory states four processes involved in a gatekeeper's options of accepting or rejecting an item. An editor will go through the stages of problem recognition, defining a group of alternatives, reviewing relevant information and applying a decision rule (to determine the angle to take from a story).
- c. Gatekeeper's personality: The gatekeeper's experiences, attitudes and expectations affect his/her decisions on selecting news items. This could engender differential gatekeeping decisions within a particular newsroom, but the effect is contingent on the portfolio of the communicator; i.e. an editor's bias will be reflected in the selection of stories, above the biases of subordinates.
- d. Role conceptions: The newsworker would select messages in accordance with his/her definition of his/her role in journalism; s/he could either be a neutral or a participant reporter. The neutral reporter strives to select stories that provide the audience with 'facts', allowing them to draw their own conclusions, while the

participant reporter is a constructionist who believes that facts cannot speak for themselves and, as such, sees no problem with framing stories and advocating certain causes. A communicator with this kind of orientation, this study hypothesises, may be inclined to select a great deal of opinionated/comment-infused stories. Janovitz (1975) terms this the 'gatekeeper' vs. 'advocate' dichotomy.

2.4.2 Communication routines level

Routines are "patterned...repeated forms that media workers use to do their jobs" (Shoemaker 1991: 48). Routines are a set of rules to minimise the risk of being sued for libel, and to create uniformity in the work of journalists. These procedures, which enable journalists to claim objectivity in reporting, include: presenting two sides of a story, using quotes and structuring information in a hierarchical format known as inverted pyramid (Tuchman 1972). This process, it could be argued, usually occurs after a story's news value has been established. Deadline pressures and the organisation of reporters into beats also make up the routines that affect the selection of stories, as well as medium specific routines such as sound bites for radio and visuals for television (Shoemaker et al 2001). Even when an individual seems to be the gatekeeper, we must question the degree to which s/he is simply performing a collection of routine practices (Shoemaker 1991).

2.4.3 Organisational level

News gatekeepers are hired by organisations; and these organisations make the rules. Centrally located gatekeepers such as editors may have more powers to make selection decisions and to develop policies that will shape the news selection process within an organisation. Such policies indicate how certain news topics should be approached (Shoemaker 1991). Besides policies, journalists belonging to the same organisation have an esprit de corps, which may lead to *groupthink* in international news selection. Groupthink is the predisposition of certain individuals in small group decision-making circumstances, to merge their opinions with the prevailing stance of the group (Evans and Newnham 1998); causing a sort of spiral of silence (the concealing of individual doubts).

2.4.4 Social-institutional level

Media organisations exist alongside other social institutions that may influence gatekeeping. Shoemaker (1991) enlists them as sources and audiences (including advertisers and interest groups). Economically and politically dominant institutions have more access to the media and consequently more opportunities to slot in messages into media channels (Gans 1979 in Shoemaker 1991). Even when less dominant groups are given access to the news media, they only become secondary definers whose views are given less accreditation (Manning 2001, Hall 1997). The gatekeeper's desire for regular, reliable pieces of information results in their dependence on bureaucratic sources (Fishman 1980 in Schudson 2000).

However, gatekeepers do not automatically accept all information they get from sources. The likelihood of sources trying to insert falsehood into the gatekeeper's news menu, results in the employment of a tactic known as *second guessing*, whereby a gatekeeper tries to 'de-bias' a message by drawing on prior knowledge to reconstruct the manifest message (Shoemaker 1991). The gatekeeper's perception of what the audience wants and the concerns of advertisers, who provide the crucial source of funding for news organisations, greatly influence news selection (Shoemaker 1991, Shoemaker et al 2001).

2.4.5 Social system level

Aspects of the social system that influence gatekeeping decisions are seeded in ideology and culture. Ideology is defined as the production and transmission of meaning in the interests of the powerful classes, in a way that limits people's consciousness of the inequalities created by the system (Hartley 2002, Fairclough 1995, Thompson 1988, Bennett 1982, Hall 1982). Culture, on the other hand, is used in this thesis in an anthropological sense; i.e. a combination of forms of knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs and habits characteristic of particular societies (Thompson 1988, Hartley 2002). Culture operates within the sphere of ideology; i.e. "culture is ideological" Fiske (1987: 255). Ideology becomes important in a gatekeeping study, as this one, in that the media are the principal modes of transmission of ideology through what Althusser calls hailing and interpellation (Fiske 1987, Hackett 1984). Hailing is the process whereby language

demands an audience's attention and creates a subjective position for that audience, while interpellation is the process whereby language creates social relations between the addressee and the addressed (Fiske 1987). Interpellation, one could argue, opens a space for discourse in signification; discourse being the use of language as a social practice to rule in and rule out ways of making social meaning, with the aid of knowledge, then power (Foucault 1980 in Hall 1997). Since power in the Foucaudian sense (espoused by this study) is not merely repressive, but productive, discourse allows for counter-discourses to emerge. Gatekeepers may thus be the instruments for the representation of hegemonic discourses as well as agents of change of discursive regimes (Fairclough 1995). Hartley (2002: 74) describes such a scenario as "the working through of an ideological struggle between discourses". This suggests that ideologies are enmeshed in discourses. Moreover, ideological discourses often undergo changes and harbour their own internal struggles.

Ideological systems in which gatekeepers function may lead them to select items that serve the purposes of elites, through the hegemonic engineering of consent (Gramsci 1971 in Hall 1997). This process is considered by Herman and Chomsky (1998), as the "manufacturing [of] consent". However, one could argue that not all news manufacture need be internationally hegemonic, given that newswriters may be positioned in the discursive order of nationalism/national identity (Billig 1995, Hall et al 1992) that could help them ward off the discourses of any foreign hegemonic power as they select international news.

Hence the forces described by Lewin are partly determined by the discourse of nationalism which, in turn, may influence gatekeepers to try to "domesticate" international news to make it relevant to home audiences. This phenomenon makes their choice of selection of each foreign news item "a conscious cultural effort" (Clausen 2004: 25). Cultural difficulties in making sense of the relevance of an international story by gatekeepers, leads them to make use of a strategy known as uncertainty absorption (Peterson 1979). This is the process of selecting a few items from a total mass of information in order to make judgment simpler (Welch 1972 in Peterson 1979).

Commenting on the forces that shape the selection of international news, Hjarvard (2002: 96) demonstrates that there is a possible interplay of influence from among all of Shoemaker's levels of analysis:

International news may be understood neither as the mere product of willful gatekeepers selecting from world events with a heavy hand, nor as the sole outcome of overarching social structures... Social actors in the field of foreign news ... are informed by, and to some extent subordinate to, the social structures that govern the journalistic profession, the particular media organization, the political and cultural framework of the country in question and so on.

And one could add that there could be tensions between forces spanning the five levels of analysis. For instance, Nossek (2004) notes that journalists covering international news concerning their own countries suppress professional values (routines level forces) and embrace nationalistic bias (social system force). Further, organisational factors, e.g. policy, can curtail the freedom of gatekeepers to make professional (routine) decisions (Breed 1955). These clashes notwithstanding, it could be averred that gatekeeping is a complex enterprise difficult to unpack without recourse to a framework such as Shoemaker's (1991) and Shoemaker et al's (2001). Having discussed the various levels of analysis on gatekeeping, it is necessary to find out what previous studies discovered about the interplay of forces in international news selection.

2.5 Review of Literature on International and Other News Gatekeeping

Since the publication of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) paper, and the debate of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)¹, there has been increasing interest among researchers in how the media cover international news (Chang and Lee 1992). Even before Galtung and Ruge's paper on the structure of foreign news, Cohen (1963: 125 in Shoemaker 1991: 63) had established that some journalists account for

¹ In the 1960s and 70s academics and leaders of the 'Third World' became increasingly critical of Western media coverage of developing countries. The critics charged that the 'Third World' could only become news in Western media, through the negative-oriented themes of corruption, coups, famine, etc. They called for a change of dispensation through NWICO, leading many developing countries to start running their own news agencies and media campaigns to highlight the process of development in their countries (De Beer et al 1996, Chang and Lee 1992).

their international news gatekeeping decisions by saying: "We print what we know the public will want to read". This was an indication that the gatekeeping of international news could be highly influenced by social-institutional forces (in this case the audience, as deterministically projected by the gatekeepers, or as gleaned from audience surveys).

Peterson (1979) surveyed 98 news workers of the British paper The Times to ascertain what factors influenced their selection of international news. She discovered that both the British and non-British staff shared similar professional news values (erratic, dramatic and uncomplicated surprises and negative or conflictual events involving elite nations and persons). But the cultural differences between the British and non-British correspondents led the two groups to select international news stories differently. This indicates the influence of communication routine factors and even a greater influence of social system (in this case cultural) forces on international news selection.

A broader survey was conducted by Chang and Lee (1992). They researched a US national sample of 540 newspaper editors to find out what personal, intra-media and extra-media factors influenced their international news selection. Their findings showed that the editors' individual attitudes/modes of thinking as well as constraints unique to their organisations impacted the most on selection (hence a high degree of individual and organisational factors acting on selection). However, many editors' choices reflected similar perceptions of news values; hence a great deal of routine influence on selection.

Bechan (1999) did an observational study of SAfm's *Current Affairs Live* (a news programme that dealt with both national and international news issues) in 1996, and concluded that organisational bureaucratic control by the hierarchy of the Radio News Department were most influential on content selection. The researcher also quoted one of the programme's producers as saying the individual attitudes and opinions of the editors of the news department greatly influenced what their reporters filed in on the programme.

In his observational study of the attitudes of US television journalists towards international news, Kim (2002) notes that although television news is the outcome of

multi-layered decisions, individual gatekeepers' news judgment and organisational forces are largely responsible for the kind of international news selected on television.

From the above review of literature on previous international news studies, it is difficult to establish whether the forces at specific levels of gatekeeping analysis have the greatest impact on the selection of international news. These studies suggest that different media organisations evince different patterns of influences on the selection of international news. A few difficulties seem to arise from some of the methods used by the researchers in these studies (see Chapter 4) but what their findings indicate for this research is that one must be open-minded enough to certain nuances that may arise in the field.

2.6 Conclusion

Although news is a difficult concept to define, journalists have some criteria to identify what could pass for news, termed 'news values' (Galtung and Ruge 1965). If news must be seen as events and issues bearing the attributes of frequency, threshold, etc., then international news would be events and issues that happen at levels that transcend national borders, or involve multi-national players, possessing these qualities. News values are part of routine forces that influence the gatekeeping process. Forces are factors acting on gatekeepers in their selection of news items. Forces differ in polarity and intensity and travel through decision points known as gates, and between channels. Gatekeepers are responsible for letting such units pass through gates. They act within five levels of analysis: individual, routine, organisational, social institutional and social system. And forces at different layers of the gatekeeping picture, act differently on the selection of international news in different media situations. And if anything, theorising on gatekeeping indicates the usefulness of Shoemaker (1991) and Shoemaker et al's (2001) framework to the study of factors affecting the selection of international news for SAfm's newscasts. The theory suggests that to investigate the gatekeeping of international news for an outfit such as SAfm is to unearth the usually taken-for-granted factors that give rise to the decisions made by individuals working for that outfit to present a certain picture of international social reality to their audiences. The following chapter places us within the context of our study site, i.e. SAfm.

Chapter 3: Background to International News on SAfm

3.0 Introduction

To better understand the nature of international news on present-day SAfm, one cannot separate its history from that of the evolution of South African society and its broadcasting, in general, and that of the South African Broadcasting Corporation Limited² (SABC), its mother organisation, in particular. This is warranted by the fact that although the media represent the dominant vehicles of social signification in today's media-rich societies, they are highly constituted by the evolution of the society they seek to reflect, hence part of its history (Hall 1982, Kellner 1995, Roscho 1975). This chapter therefore starts with an account of SA's history as it impacted on the history of broadcasting in the country. That would lead us into the trajectory of SAfm, its general history and the history of international news selection for the station, within a broader setup of the SABC. The policies impinging on the kind of international news selected for SAfm will be discussed, while the organisational structure of the Corporation, as it is relevant to SABC Radio News³, will be outlined.

3.1 South Africa: from Racism to Democracy and Press Freedom

From 1948, South Africa had a series of repressive racist governments led by an Afrikaner-dominated National Party (NP) under D. F. Malan, H. Verwoerd, B. J. Vorster and P. W. Botha (MacKinnon 2004, Clark and Worger 2004). These regimes had operated with a policy of white domination, officially called apartheid, which had ossified in the country since the arrival of the Dutch and later the English in the 17th and late 18th centuries respectively (Guelke 2005, Bryant 1949). Apartheid was however stiffly opposed by political groups such as the African National Congress (ANC) as well as by pressures from the international community. This led to negotiations under the government of F. W. de Klerk in the early 1990s. Apartheid finally crumbled in 1994,

² The South African Broadcasting Corporation Limited was formerly known as the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC Annual Report 2004).

³ The site for this study is the central radio newsroom of SABC News and Current Affairs subdivision (SABC Radio News) because it is solely responsible for producing bulletins for SAfm. All SAfm bulletins are presented from its own studios, remotely linked to the station (hence, SAfm newscasters are located in the newsroom of SABC Radio News).

with a multi-party election that ushered the ANC, led by Nelson Mandela, to power (BBC 2005, MacKinnon 2004). This advent of democracy has given SA unprecedented levels of freedom of expression thanks to its new constitution described by Woods (2001: 1) as the “most advanced of all democratic constitutions”. The country’s media is ranked 31st out of the 167 countries in the 2005 Worldwide Press Freedom Index, coming ahead of the UK, Australia and Japan (Psych Central 2006). This is an indication that SABC Radio News (feeder of all bulletins to SAfm) may be operating with more editorial freedom than it ever had during apartheid. The next section investigates the evolution of SAfm.

3.2 Development of Broadcasting in South Africa and the Road to SAfm

Broadcasting in the Union of South Africa kicked off as a private initiative of amateurs in the early 1920s, but the government decided to grant just one radio license to each of the three urban areas of Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). These stations (the Cape Peninsular Publicity Association, the Durban Corporation and the Association of Scientific and Technical Societies in Johannesburg) began broadcasting in 1924 but were run at a loss, owing to their difficulties in collecting radio licence fees from their audiences. As a result, the Postmaster-general approached a successful entrepreneur in insurance, film and theatre, American-born I.W. Schlesinger, who devised other strategies of meeting costs and making profits (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). Schlesinger took over the three stations and made them centrally administered under his company, the African Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1927 (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). The outlook of the stations’ broadcasts was mostly English, given their urban reach (influential English South Africans were in the urban areas where the radio signals were good, while influential Afrikaners were in remote areas). Further, Afrikaans broadcasters had little or no cultural artefacts to work with, whereas such material abounded in the English language (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). This English dominance was resented by the majority of Afrikaans speaking whites in the South African parliament and, as such, suggestions were made in the direction of state-controlled broadcasting (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989).

These circumstances led Prime Minister Barry Hertzog to invite the pioneer Director General of the BBC, John Reith, to tour South Africa in 1934 and propose a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) radio model for the country (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). A PBS outfit is one that is paid for by the public to provide information, education, and “entertainment of high quality” to as many citizens as possible (ICASA 2005b) and to promote a plurality of voices, while shunning advertising (Bechan 1999, Stein 1998). Contemporary ideas on PBS broadcasting have emerged from Jürgen Habermas’ theory of ‘the public sphere’ which defines this arena as the sphere of ‘human beings’ engaged in rational-critical debates, and which became the sphere of the public once these human beings were constructed as ‘citizens’ within any context of communication surrounding the ‘common wealth’ (Habermas 1989 cited in Padovani and Tracey 2003: 149). Media theorists today emphasise the need for a PBS station to be independent of government control (though it could be funded from government taxes) with the freedom to produce challenging and controversial programming material, with a commitment of unifying citizens in nation-building and with an obligation to the public rather than the market (Stein 1998, MISA 2003, Broadcasting Act No 4 of 1999).

After Reith proposed most of these principles following his tour of SA, the state dissolved the ABC in 1936, created the SABC and gave it a BBC orientation (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989, Mbhalati 2005). It remained so even after the rise of absolute Afrikanerdom in 1948 until the accession to power of Verwoerd in 1958 (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989, Bussiek and Bussiek 1998, Mbhalati 2005). And although the Broederbond had increasing control over the SABC between 1948 and 1959, they could do little to change the position of Gideon Roos (SABC’s Director General at the time) which was a “relatively objective style inherited from the BBC” (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989: 46).

Meanwhile between 1949 and 1959, the SABC expanded into three stations; the English Service (now SAfm), the Afrikaans Service (now Radio Sonder Grense or RSG) and a commercial station (a station engaged in full-fledged advertising for its profit and upholding) baptised Springbok Radio. As for the African languages, Zulu, Xhosa and

Sotho were allocated a mere 30 minutes of programming on the PBS channels per day (Hayman and Tomaselli 1989). These African language programmes were eventually placed at the service of Radio Bantu, created by the government as part of its scheme to divide and rule the oppressed by accentuating the differences between races and cultures (Tomaselli et al 1989) hence, operating against the PBS principle of unifying citizens in nation-building (Barnett 1999). By 1964, programming for Africans comprised seven different services, while commercial stations such as Radio Highveld, Radio Good Hope and Radio Port Natal were set up especially for white South Africans (Hachten and Giffard 1984 in Jjuuko 2005).

In 1959, following Verwoerd's appointment of Piet Meyer (head of the Broederbond) as chairman of the Board of Governors of the SABC, things took a different turn at SABC stations in terms of editorial decision-making (Bussiek and Bussiek 1998, Hayman and Tomaselli 1989, Krabill 2001). The selection of foreign news at SABC stations was henceforth skewed towards material that would discredit foreign governments that were critical of apartheid as well as content that would project black-ruled countries as chaotic, poverty-stricken and violent. Furthermore, news items unfavourable to the apartheid government were held back until the government had had time (sometimes up to three days) to make a statement on the issue (Tomaselli et al 1989). During his experience as a junior reporter at the SABC in the apartheid era (he joined the SABC in 1983), an SABC Radio News output editor in 2006 recalls:

You would be asked to run something from Margaret Thatcher [former Prime Minister of Britain], for example, if it had a positive context towards South Africa... But in the sense of ... Thabo Mbeki [issuing a statement from] Lusaka, Zambia, before the ANC was unbanned, we were not allowed to run it because he was on the banned list. There were specific lists of organisations of people that you could use or not. Or if Jimmy Carter [former US President] issued a very negative statement about South Africa, you had to be very careful of how you ran the story and what angle you took (Shreuder 2006 personal communication).

As a reporter for SAfm (the English Service or Radio South Africa at that time), one "couldn't get a story from a printer and use it – all stories had to be cleared" by

executives (Sithole 2006 personal communication). And those appointed as executives were white and sympathetic to apartheid ideology, to make sure that anti-apartheid discourses did not penetrate the news (Phetoe 2006 personal communication). Such an “active censorship by the administration” of the entire SABC, was accompanied by “extensive self-censorship on the part of SABC reporters, whether through the fear of reprisal ... or an honest belief in the government line” (Krabill 2001: 575). In view of Shoemaker’s (1991) model of gatekeeping, therefore, there were constraints at various levels: organisational (in this case editorial), social-institutional (in this case the Broederbond and the government) and social-system (in this case National Party ideology). These worked in conjunction with some individual journalists’ biases in favour of NP discourses and against oppositional discourses (Phetoe 2006 personal communication). The fact that very little information about opposition to apartheid ideological discourses by SABC gatekeepers came out during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings (Krabill 2001), attests to such biases.

This also implies that the routines of communication work in terms of professionalism in journalism, e.g. the creed of objectivity, were never really used as what Tuchman (1972) termed “strategic ritual[s]” by journalists selecting (international) news to be aired on SAfm, because their risks of being sued or fired were eliminated once they could align themselves with apartheid ideology. There was also little reporting of international news especially as it related to South Africa on SABC radio stations in general and SAfm in particular (Shreuder 2006 personal communication). This was a strategy of withholding citizens’ access to representations from outside South Africa, which the government thought could inflame public opinion against racism (Dawson 2001). Rather, news bulletin gatekeepers had to cultivate an attitude among white South Africans that apartheid was normal and unavoidable (Krabill 2001). In fact, in selecting and shaping most international and local stories on SAfm’s bulletins, editors had to toe the NP party line (Phetoe 2006 personal communication, Newton 2006 personal communication). Journalists who felt uncomfortable with the system had to resign. Among those was Solly Phetoe, who later returned and who headed the SABC Radio News in 2006:

We had people who were in charge of various desks, who would ... inform you of directives on what you should do and how you should treat a story. And being a young journalist at the time, I felt that was not going to help me in terms of my career development (Phetoe 2006 personal communication).

However, such difficulties in gatekeeping international news were soon to be altered, for, with the tumultuous political trend in South Africa in the 1980s, especially police repression following the state of emergency declared by President P.W. Botha in 1986 (Woods 2000, Manóim 1996), the English Service (which changed its name into Radio South Africa in 1986, and then into SAfm in 1995) anticipated change and revised its programmes to meet the needs of a wider audience (Bechan 1999, Mbhalati 2005, Erasmus 2004). It departed from a predominantly magazine to a predominantly news outlook (Mbhalati 2005). The move was intended to accommodate a new set of audience members, which now constituted not only a white English-speaking South African middle-class, but a whole spectrum of South Africans, with some degree of education, who could speak English, as well as non-South African nationals in the country (Phetoe 2006 personal communication, Sithole 2006 personal communication, Mbhalati 2005).

Even greater changes were to affect the SABC in general, for the NP's use of the Corporation for its political gains was an important factor in shaping the multi-sector debates that led to the liberalisation of the broadcast landscape in South Africa at the start of the 1990s. With the end of apartheid power in sight,

...the ruling Nationalist Party feared the scenario of the SABC continuing as 'his Master's voice' – but lost to a different master in the form of an ANC government. For its part, the ANC needed to detach the broadcaster from Nationalist control ahead of the [1994] election (Berger 2001: 6).

In these circumstances, therefore, a campaign to liberalise the broadcasting sector in South Africa started in March 1990 with the commissioning of the Task Group on Broadcasting in Southern Africa. In 1991, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) laid the concrete groundwork for the establishment of an unfettered independent broadcasting and telecommunications regulatory authority (Barnett 1999, Woods 2000, MacKinnon 2004). These efforts resulted in the creation of the Independent

Broadcasting Authority (IBA) and the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (SATRA), later to be merged into the Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA)⁴. By May 1993, the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting had been set up with the aim of building the foundation for an independent public broadcaster in South Africa (Jjuuko 2005). Political parties and the civil society were energetic in the various stakeholder forums, such as CODESA, that led to the drafting of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act of 1993 (Horwitz 2001, Barnett 1999). The Act stipulated the conditions for obtaining broadcasting licences in a three-tier system: public, private (later amended as commercial) and community broadcast services. It also ordered a 'Triple Inquiry', by the IBA, into the viability of public broadcasting in SA, the cross-media ownership of broadcast services, as well as the provision of local content and South African music by various broadcasting outfits (Horwitz 2001, Barnett 1999).

Following the recommendations of the Triple Inquiry Report, the SABC sold off six of its stations in 1996 (Horwitz 2001, Berger 2001, Barnett 1999). SAfm stayed on as an SABC station after putting forward its case as a PBS in its submission to the IBA (Bechan 1999). As a PBS, it is governed by a set of SABC-wide editorial policies underpinned by the values of the preamble of South Africa's constitution (healing the divisions of the past, laying the foundations of a democratic SA, getting South Africa's "rightful place ... in the family of nations", etc.) and the principles of the SABC Charter that is part of South Africa's Broadcasting Act No 4 of 1999 (SABC Editorial Policies 2004: 3).

The Broadcasting Act as amended in 2002, to complement the IBA Act, devotes its Chapter IV to the Charter of the SABC. The Act's Section 6 stipulates that "the Corporation will in pursuit of its objectives and in exercise of its powers, enjoy freedom of expression and journalistic, creative and programming independence". Section 8(a) –

⁴ The IBA was set up in 1993 while SATRA was created in 1998 in an effort by government to assert more control over telecommunications than it had over broadcasting due to the IBA's mandate as an independent broadcast regulator (Berger 2001; see also Barnett 1999). The two institutions were merged in 2000 after debates on the inappropriateness of government's direct control over SATRA. Though the government directly funds ICASA and determines the general licensing policy, it has no direct control over the granting of licences for broadcasting (as distinct from telecommunications) (Berger 2001).

(e) stipulates that the Corporation is responsible for the provision of television and radio services to the whole country and would be responsive to the public (not the government), including the deaf and dumb (ICASA 2005a). It further accords a 15-person board the power to oversee the activities of the Corporation (Broadcasting Act No 64 of 2002 as amended in RSA 2003). This legal set of procedures therefore indicate that if the rules are kept to the letter, today's SAfm should not find itself in a position where the international news selected for its bulletins is the outcome of the ideological and social institutional pressures from the government in power.

3.3 Examining the Possible Impact of SABC Editorial Policies on International News Gatekeeping for SAfm

The SABC Editorial policies are intended to operationalise the editorial independence of the Corporation from the government as required by Section 10(1d) of the Charter, which stipulates that the corporation, and by extension SAfm, should provide:

...news and public affairs programming which meets the highest standards of journalism, as well as fair and unbiased coverage, impartiality, balance and independence from government, commercial and other interests; (Broadcasting Act No 64 of 2002 as amended; see RSA 2003).

The Charter's guarantee of the Corporation's editorial independence is re-echoed in the SABC Editorial Policies (2004: 20):

The SABC is not the mouthpiece of the government of the day, nor should it broadcast its opinion of government policies, unless they relate directly to broadcasting matters.

While the foregoing legal and editorial policy requirements lessen the pressure from social-institutional forces on gatekeeping (they insist on SABC's independence), they accentuate the routine forces of gatekeeping with their insistence on professional journalistic values of impartiality and balance:

... reporting should be ... accurate, fair, impartial and balanced. Our audiences have the right to expect SABC news and current affairs programming not to reflect the personal views of editorial staff (SABC Editorial Policies 2004: 20).

Should the foreign desk and the editorial team of SABC Radio News really operate on these bases, then they would be bound to stick by the strategic ritual of objectivity that serves as newswriters' insurance against the risks of their trade (Tuchman 1972). However, there is some fluid sense of ideological interpellation (hence social system level influence on gatekeeping) for SAfm's bulletins gatekeepers to be found in the set of "powers, functions, rights and obligations" of the SABC in its mandate. This section of the SABC's editorial policies stipulates inter alia that SABC stations offer "a plurality of views and a variety of news, information and analysis from a South African point of view" (SABC Editorial Policies 2004: 2). This point (which originates from the provisions of section 6 (4c) of the Broadcasting Act as amended in 2002) is emphasised in the SABC's Editorial Code of Practice:

We aim to tell stories from a South African point of view... This includes local, African and global issues. We endeavour to contextualise for South Africans their life as global citizens, and to recount the story of South Africa in all its variety and complexity. Given our history, and that South Africa is part of Africa, we see it as our responsibility to endeavour to represent Africa and African stories fairly and diversely (SABC 2004: 5).

The above clause acts as a requirement for the international news gatekeepers for SAfm to search their news items for cultural proximity to (South) Africa, and a sense of identity with an assumed South African perspective on global issues. It encourages their possible SA-centric view of the world, a sort of narcissism, which reverberates in the Corporation's self-qualification as the "pulse of Africa's creative spirit" (SABC 2005). But the onus placed on the gatekeepers seems to come more from the organisational upward referral procedures:

As a rule, and as a matter of policy, the authority for editorial decisions is vested in the editorial staff ... The practice of upward referral gives journalists and other

news staff [when faced with difficult decisions] an ideal mechanism for consultation, first with peers, and then with senior management before taking a decision.... [In this light] news items that are controversial or likely to have an extraordinary impact, should be reported in advance to the senior news ... executives (SABC Editorial Policies 2004: 5-6).

The guidelines further stipulate that “this process of voluntary upward referral could extend as far up as the Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO), in his capacity as editor-in-chief” (SABC Editorial Policies 2004: 5). It is clear from these provisions therefore that one would expect to have a delay in the gatekeeping process of possible international news items that are considered problematic at SABC Radio News, due to the bureaucratic nature of the organisational-level gatekeeping. From this vantage point of policy, international news selection for SAfm would seem to undergo careful editorial scrutiny (hence heavy organisational-level gatekeeping impact) given that:

News and current affairs stories and feeds taken from international broadcasters, bureaux and correspondents are always to be acknowledged, and to be consistent with SABC editorial policies and standards (SABC Editorial Policies 2004: 21).

Following an examination of relevant policy on news coverage at the SABC Radio News, as it may impact on international news selected for broadcast on SAfm, it is important to discuss how the process is structured in 2006.

3.4 Who is Responsible for International News on SAfm and how is the Selection Process Structured?

As far as news on all SABC radio and television stations is concerned, the Group Chief Executive Officer (GCEO) of the SABC (in 2006 Dali Mpofu), is held accountable for performance, though his role “is not to make day-to-day programming or newsroom decisions” (SABC Editorial Policies 2004:5). The GCEO therefore assumes executive editorial responsibility for news content on the SABC, and delegates the responsibility of daily management of all news programming on the corporation to the Managing Director (MD) of News (in 2006 Dr Snuki Zikalala). The MD of News heads a division that comprises four subdivisions, notably: SABC Radio News, SABC TV News, the Online News subdivision and the Special News Services. Since this study focuses on radio, we

will concentrate on the operations of SABC Radio News. The Head of Radio News (Solly Phetoe in 2006) oversees the news and current affairs programming on SAfm. He delegates his authority to any senior editor in the event of his absence. The task of managing other programming content, the logistics and the specific station personnel rests with the station manager, Mapule Mbhalati in 2006, who reports to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) responsible for PBS radio stations (Phetoe 2006 personal communication, Mbhalati 2005 personal communication).

Therefore, the selection of international news for SAfm's bulletins is placed in the context of SABC Radio News, that organises daily news conferences at 8.30am and 3pm (dubbed "line talks") meant for providing news on all of SABC's PBS radio stations. The line talks are coordinated at by the Politics Desk Editor, with overall supervision from the Radio Current Affairs Editor. Various central desk editors and their collaborators, spread across nine regions of the country, contribute to the line talk. It brings together the Head of Radio News, the Executive Producer of Current Affairs programmes on SAfm, all central radio news specialist desk editors, the heads of the Johannesburg bureau, the Chief Editor for National Bulletins, the National Regional News Editor (on location in the conference room); as well as the regional editors (by phone).

At these line talks, the angles for stories coming in from all the regions, the central desk, as well as the international bureaux, are decided. The morning line talk assesses the most important aspects of news coverage of the previous day and lays the foundation for news bulletins and current affairs programmes on SAfm especially during the day; while the afternoon line talk makes a review of coverage during the day and projects into coverage and news treatment in the evening of the present day and the morning of the next day. The line talk is also attended on rare occasions by the MD of SABC News.

In the line talks, international stories come directly from the foreign desk's contribution. The Foreign Desk Editor proposes a diary of foreign events, having consulted the SABC's News and Current Affairs' three bureaux chiefs in Washington, Brussels and Nairobi, as well as stringers from many parts of the world (Phetoe 2006 personal

communication, Makatees 2006 personal communication). There is also a special arrangement with a US-based media entrepreneur, Simon Marks, to supply the foreign desk with international stories and features from Moscow, London and Canada, through his media organisation known as Feature Stories. Other sources of the desk's content are feeds from news agencies mainly Reuters and the South African Press Association (SAPA), as well as sound bites from the BBC. These organisations have an agreement of cooperation with the SABC (Phetoe 2006 personal communication).

SABC Radio News is concentrating on changing what it considers the gloomy image of Africa, shown on Western media, with a zoom on development progress on the continent (Mbhalati 2005, Phetoe 2006 personal communication). Hence, in addition to the bureau that is fully functional in Nairobi, Kenya, the establishment of bureaux in Nigeria, Senegal and the Democratic Republic of Congo, are in the offing (Phetoe 2006 personal communication). These objectives tally with the ANC-led government's explicit African nationalistic foreign policy ideology (Bond 2004, Orgeret 2004), confirming Nossek's (2004) contention that media organisations' coverage of international news is greatly influenced by the foreign policy of their governments. It would therefore not be surprising if this study finds out that a social system factor (the ideology of the ANC government in 2006) impinges a great deal on the gatekeeping of international news items broadcast on SAfm's bulletins.

3.5 South Africa's Foreign Policy and its Impact on SABC's Worldview

Although post-apartheid SA has increasingly led Africa's voice in structures such as the UN (Bond 2004, Venter 1997), its intention has been to switch its foreign policy objectives from Europe, during apartheid, to Africa in the new conjuncture (Venter 1997). The SA government has therefore made many political gestures in terms of peace missions in hotspots such as the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda and Liberia (Bond 1994), though it was chastised for its vacillation to take action against the Abacha regime in Nigeria for its repressive dictatorship (Venter 1997).

In the economic sphere, South Africa has taken up the role of a 'middle power' (Nel 2002), whose motivation is that of economic opportunism (Venter 1997). This attitude has driven SA to expand its businesses into the rest of the continent in an exploitative manner (Bond 2004, Nel 2002, Le Pere and van Nieuwkerk 2002). According to Venter (1997), the motivation for such an attitude is the principle of "universality" in international relations which allows for a country to be open to as many foreign partners as possible, in negotiating its interests, without superficially treading on anyone else's toes. However, it is averred that such universality helps to sustain the global system of hegemony that benefits the US the most (Bond 2004, Nel 2002).

Hence, although the ANC-led government publicly differed with the US in pressing for the total destruction of landmines, it has been reluctant to use its membership of the Non-Align Movement (NAM) to press for an equal treatment of nations regarding the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty – NPT (Bond 2004, Nel 2002). More ambivalence in South Africa's position on US hegemony is said to have emerged when President Mbeki denounced US unilateralism in waging war against Iraq in 2003, but allowed South Africa to sell arms to the US and the UK (Bond 2004). Consequently, Bond (2004) dismisses SA's official adoption of the ideologies of pan-Africanism and social capitalism as a gimmick to win public approval, whereas it actually subscribes to the 'Washington Consensus' (i.e. an adoption of neoliberal principles in favour of global capitalism that sustains the US 'Empire'). These developments have led Bond (2004), and Nel (2002) to argue that SA is not actively involved in a counter-hegemonic trade agenda. However, this study argues that it is the explicit pan-Africanist and anti-American unilateralist stance from the SA government (at least through language) that seems to resonate within the SA media and possibly some part of the SA public. This finds support in Bond's (2004) own proposition that certain media organisations, including the SABC, the Sowetan, City Press, Enterprise and New Agenda, have taken up the pan-Africanist discourse preached by the SA-government (in their news coverage), while some social-capitalist media such as the Mail & Guardian, have overtly praised Mbeki's global agenda.

3.6 Conclusion

The selection of international news for broadcast on SAfm must be studied within a history of struggles in South Africa between an oppressed black community and a dominant white community. The dominant group sought to control broadcasting in order to shape an image of the world that was consistent with its ideologies of white domination. Hence from the period of the Afrikanerisation of the SABC (1959) to the fall of apartheid (1994), international news selection for broadcast on SAfm was heavily influenced by the ideologies of the NP that permeated the organisational structures of the SABC through the NP's Broederbond. This was an Afrikaner reversal of the more liberal and pro-BBC approach to broadcasting that had prevailed before. During this period dominated by the politics of the Afrikaner-led NP, the selection of international news to be broadcast on SAfm hardly followed journalistic professionalism. Rather, gatekeepers were compelled by the apartheid government to portray black ruled countries as ungovernable, chaotic and poverty stricken, with the intention of justifying white rule in South Africa to the station's audiences. This was ensured by the appointment of editors who shared in the NP ideology of white supremacy. This implies forces at work for in the selection process were linked to the organisational level of gatekeeping, that was consistent with the social system factor (apartheid ideology), and heavily policed by the social-institutional forces (the apartheid government structures). Government and editorial control, brought about by a system of upward referral, stymied the process of selecting foreign news to be aired on SAfm. However, this dispensation changed with the fall of apartheid in 1994, which also resulted in the guarantee of editorial independence to the SABC by the Broadcasting Act of 1999. In 2006, the SABC Board therefore has the mandate to deliver services to its audiences that capture the spirit of an independent and professional public broadcaster, committed to change the negative practices of the past. It has consequently developed editorial policies which insist on portraying a positive image of Africa, in the domain of international news selection and reporting.

The responsibility for selecting and presenting (international) news to the SAfm's audiences rests with SABC Radio News. The following chapters therefore investigate the process of the selection of international news items for SAfm's bulletins by SABC Radio

News, to ascertain the factors that affect such selection processes and determine the extent to which they depart from the processes that obtained there before the demise of apartheid in 1994. Chapter 4 sets the pace with a discussion on the methodological framework used in the investigation.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.0 Introduction

The foregoing chapters have established that the gatekeeping of international news is a complex process may often taken-for-granted. It has been discussed that gatekeepers of international news, though cultured in commonly-held professional standards of journalism, do not work within the same socio-cultural, historical, political and organisational framework; hence the factors affecting selection in specific contexts need to be carefully examined. Examining the factors that underlie the selection of international news at a station with the widest geographical signal reach in a country (SA) that was once isolated in the international arena is useful. It is useful to examine how the SABC Radio News selects international news that is broadcast on SAfm's bulletins because such a medium helps to construct images of the world to a country now integrated internationally. But to undertake a venture of unpacking selectivity as a journalistic practice, there is need for the researcher to use a method of investigation that allows him/her to draw maximum information from various levels of gatekeeping analysis. For several reasons to be explicated below, it would seem such a method is best informed by qualitative epistemological foundations in the sociology of news production.

The outlook of human inquiry into the world of news, according to constructionist scholars, is hardly objective (see Chapter 2). This is true of the qualitative research process where the researcher relates to reality in a way that is unique to him/her (Wimmer and Dominick 1991) primarily through observational and interview techniques (Tuchman 2002). The purview of qualitative inquiry is usually particularistic but there is emphasis on historicity, holism (probing and analysing the whole structure of a social phenomenon as opposed to atomising its parts) and process (Lindloff 1992 in Strelitz 2002). Qualitative researchers attempt to produce a unique explanation about a given situation or individual, and unlike in quantitative research where measuring instruments are different from the inquirer, it is the researcher who acts as the instrument of qualitative research (Wimmer and Dominick 1991). Hence, the research design can be adjusted while the researcher is on the field collecting data (Wimmer and Dominick

1991, Strelitz 2002). The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to state the philosophical underpinnings of the field observation technique employed to document the gatekeeping of international news at SAfm, link the process to international news determinant research strategies, indicate the methods used in collecting the data and tease out the techniques used to interpret it.

4.1 Philosophical Underpinnings

The methodological approach to this research is informed by the notions of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology in qualitative research. These constitute a micro-theoretical approach that focuses on the interaction between individuals and institutions (symbolic interactionism) and emphasises an understanding of the meaningful nature of social life based on the consciousness of its actors (phenomenology) (Tuchman 2002, Kvale 1983 in O'Dowd 1996). Phenomenologists stress that any attempt to understand social reality must be situated in people's experience of that social reality which endows them with the motivational backdrop to their actions (Bryman 1988). This study is therefore interested in probing the gatekeepers' action of selecting international news based on their views and experiences of what international social reality is, and also in terms of the routine, organisational and extra-media factors underpinning their actions. The task of the phenomenologist is thus to capture the process of interpretation of the subjects' world, by the subjects themselves (Bogdan and Taylor 1975 in Bryman 1988). However, if the phenomenologist works only from the standpoint of the subjects being studied, his/her findings could be reductionist (Shutz 1967 in Bryman 1988). This critique signifies that phenomenology is a metaphor indicating a commitment to representing the social actors' own points of view; hence, the researcher would need to employ a form of analysis to deal with the differences between various actors' categorisation of the world, characterised by dynamism between actors (Bryman 1988). This ushers in the epistemology of symbolic interactionism.

Researchers within this tradition view social life as a process in which the individual interprets his/her environment and operates on the basis of such interpretations vis-à-vis other individuals and structures (Bryman 1988). Symbolic interactionism stresses two

facets of the social being: first as an independent individual who thinks of herself/himself as 'I', and second, as an interdependent being who thinks of himself/herself as 'me', which indicates how other people see him/her. This dialectical outlook of social persons contributes to their interpretation of their surroundings, and consequently on their action (Bryman 1988, Becker 1996). Thus, actors in the social world of news production, such as SABC Radio's central newsroom, could select what they think is international news, through their personal judgments, but they would only afford to take action in conjunction with how they perceive the way they are seen by others. Symbolic interactionism, like phenomenology, therefore informs many observational studies of news production in a particular setup (Tuchman 2002, Bryman 1988). Investigating such a particular setup falls within the precincts of micro theory, popularly employed by researchers of international news determinant research as we shall see below.

4.2 Perspectives on International News Gatekeeping

The two main levels in the study of international news production are macro and micro (Hjarvard 2002, Kim 2003). The macro-level concerns itself with the direction of international news flow (e.g. from industrialised to non-industrialised nations or vice-versa), while micro-level studies dwell on gatekeeping, to find out what kind of events are selected as newsworthy and/or the decisions leading to such selections (Kim 2003). Hjarvard (2002) distils four approaches from these two broad levels of international news research: (1) The micro-level and selection perspective, which is gatekeeper analysis; (2) micro-level and construction perspective, which deals with ideology and the critique of foreign news content; (3) the macro-level and selection perspective, which deals with news flow analysis, and (4) the macro-level and construction perspective which focuses on media imperialism and the political economy of news media. This study employs the micro level and selection perspective because it focuses on the factors affecting the gatekeeping of international news which is broadcast on a particular media outlet (the SABC's SAfm). This perspective underpins the qualitative operational methods of data collection, employed in the present study, as discussed in the next point.

4.3 Methods

Investigating the organisation of news work involves a look at the nuanced practices of journalism primarily through observational and interview techniques (Tuchman 2002, Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Deacon et al 1999) which also require specific strategies.

4.3.1 Field observation as the principal method

The technique of field observation strives to offer a deep understanding of a working milieu, organisational culture and professional practice (Hansen et al 1998, Bryman 1988). Employing this approach to investigate newsroom practices serves to develop understanding and theorising on news and newsmaking processes, and the relation between news and wider society. At the outset of this study, I intended to carry out overt simple observation, i.e. simply observing my subjects with their consent (Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Deacon et al 1999). However, my role changed from a simple observer to a participant observer, due to requests made by some bulletin editors and presenters to help with lead-writing and editing of wire stories. This proved to be more of an advantage than a drawback to my observation process for I got the status of an adopted newsworker there and felt relatively at ease in asking a lot of questions from time to time about the workings of the SABC Radio newsroom.

I chose field observation as the principal method of my inquiry due to its many advantages: it provides data rich in detail and subtlety, the field observer does not rely solely on his subjects for an explanation of their behaviours, the observer gets access to situations that would be otherwise difficult to study, observation could provide results not captured by existing theory, observation provides for triangulation, i.e. it is easily complemented by interviews and document analysis (Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Hansen et al 1998, Spradley 1980). It is on the basis of the last argument that I used interviewing to append field observation. After conceiving the methods to employ for this study, I had to consider sampling.

4.3.2 Sampling

Radio was chosen for this study with the rationale that in a developing country, such as South Africa, with a 17.6% adult-illiteracy rate (Human Development Report 2005) and a high incidence of poverty, radio would be the most accessible medium of mass communication (Stein 1974, Mbaine 2005). The choice of observing the selection of international news that is broadcast on SAfm from a sampling frame of 15 PBS stations was purposive. For, although the central newsroom of SABC Radio's News and Current Affairs subdivision is responsible for most news items generally broadcast on SABC stations, it is uniquely responsible for both the selection and presentation of all of SAfm's news bulletins (as well as news bulletins on the commercial stations 5fm and Metro Fm), broadcast from its own physical installations and linked to the SAfm newsroom by proxy. While it is true that SAfm's daily audience of 347 000 is far below that of Ukhozi FM (4.817 million), my preference for the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm lies in the fact that it is the radio with the highest geographical reach in terms of reception signals; it covers 95% of the South African landscape (SABC Editorial Policies 2004). Further, its language of broadcast – English – is the most used mother tongue in official and commercial public arenas in SA (SouthAfrica.info 2006, Silva nd) and also the working language of the researcher; hence it makes for the easy understanding of the variables under study.

The settings to draw data from the study site were self-evident: the conference room of SABC Radio News' seat in Johannesburg, which hosts its line talks, the newsroom, offices of the editorial staff and any other setting that would present itself as important during the study. These areas constituted a purposive sample; i.e. areas considered relevant to the study (see Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Deacon et al 1999). Following this procedure was a design of the sample of processes to be observed.

The processes of the gatekeeping phenomenon being studied included the number of line talks to be observed, and the amount of time to be spent observing the editing of international news in the newsroom. The sample for the population of line talks to be observed was also purposive – two working weeks i.e. 10 days of such morning and

afternoon editorial conferences at 8.30 am and 3pm, from Monday March 13 2006 to Friday March 24 2006 (SABC Radio does not hold line talks at weekends). Meanwhile, the amount of time spent observing the editing process in the newsroom and checking on editors in their offices, was also purposive but went beyond working weeks. Two weekend days were included (Sunday of the first week and the Saturday of the second week) for the sake of making maximum use of the two weeks of access available for the observation. I thought it wise to retreat from the site of the study for the two remaining days for two reasons: firstly to have some respite, and second, to have time to look at the data keyed into the log book, which could help me develop fresh ideas.

Although the amount of time spent at the SABC during each day of observation was expedient (e.g. on factors such as reaching a saturation point of patterns observed and human fatigue on my part), I generally arrived at the SABC shortly before 8.30 am on each working day of observation and left not earlier than 4.30pm. At weekends, I arrived around 9.30 am and left not earlier than 1.30 pm. The total amount of time spent at the SABC during the study for 12 days, was 101 hours, 26 minutes. Generally, the study was restricted to two weeks to make request for access easier to grant and to make optimum use of the limited resources available. Identifying informal discussions (merely occurring in the newsroom) that could play a role in revealing factors influencing the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm, was simply a matter of chance (see Deacon et al 1999). The selection of these settings and processes of international news gatekeeping to be observed was largely purposive. Everything observed was what Wimmer and Dominick (1991:143) term a “de facto sample” of what could not be observed. Following this sampling of SABC Radio’s settings and processes connected to the gatekeeping of international news for SAfm’s bulletins, the next thing to be considered was the sampling of individual gatekeepers to be interviewed (a discussion of interviewing as one of the methods of the study is made in points 4.3.5. and 4.3.6 below).

Individuals to be interviewed were selected on a theoretically informed basis; i.e. I first identified all those indirectly and directly responsible for the gatekeeping of international news that is broadcast on SAfm’s news bulletins. Then, I decided on a smaller group of

the core persons among them to be interviewed, after which I interviewed just about anybody in the larger group till the subjects began evincing an ostensibly regular pattern in their responses (discussions on theoretical non-random sampling are provided in Deacon et al 1999: 52, Jensen 2002: 239). By this method, I identified a population of 19 persons relevant to the question of international news as they impact on the bulletins at SAfm. They were: two chief executives (the MD of News and the Head of Radio News), three executive editors of SABC Radio (the Foreign Desk Editor, the Politics Desk Editor and the National Bulletins Editor), six SABC Radio bulletin editors, and five SAfm news bulletin presenters. Those I assumed were central to the input of international news, to be interviewed at all costs, were the following nine persons: the Foreign Desk Editor, the chiefs of the three international bureaux, at least three bulletin editors (half of the population), the Chief Editor of National Bulletins, and the Politics Desk Editor (he regularly assigns staff that go on mission abroad, as well as those that cover international political events happening in South Africa).

From this population of 19 persons, I ended up interviewing 15 of them, among whom were all those assumed to be central to the inputting of international news on SAfm's newscasts. However, one producer of current affairs shows at SAfm, not concerned with news bulletins, was interviewed for curiosity sake, to see if it could be helpful to the study (which it would later prove to be), bringing the number of persons interviewed to 16. As for the two chief executives, only the Head of Radio News was interviewed; the MD of News was not available due to his administrative duties. In presenting data about these gatekeepers as well as in quoting them, I decided to delete real their real names and give them codes, to avoid embarrassing anyone who may not be comfortable with having his or her profound judgments published. The codes range from 'G1' (meaning 'Gatekeeper 1') to 'G16' (meaning 'Gatekeeper 16'). However, to make the data comprehensible, if Gatekeeper 1 is a bulletins editor, where it is important to state his/her profile, I represented him/her as Bulletin Editor G1. In the same way, if it is important to note the profile of a presenter who happens to be Gatekeeper 4, such a person is represented as presenter G4. Any gatekeeper above the rank of the bulletins editor (i.e. the Head of Radio News and all the heads of specialised news desks) is referred to as 'an

executive editor' and his code number is used in place of his name (gender is deliberate as only males occupy these posts in 2006). There are instances where the full job title of the gatekeeper is given, because the data referring to them is intrinsically indicative of their role; e.g. if G25 talks about his/her chores in New York, it will be evident that s/he is the correspondent in the US. In such an instance, his/her title is used and the code dropped.

It should be noted that the same interview guide was used for everybody but I was flexible enough to address particular questions to particular persons according to their job profiles and rank. However, I did not find it compelling to disaggregate the data from gatekeepers performing different job types for three reasons: 1) there was not a great deal of difference in the questions posed since I could not have been cocksure about the different degrees of input from different types of gatekeepers prior to observation; 2) field observation would be useful in identifying differences; 3) data analysis would provide the space for outlining any nuances discovered. Notwithstanding, the bulletin editors had the greatest voice in the data analysis since it became evident during a review of the field notes that they were the most influential gatekeepers of international news broadcast on SAfm's newscasts.

4.3.3 Gaining access

Working to gain access to the central newsroom of SABC Radio News (responsible for the bulletins on SAfm) started in September 2005, when I contacted SAfm's Station manager, Mapule Mbhalati, who subsequently introduced me to the Head of News and Current Affairs for Radio – Solly Phetoe. I spoke with Phetoe or his Personal Assistant on the phone about a dozen times between September 2005 and March 2006, to negotiate my access to the research site. Upon his demand, I wrote a formal application to access the SABC Radio News' central newsroom, which I forwarded to him by email. It was however not easy to glean information on how the selection process of news broadcast on SAfm works, because several times I called, Phetoe was either away on assignment or too busy to respond systematically to my questions. However, he made an appreciable effort to call me back certain times and explain a few things to me at length. I felt I was partly

limited in access, because my request for at least two days of acclimatisation at the SABC structure dealing with radio news, before the observation process itself, was not granted. Phetoe assured me that I would be well briefed on the processes. He kept his word and showed me round the sections of the SABC directly linked with news on SAfm on the day of my arrival, while introducing me to his colleagues who immediately exuded their sociability. Having made these gains, I needed to be clear on the strategies of data collection.

4.3.4 Design and data collection

Before setting out to the site of my study in Auckland Park, I had to design a schedule of my two weeks of activities there, in line with the prescriptions of Wimmer and Dominick (1991), and Hansen et al (1998). The first day (Monday March 13) was for acclimatisation i.e. I had to find out who held what position in the newsroom and news chain, take note of the physical organisation of the newsroom, meeting times, selection procedures for international news, as well as introduce myself to most people involved. The second and third days were for observation, while the rest of the study period was for both observation and interviewing. Following this schedule, I constructed a field log, which is a diary of what I would observe in the field (Hansen et al 1998, Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Deacon et al 1999). The first few leaves of the field log were reserved for comments about the spatio-temporal organisation of the newsroom (Hansen et al 1998). The notes would help me in doing a simple description of the channels, gates and sections that are set up for the manufacturing of international news destined for SAfm's bulletins (see Shoemaker et al 2001, Shoemaker 1991). Then the rest of the log was designed as follows (see Deacon et al 1999, Jensen 2002):

Date& location	Random notes	Questions	Significant Events	Own comments
-------------------	--------------	-----------	-----------------------	-----------------

4.3.5. Data collection through interviewing

Participant observation is usually accompanied by the interviewing of key informants to enable the researcher fill the gaps that observation might create (Hansen et al 1998,

Deacon et al 1999, Wimmer and Dominick 1991, Jensen 2002, Tuchman 2002, Bryman 1988, Bryman 1984, Lofland 1971). Interviewing is the collection of oral reports from members of a culture being studied (Douglas 1985 in Fontana and Frey 1994). For this research, semi-structured individual interviews were done with persons considered relevant to the gatekeeping of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. The questions were designed to glean information on how the gatekeepers individually influenced selection decisions, and how they functioned in relation to the other four levels of Shoemaker's model (questions about routine influences, organisational influences, social institutional influences and social system factors). Hence an interview schedule was drawn up, with questions appropriated into themes (see Appendix 2).

These interviews ranged from 25 minutes to an hour; some interviewees were very brief, while others rambled away from questions and, in the process, unveiled important insights for the research (see Fontana and Frey 1994). Technically, I had to pursue the traditional method of keeping a friendly tone, and coaxing the respondent into feeling at ease to reveal as much information as they could, by first 'breaking the ice' (i.e. talking about general life issues first or cracking jokes) before moving to my specific questions (see Fontana and Frey 1994). While most of the interviews were done orally following a guide and with the aid of a tape recorder, I singled out samples of international stories selected and rejected from the wires by two output editors (G15 and G16), and asked them to make brief comments on why they selected or rejected the stories in question. This was inspired by the method David Manning White used in his study of 'Mr Gates' in 1950 (see Schudson 2000, Shoemaker et al 2001, Shoemaker 1999) and the approach in a study of Canadian crime journalism by Erickson et al (1987 in Deacon et al 1999). To avoid ambiguity in the broader sections on sampling and coding (4.3.2 and 4.3.7), I decided to devote the section below to explaining the sampling and coding procedures used for this specific qualitative interview type.

4.3.6 Interviewing based on selected and rejected stories from the wires by two editors

To enrich the data obtained from the field, I went into the story files on 'Newstar' (the content management software at SABC Radio), to get a sample of international news

stories selected and rejected from the main wire services used at SABC (SAPA and Reuters) and to survey the editors' (G15 and G16's) reasons for inclusion and exclusion of stories into the 'Approved' file that signified the stories' passage into the bulletins broadcast gate. I printed all international news items selected during the eight-hour shifts of each of the editors for two days. I placed them vis-à-vis a sample of the same number of stories rejected by each editor during those two days, for their comments. I limited it to two days of selection/rejection to encourage the editors to make comments, since they would have had no time to attend to a much larger questionnaire.

Accordingly, all the 40 stories selected by G16 for two days (21 stories on the first day, and 19 stories on the second day) and all 22 stories selected by G15 for 2 days (11 stories on the first day and another 11 on the second day) were printed and given to them to explain why each story was selected. I divided the cumulative sum of each editor's selected stories by 2, to determine the sample of rejected stories to be printed from the file of stories in the wires during their shifts of each day examined. G16's list of rejected stories consisted of 40 news items (to match the number of items he selected for those two days). It was broken down into a sample of 20 items for his rejected lot of stories on the first day and another sample of 20 items from his rejected lot of stories of the second day. Similarly, G15's two samples of 11 stories each were selected from the lot he rejected during his shifts for those two days (see Table I).

TABLE I: G15 AND G16'S SAMPLES

G16			G15		
Date	No of stories Selected	Sample of stories rejected	Date	No of stories Selected	Sample of stories rejected
21 March	21	20	18 March	11	11
22 March	19	20	19 March	11	11
Total	40	40	Total	22	22

For convenience, if the sample of the first day of rejected stories by an editor was drawn from the SAPA files, the sample of rejected stories of the next day, by the same editor, was drawn from the Reuters file (to give these two wire services accessed by the SABC

equal treatment). A systematic sample (Deacon et al 1999) of the rejected stories was done so that a uniformed number of stories would be drawn from each hour range within the editor's eight-hour shift per day. In G16's case therefore, the rejected sample consisted of 20 stories per day, spread over eight hours. Mathematically, this would result in $20/8 = 2$ (with 4 left over). Hence two stories were drawn from each of the eight hours of G16's shift; after which the process of drawing was recommenced for the 4 left-over stories. Commonsensically, two of these 'left-over' stories were drawn from the first two hours of his shift and two others drawn from the last two hours of the same shift, to arrive at a total of 20 rejected stories per day.

These questionnaires were then administered to the editors, following which their comments were read and a coding outline designed. Since their responses dwelt mostly on values of news judgment, a few other routine factors and individual perceptions, these responses were quantitatively keyed into tables bearing such headings, for both selection and rejection. In the case of selection, for instance, there were two coding/analysis tables (informed by the data that emerged from the editors' comments): one entitled 'news values' and the other entitled 'other routine factors'. The data was meant to reveal the degree of reflection of news values and other factors in the totality of stories selected, according to the editors' own comments. After this detour to the analysis of a specific interview type, let us now turn to the coding and analysis of the principal method (observation) and its accompanying method – oral interviews.

4.3.7 Coding and analysis – the broader picture

Once data was keyed into the field log, I carried out thematic coding of the data. Thematic coding is the classification of observation notes or interview transcripts into themes, headings or concepts as a means to a step by step analysis (Jensen 2002). In this case, Shoemaker's revision of Lewin's gatekeeping model was used in categorising the data, and subsequently analysing it. This process was done through the design of four index cards labeled A to D; representing the first four levels of Shoemaker's five levels of gatekeeping analysis respectively (see Deacon et al 1999 for indexing). The social system level (comprising ideological and cultural factors) was not included because

unpacking ideological/discourses is a time and space consuming enterprise which could be investigated for a thesis on its own (see Thompson 1988, Fairclough 1995). Each card was headed by guidelines provided by Shoemaker (1991) and Shoemaker et al (2001) as seen below:

INDEX CARD A: INDIVIDUAL FORCES

Note: forces include: education of gatekeeper (place, level) (idea from Shoemaker and Reese 2001); star vs. non star reporter (idea from Breed 1955); experienced vs. cub (idea from Shoemaker and Reese 2001, Breed 1955); race (idea from Shoemaker and Reese 2001); national/international political opinion (idea from Shoemaker and Reese 2001); role conception ('advocate' or 'gatekeeper') (idea from Shoemaker 1991, Janovitz 1975); others.

INDEX CARD B: ROUTINE FORCES

Note: forces include: professional values of newsworthiness, technical resources, editing, actualities (radio-specific interview clips), others.

INDEX CARD C: ORGANISATIONAL FORCES

Note: forces include: policy, editors' orders, colleagues consensus (groupthink), others.

INDEX CARD D: SOCIAL INSTITUTIONAL FORCES

Note: forces include: government, interest groups such as political parties, audiences, advertisers, others.

It is argued here that for want of space, most of the variables outlined above need not be individually motivated at this juncture because these dynamics have been illuminated in Chapter 2. However, the component of race under the individual level needs some discussion given that the concept has been at the origin of South Africa's historical problems. In the South African context the concept of race (which refers to the distinct features of human sub-groups in terms of skin colour) was ideologically emphasised by the colonialists and later accentuated by the apartheid government for the end of 'white' domination (MacKinnon 2004, Woods 2000, Mamdani 1996). The discourse of race is an



important factor to consider in a gatekeeping study at a multiracial South African newsroom because its ideological underpinnings may reflect in decisions made by gatekeepers of its different groupings, whose reaction to how they had been constructed in the past may have bearings on their selection choices of international news stories that carry racial discourses.

It should be noted that, following the above guidelines, separate indexing was done for the observation notes and the interviews. The indexing for field notes constituted reading through the notes in the field log and copying and pasting notes that fitted into particular levels of analysis in each card (see Appendix 3). The indexing of interviews on the other hand, which was far more laborious, consisted in placing interview questions within strata that represented the five levels of gatekeeping analyses, in one document. Questions intended to measure gatekeepers' selection practices within routine processes, for instance (e.g. 'what's your most important news value?'), were placed under the heading 'Routines' and a summary of each interviewee's response keyed under such heading. All interviewees concerned with the bulletins broadcast on SAfm were ascribed codes from 01 to 14. Their respective answer ideas were tied to their code numbers. Just like in the indexing of the field notes, responses that proved to be typical examples of certain patterns were highlighted to aid the process of analysis and discussion (see Appendix 4). The coding of data from editors G15 and G16 was done separately (see point 4.3.6 above).

This indexing was followed by analysis that focused on the interplay of the dependent variables which in this case are the forces, at each of Shoemaker's levels of gatekeeping. These broad levels of gatekeeping, (i.e. the individual, routine, organisational, social-institutional and social system levels) constituted the independent variables. A multivariate analysis on the relationship of forces was carried out at various levels of Shoemaker's classification. The way these forces and levels of gatekeeping impinged on the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins, was compared to what obtained in the apartheid era. In analysing the factors affecting the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins, an attempt was made to establish a

pattern and the consequences of such a pattern for the subjects of the study and possibly for their audiences. Deviations from the pattern were highlighted and reasons for such deviations advanced, while projections were made about alternatives to the pattern observed. In doing this, certain axes of discussion drawn basically from the biodata of the gatekeepers (notably rank, work experience, level of education, gender) were attended to at the necessary levels of analysis. Finally, I made suggestions for the validation of the approach used in this study. These steps, used to shed light on four of Shoemaker's five levels of analysis, were inspired by similar steps in Merton's functional analysis approach, employed by Breed (1955). It should be noted that the data obtained from observation was coded separately from but interpreted together with the data obtained from interviewing. In analysing, I avoided the academic apartheid that some scholars have brought to bear on the difference between qualitative and quantitative studies (see Deacon et al 1999). My approach supports the view of Bryman (1988) and Deacon et al (1999) that qualitative and quantitative methods (as opposed to philosophies) of social enquiry should not be artificially boxed in separate corners. Rather, it is the research question that should determine which method to be principally used and room must be allowed for cross-fertilisation as demanded by the occasion. Although I was not obsessed with quantification, it nonetheless proved useful in patterning and helped to identify best possible examples of interviewee responses to represent those patterns. Hence qualifiers such as 'the majority', 'most', 'only a few', etc., were used. But these were meant to illuminate the phenomenon under investigation and to raise questions about deviations that could aid future research. Also, it is worth mentioning that the quantitative elements of the analysis must not be read as indicative of a generalisation of the factors affecting the selection of international news for SAfm's bulletins. Rather, these elements help in the primary task of qualitatively assessing factors underpinning the selection of international news at SABC Radio at a particular point in time (early 2006) and its editorial and personnel contexts.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the methodology used in gathering and analysing the data obtained for the study of factors affecting the selection of international news broadcast on

SAfm's bulletins. This research is informed by the qualitative epistemology into human inquiry, notably the point that the study of news selection cannot be qualified as 'objective', given the constructivist nature of the news production process itself. Hence, the researcher is an instrument for data collection. Two main philosophies of social inquiry inform this study: symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. These philosophical considerations determined the perspective of international news research applied to this study – the micro-level selection perspective that dwells on gatekeeping by case study. The main operational method of this case study was field observation. This method was adopted following its advantages over other qualitative techniques, notably its avenues for triangulation with interviewing. After gaining access to the site of this study, data collection for observation was aided by the design of a field log, while oral interviews were aided by a semi-structured schedule. Apart from conducting oral interviews, a sample of two output editors' selected and rejected international news stories from the wires was drawn, printed and handed to them for comments on the reasons why the selected and rejected various international stories. The data gleaned from these methods were coded and analysed thematically to fit the interpretive structure provided by four (out of five) levels of gatekeeping analysis (treated by Shoemaker 1999; Shoemaker et al 2001). It should be noted that there was no major difficulty encountered in collecting field data for this research except for the fact that on a few occasions two international news gatekeepers in the SABC Radio central newsroom spoke to each other in a South African mother tongue not understood by the researcher.

The subsequent two chapters reveal the findings of the data collected through the methodology examined hitherto. The first of them pays attention to the individual and routine factors affecting the selection of international news, and the second focuses on the organisational and social institutional underpinnings of international news packaged for the bulletins of SAfm in March 2006. It emerged from the research process that the social system factors (ideology and culture) affecting the gatekeeping of international news at SABC Radio could not be fully gleaned by the methods being utilised. This would possibly have required an ethnographic study and a discursive content analysis of international news on SAfm's bulletins; time, space and resources for this thesis have not

allowed for such an enterprise (see point 4.3.7 above). However, it could be averred that the various levels of analysis, provided by Shoemaker's (1991) and Shoemaker et al's (2001) framework, interrelate; hence some data would overlap across the levels including into social system factors affecting gatekeeping.

Chapter 5: Findings at the Individual and Routine Levels of Analysis

5.0 Introduction

This chapter will pay attention to the individual and routine levels of analysis, in the gatekeeping of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. The data at these levels of analysis pertain to observations and interviews made at SABC Radio News in March 2006. The chapter starts with a presentation of the individual level forces disaggregated into six operational factors. This is followed by the presentation of findings at the routine level of analysis, broken down into five operational factors. A conclusion recaps the main trends observed during the period of observation and links the chapter to the next two levels of analysis used by this research (organisational and social-institutional).

5.1 The Individual Level Factors

Individuals responsible for the input and output of international news broadcast on SAfm can be classified into three main groups: gatherers, processors (see Shoemaker et al 2001, Peterson 1979) and what one could term 'delivery persons'. The gatherers are the correspondents employed by the SABC, stringers commissioned by the Corporation, as well as the wire services and broadcast media monitored by SABC Radio bulletin editors; the processors are the executive editors (to a lesser extent) and bulletin editors (to a greater extent), while the delivery persons are the presenters. Unlike in the gatekeeping of local news at SABC Radio, observation showed that members of these groups of international news gatekeepers all perform boundary role functions at some point. The correspondents (mainly the Nairobi, Brussels and Washington bureau chiefs), the stringers, e.g. those working under Simon Marks' organisation – 'Feature Stories', and the wire services⁵ (used by the SABC) are the input boundary role gatekeepers because they liaise with sources and could also initiate stories. The processors on their part perform intra-organisational roles when they select and edit stories filed by the SABC's own correspondents, and boundary roles when they edit stories got from the wires or

⁵This scope of this study is an observation of the factors affecting gatekeeping of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins within the context of SABC Radio News; hence, it does not delve into factors affecting the selection of international news by the main wire services used by SABC Radio News – SAPA and Reuters.

other broadcasters such as the BBC. Executive editors who influence international news selection for the bulletins on SAfm basically perform an SABC Radio intra-organisational gatekeeping function but they become boundary role players when they (e.g. Foreign Desk Editor and Political Desk Editor) directly receive press releases on international events/issues from sources within and without South Africa. The delivery persons (presenters) essentially perform output boundary roles as they convey the news to the audiences via the reading of bulletins.

With regard to the above structure, individual gatekeepers stand at five main gates along three main channels of communication at SABC Radio News: 1) the source//reporter/source//executive editor gate, 2) the correspondent//foreign desk editor gate, 3) the reporter//political editor gate, 4) the correspondent//output editor, wire service//output editor, region//output editor gate (which is the editor's desks) and 5) the presenter//audience gate (which is the studio). Almost all of these gates recur at the routine and organisational levels of analysis as would be discussed later in this chapter.

Observation for this study found that at the individual level of analysis, forces affecting the selection of international news for SAfm's bulletins, passing through these gates, are the products of the gatekeeper's historical experiences, rank, work experience, job function and level of education; his/her role conceptions, his/her model of thinking, his/her personal inclinations and tastes and his/her physical state of being. Gender and race variables did not evince any strong influence on international news selection, during the period of this study. The following paragraphs examine the way these factors impinged on movement of international news units through the gates outlined above.

5.1.1 Gatekeepers' historical experiences

All of the gatekeepers who had worked as journalists during apartheid (interviewed) said they would not use the expression 'terrorist(s)' in their stories, because it reminded them of how those fighting for racial equality in South Africa were labelled. About half of the gatekeepers who only started their career either during South Africa's transition (the first three years of the 1990s) or after the collapse of apartheid (in 1994) also shared this view.

To this group of gatekeepers, 'terrorism' is a "loaded term" (G6 2006 personal communication) and must be avoided at all costs. What this suggests is that a story from the wires about Iraq (for instance) loaded with the terms terrorists/terrorism, could put off an editor because s/he was an oppositional subject to the discourse of 'terrorists' employed by the NP government to label anti-apartheid activists.

On the contrary, about half of those who had no historical experience (as journalists) with apartheid discourse (including all the presenters) said they had no problem with the words terrorists/terrorism. If faced with the decision to select or reject a story loaded with such terms, therefore, their lack of historical experience with the discourse could act as a positive force allowing the story to pass through to the various gates within the SABC Radio News channel and possibly get to the news bulletins at SAfm.

In addition, some of the gatekeepers who had witnessed the various apartheid governments' strangle-hold on the SABC consciously try to right such historical wrongs as in a case where "three or five people die in London [and] radio and TV would rather use that story and leave out 20 people who have been killed somewhere in a township" (G1 personal communication 2006). It is the experience of such propagandist gatekeeping of international news broadcast on SAfm during apartheid, that ignites the desire of Bulletins Output Editor G1 to crave more reporting on Africa: "I'd actually love to see us covering neighbouring countries [such as Mozambique] because ... Africa is our home" (2006 personal communication). One could postulate therefore that G1's personal experience with gatekeeping during apartheid would act as a positive force for the selection of international stories happening within Africa, and a negative force blocking the selection of international stories of equal or lower threshold (in comparison with African stories) happening outside Africa.

5.1.2 Gatekeepers' rank, work experience, job function and level of education

Just like historical experience, variables such as the work experience, rank and level of education of gatekeepers at SABC Radio during the period of study played an important role at the individual level of gatekeeping, with regards to selecting international news

that is broadcast on SAfm. Because executive gatekeepers such as the Head of Radio News, the Chief Editor for National Bulletins, the Foreign Desk Editor and Political Desk Editor mostly make decisions at the organisational level of gatekeeping (e.g. at the line talks), this discussion on individual decisions would be limited to comparisons between the output editors and the correspondents/reporters or presenters. Rank and work experience mainly determine the amount of leeway that non-executive gatekeepers (i.e. those below the Head of Radio News, Chief Editor for National Bulletins and heads of the various specialised desks) have to influence the passage of international news items from the input to the output gates of SABC Radio News. It was observed that the higher the rank and work experience of the non-executive gatekeeper, the greater the leeway they have to effect selection of international news items broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. This was consistent with Breed's (1955) and Shoemaker and Reese's (2001 in Shoemaker et al 2001) findings on general news decision making. The most influential gatekeepers of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins at the individual level of analysis are the bulletin (output) editors. They occupy the highest rank of the non-executive gatekeepers at SABC Radio News and their pole position in selection stems from their control of most international news items coming into SABC Radio News' organisational channel through the wires.

Although the output editors have the most individual control over the selection of international news to be aired on SAfm's bulletins, it is the correspondents who have the most leeway to initiate stories happening outside of South Africa directly covered by the SABC, due to their function as gatherers. According to the Head of the Washington Bureau in early 2006, most of the stories he reports are initiated by him. He even has the leeway to drop certain stories from his schedule and pick up new ones, as the occasion may require. For instance in his diary of the week of March 26-April 1, 2006, he had planned to cover a debate on human rights in Ethiopia in the US Congress but unilaterally decided to drop it because he later learnt that the Premier of Free State and the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Agriculture for the same state, were visiting the US to enhance trade deals between Free State and Washington State (Washington Bureau Chief 2006 personal communication). The gatekeeper dropped the Congress story

because he found it more compelling to report on something that had more cultural proximity to his South African target audiences. This example is however self-indicative of the fact that although the reporter was acting in his individual capacity, rather than reacting to organisational influences from the Johannesburg headquarters of the SABC, he was highly responding to routine forces of international news coverage whereby cultural proximity (see Galtung and Ruge 1965) seems to be the most important news value for SABC Radio News staff. Similarly, the SABC News Bureau Head in Nairobi in early 2006 maintains that most of the stories he sends to SABC Radio News are initiated by him. On his part, the Brussels Bureau Chief in early 2006 submits that he initiates 50 percent of the stories coming through to SAfm from his end, while the Johannesburg Bureau initiates 50 per cent of the international stories he sends back home. These instances point to the strong role played by enterprise channels of international news covered for SAfm's bulletins during the study, by gatherer-staff employed by the SABC.

As for the newswriters with the lowest rank in the international chain, the amount of leeway given them to handle selection decisions seem to tally with their experience and/or level of education. For example, it was observed that among the SAfm presenters, one of them, with five years of experience at the SABC (the highest among presenters) and holding a postgraduate degree, got the greatest amount of latitude from her editors to select international news stories that went into her bulletins. In fact, she was not just given the liberty to choose items from the repertoire already made by the bulletin editors but she could actually pick up stories from the wires and edit them herself (as could be seen in her initials at the end of edited stories within the content files of Newstar).

[I get] quite a lot [of freedom]! I think much more so than TV – they are told that they have to go with stories of certain importance. What's great is that I would present in the mornings, and there is a lot of space for discussion. Normally if there is not a clear lead, that we talk about! I've never really been told: 'you will go with that story!' (G3 2006 personal communication).

G3's situation contrasts with those of her colleagues, all lower in terms of educational profile. G11, for example, with a Certificate in Journalism (obtained after 1½ years in a post-high school institution) confirmed that the best she could do was make suggestions

to editors because she is “only a reader” (G11 2006 personal communication). In spite of this trend (the higher the gatekeeper’s level of education, the greater the latitude given them to select stories), it was noticed that G4 (with a first degree in Journalism) was allowed some latitude to select international stories from the ‘approved’ files (the files containing stories already selected and edited by the output editors but not yet ready for broadcast) in SABC Radio News’s content management system. However, he always informed the editors whenever he had made a selection decision. Concretely, most of the time, G4’s freedom was limited to the choosing of the headlines, which seemed to have been more affected by his routine sense of newsworthiness once the order of precedence had been set by his output editors in their selection (hence G4’s input was more of a routine than individual factor affecting gatekeeping).

The next point examines the way the SABC Radio newswriter’s role conception, i.e. as a gatekeeper or an advocate (Janovitz 1975), impinges on her/his selection or possible selection of international news aired on SAfm.

5.1.3 Gatekeepers’ role conceptions

Although the journalists interviewed for this study differed in their conceptions of their role as journalists, the majority of them identified themselves as ‘gatekeepers’, while up to a third of them said they practised both the role of a ‘gatekeeper’ and that of an ‘advocate’. Only two of the journalists gave responses that proved they regarded themselves as absolute ‘advocates’. While an absolute gatekeeper such as Bulletins Editor G9 argued that in news “facts are pinnacle” (2006 personal communication), Bulletins Editor G1 (an advocate) argued that the plight of the people must be considered first:

... what the people think, and what the people want ... is very important because I come from the background of [black people being] disadvantaged in this country. And many people like Aggrey Klaaste, who trained me, told me journalism was about changing the image of the country and making sure that the lives of the people changed. Let me give you an example: the fact, then, would be that ‘the Johannesburg City Council has thrown out a 90-year old grandmother because she did not pay rents’... But for me, the story will be that ‘an ailing old granny who doesn’t work has been thrown into the streets!’ The plight of the people, I think,

has got to be brought forward in the story... And I think we are lacking on that type of journalism, which puts people first (2006 personal communication).

In spite of G1's position above, she does not have much chance to alter the empiricist outlook in the selection of international news items broadcast on SAfm because, like her 'gatekeeper' (objective/empiricist) colleagues who edit bulletins, she mostly encounters 'factual' stories from the wire services such as SAPA and Reuters that distribute mostly news items treated 'objectively'.

However, the advocate correspondent in East Africa can practice his advocacy role since he functions at the first gate along the international news chain and is given a leeway, as we have seen above, to initiate stories. Because of the Nairobi Bureau Chief's (2006 personal communication) position that "a journalist exists to hold accountable government on behalf of those who are governed", he submits (to SABC Radio) a number of stories that centre on social issues in East Africa rather than just routine events. An example is the one he proposed for the line talk on Monday March 13 2006, on how bad roads in Kenya impede the transportation of children to school. He also investigated the corruption scandal involving some Kenyan government ministers in early 2006 and sought, albeit with difficulties, to interview some members of government to account for the scandal.

The next point examines the way gatekeepers cognitively arrive at decisions to include or exclude certain international stories broadcast on SAfm's bulletins.

5.1.4 Gatekeepers' models of thinking

As indicated in Chapter 2, several ways of thinking and decision making could affect the gatekeeping of (international) news. At SABC Radio, intentional news gatekeepers for SAfm's bulletins arrive at decisions to select or to overlook certain stories primarily through information processing. This is done mainly through the categorisation of news items. G4 (a presenter and, as such, a boundary role gatekeeper between SAfm's news team and the audience), makes this point eminent:

Balance is the key; a good mix is the key of a bulletin. You always know that you have your local content which makes up the majority [of the stories], then you always try to include one African story generally and one [other] international story, to end with. Generally, the order is local, Africa, [global].

A similar way to manage the cognitive process of selecting stories is the employment of some basic techniques, taught in journalism schools, to ascertain which stories are good enough to include in a bulletin as noted by an executive editor:

I would try to understand. There are some of the basic questions that all trained journalists are taught ... [the] what, why, when, how and who. I think by interrogating any copy that comes in with those questions, you should be able to make it clear ... You have to question, follow it up and put it in a way that you will understand it yourself when you listen to it (G6 2006 personal communication).

Questioning, following up and understanding issues around international stories before selection, as stated by G6 above, falls under decision-making theory mentioned in Chapter 2 and it is basically employed at SABC Radio by the correspondents in the three main international bureaux. The correspondent in the US, for instance, says it takes “good planning” to cope in his daily chores (2006 personal communication). This kind of planning is also executed by his colleagues in Nairobi and Brussels.

5.1.5 Gatekeepers' physical states of being

Apart from the cognitive facet of individual decision making in international news at SABC Radio's central newsroom, the physical human conditions of the gatekeepers also impinge on the international news items selected for SAfm's bulletins. Fatigue was noticed to be a limiting factor for the inputting of international news items into the 'approved' files of Newstar. At 10:04 am on March 19 2006, for instance, Bulletins Editor G15 told his presenter G4 that he had no time to re-script a story on a convention of Zimbabwe's main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), because he needed something to eat. The latest development on the story was therefore not selected for the next bulletin at 11am. In this case the human need for food had acted

as a negative force on the MDC story. This negative force was intense enough to stop the story from passing through the gate of the editor's desk, through to the studio gate. But it was not the strength of this force alone that inhibited the story from progressing to the final gate. The fact that an earlier version of the story had been presented in a previous bulletin, that morning, also eased the decision to stop the newer version from going through. This was clearly an instance when a force already behind the gate, affected another force standing in front of the gate by helping to block its passage (see Shoemaker 1991).

In another instance, Bulletins Editor G1 complained of a headache (due to work pressure) around 3pm on Monday March 13 2006. This physical condition was a negative force strong enough to deter her picking up of many international stories from the wires for editing. This example also strongly represents a routine factor affecting selection and what it suggests is that the less the physical stress on the bulletins editor, the greater the number of international stories to be selected for bulletins presented on SAfm; and the more the level of physical stress on the editor, the fewer the number of international stories to be possibly checked and selected.

5.1.6 Gatekeepers' personal inclinations and tastes

Apart from their physical state of being, gatekeepers' personal inclinations and tastes were noted to affect the selection process.

Because people are different – you would select a story but your fellow editor will actually ignore the story. News to a great extent, especially on a quiet day, is a very personal thing (G5 2006 personal communication).

G5's point above is consistent with the experience of one of SABC's correspondents:

...there are times when there are stories that I feel important or really attractive, and sometimes I feel that some of the lighter stories, the more cultural stories, should get onto the bulletins [but] the editors may feel that they have a very powerful lineup of other stories (G10 2006 personal communication).

From G10's point, one could infer that stories selected out of personal taste and not in accordance with the groupthink of editors and peers, could only have a better chance of reaching the broadcast gates at weekends, when bureaucratic gates such as the line talk, could be bypassed by the correspondent. Notwithstanding, the job function of the gatekeeper along the intra-organisational channel at SABC Radio News could determine how much of their personal taste for certain types of stories can affect international news selection. It was observed that the most strategic position (in terms of job function), at which individual taste could affect international news selection for SAfm, is that of the bulletins editor's desk. A reason for the bulletin editors' considerable autonomy in the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm is the constantly changing news environment (Soloski 1997) especially with international news on the wires. Hence Bulletins Editor G1 professed her inclination for a comic story around midday on March 14 2006 and got quite a lot a freedom to select it and move it through to the final gate. The story was about a British man who placed the picture of his daughter's untidy room on the shameit.com website to pressure her to change her filthy habits. G1 personally considered it a good lesson to share with her SAfm audiences, in conformity with her role as an advocate newsworker.

From comments made by the individual gatekeepers, as well as from observation, there was hardly any influence of individual bio-traits such as race and gender on the selection of international news for SAfm's bulletins. The limited visible impact of race as a variable on the selection process could be attributed to three factors: First, the end of apartheid has obliterated the need for SAfm's newscasts to try to portray black-ruled or anti-apartheid countries as chaotic and ungovernable (see Chapter 3). Second, the discourse of South African/pan-African nationalism, to which all the gatekeepers visibly subscribed, made them gravitate towards selecting mostly stories with relevance to the African continent (the news value of cultural proximity). Interestingly, all gatekeepers interviewed, no matter what racial group they belong to, asserted their Africaness. Thirdly, although some older 'nonwhite' gatekeepers had served SAfm during the apartheid era, it was clear from their interview responses that they had been frustrated

with the pre-democratic SA dispensation within which they found no real platform to put to practice the journalistic ethos of objectivity within a reflectionist paradigm (at least with regards to selecting international news). This may not necessarily be the case with the gatekeeping of national news stories aired on SAfm's bulletins.

With regards to gender, the situation looked fluid perhaps because of the short period available for the observation, but this variable rather seemed to have reflected on the selection of national stories (following the interviews). As noted in certain examples above, decisions made by individuals selecting international news stories to be aired on SAfm, during the observation for this research, were sometimes the outcome of their routine behaviours internalised through professional socialisation. These routine factors are fully examined in the next point.

5.2 The Routines Level Factors

Most of the gates at the level of communication routines associated with the gatekeeping of international news broadcast on SAfm are a recurrence of the gates seen at the individual level of analysis i.e. the source//reporter, source//executive editor gate; correspondent//foreign desk editor gate, the reporter//political editor gate, the correspondent//output editor, wire service//output editor, region//output editor gate (which is the editor's desks); and the presenter//audience gate (which is the studio). The only gate at the routines level not found at the individual level of analysis is the line talk//newsroom gate, which in effect, is the conference room for line talks. The most important routine variables affecting international news selection for SAfm by the central radio newsroom of the SABC during this study included: news values/professional journalistic ethos, newsflow on the wires/editing, the format of news items/availability of airtime, pressure from national stories/deadlines and the coverage of routine events. Each of these dependent variables under routine factors is examined below.

5.2.1 News values and professional journalistic ethos

All the journalists concerned with international news gatekeeping at SABC's central radio newsroom interviewed for this study, declared their attachment to professional

journalistic norms in contrast to the 'unprofessional' propagandist attitudes SABC Radio gatekeepers upheld during apartheid. These included their sense of news values and the creed of objectivity or giving 'both sides of the story'. In terms of news values, the SABC Radio newswriters interviewed generally made reference to all of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) news factors, except for unambiguity, as informing their choice of international news selection. It was, however, inferred from their responses to the question of how they treated stories that seemed difficult to grasp, that unambiguity was, nonetheless, a decisive factor. And although room was given for the interviewees to mention news values they thought were relevant to their situation but not covered by Galtung and Ruge's (1965) taxonomy, no alternatives were mentioned; instead, what cropped up was 'human interest' but it was generally subsumed into the category of unexpectedness. This confirms the view that Galtung and Ruge's classification constitutes the most influential explanation of news values worldwide (McQuail 1994 in Harcup and O'Neill 2001, Hjarvard 2002). From the observation and interviews, there was a random complementarity between all sorts of values informing the selection of international news items, although there was a slight tendency for the combination of the values of negativity and reference to elite persons (negative news referring to elite people) to dominate. However, from the semi-structured verbal interviews with 14 of the respondents and textual interviews with two output editors, G15 and G16 (see Chapter 4), there was a clear hierarchy of news values affecting the selection of international news items broadcast on SAfm. This hierarchy is explicated with the help of Table 1 and Table 2 below (representing G15 and G16's written explanations of their international news selection/rejection choices made in two of their shifts each) in conjunction with data gleaned from observation and the verbal interviews conducted with 14 other gatekeepers.

TABLE 1: NEWS VALUE CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

News Value	Degree of reflection of value in stories selected by editors where % is calculated on 40 stories for G16's selection and on 22 stories for G15's selection			
	G16		G15	
	No of Stories reflecting value	Percentage	No of Stories reflecting value	Percentage
Cultural proximity	24	60%	12	54%
Continuity	9	22.5%	7	31%
Threshold	8	20%	4	18.2%
Unexpectedness/ human interest	8	20%	1	4.5%
Consonance	7	17.5%	1	4.5%
Composition	2	5%	0	0%
Elite nations	2	5%	0	0%
Elite people	2	5%	0	0%
Negativity	2	5%	0	0%
Unambiguity	0	0%	0	0%
Personification	0	0%	0	0%
Frequency	0	0%	0	0%

In writing down general reasons why they selected or rejected the particular international news items from the SAPA and Reuters wire files during their shifts, Bulletin Editors G15 and G16 overwhelmingly referred to their news value judgment as the lead criterion. Table 1, for instance, indicates that the value of cultural proximity was the main reason informing the choice of 60% of the international news items selected by G16 during two of his editing shifts combined, while it was one of the major factors considered by G15, in his selection of 54% of his international news stories for two shifts. Table 1 also shows that after cultural proximity the next most important factors informing G16's selection choices were the news values of continuity (reflected in 20.5 % of his choices), threshold and unexpectedness/human interest (each reflected in 20% of his choices); and consonance (reflected in 17.5% of his choices). Similarly, the most important factors informing G15's selection choices, besides cultural proximity, were the news values of continuity (reflected in 31% of his choices) and threshold (reflected in 18.2 % of his

choices). This trend was in agreement with the responses of the other gatekeepers verbally interviewed.

Other factors (apart from news values) responsible for the selection of items by G15 and G16 were minimal as demonstrated by Table 2.

TABLE 2: OTHER FACTORS INFORMING SELECTION (G16 AND G15)

Factor	Degree of reflection of factor in stories selected by editors where % is calculated on 40 stories for G16's selection and on 22 stories for G15's selection			
	G16		G15	
	No of Stories reflecting factor	Percentage	No of Stories reflecting factor	Percentage
According to headline trend on BBC	2	5%	0	0%
Ready-made package by 'Feature Stories'/BBC	0	0%	2	9%

Only 5% of G16's selection choices were made because the BBC had set the precedence by giving prominence to those stories on its own newscasts. In a comparable manner, G15's only argument for selecting some stories besides their news value was that the stories had been well-packaged for bulletins by the BBC or by Feature Stories (the stories were good examples of ready-made bulletin packages). This accounted for his choices of just 9% of his selection during two of his shifts. As gleaned from interviewing (verbal and written) and observation, the values of cultural proximity, threshold and unexpectedness/human interest dominated the gatekeepers' reasons for selecting stories. Although continuity was not a leading criterion for selection according to the verbal interviews, data from G15 and G16's written interviews proved that it was also a very important factor.

Similarly, if a story was found to be deficient in any of the values of cultural proximity, threshold and unexpectedness/human interest, that would be a negative force acting

against its passage through the various routine gates. In addition, the lack of consonance in any story was a negative factor strong enough to block its passage from the wires through the bulletin editors' gates to the studio. Table 3 shows that G16 based his rejection of up to 42.5% of stories in the sample I drew from two of his shifts, partly on the premise of their lack of cultural proximity.

TABLE 3: NEWS VALUE CRITERIA FOR REJECTION

Prominent News Value Lacking	Degree of reflection of deficiency in news value of sample of stories rejected by editors where % is calculated on 40 stories for G16's sample and on 22 stories for G15' sample			
	G16		G15	
	No of Stories reflecting deficiency in value	Percentage	No of Stories reflecting deficiency in value	Percentage
Cultural proximity	17	42.5%	4	18.2%
Consonance	4	10%	0	0%
Unexpectedness/human interest	4	10%	2	9.1%
Threshold	3	7.5%	12	54.5%
Unambiguity	1	2.5%	0	0%
Elite nations	0	0%	1	4.5%
Elite people	0	0	0	0%
Negativity	0	0	0	0%
Personification	0	0	0	0%
Continuity	0	0%	0	0%
Composition	0	0%	0	0%
Frequency	0	0%	0	0%

Lack of consonance played a role in the rejection of 10% of the stories he dropped during the two shifts sampled, and this was also true for the lack of unexpectedness/human interest. G15 on his part rejected 54.5 % of stories mainly because he argued they lacked the value of threshold, while he dropped 18.2% of his rejected lot of stories sampled across two of his shifts due to their lack of cultural proximity. Meanwhile factors besides the lack of certain news values informing rejection of stories by G15 and G16 were marginal. Table 4 indicates that besides deficiency in news values, the lack of routine format and the lack of detail were the principal reasons informing G16's rejection of stories (each of them contributing to the dropping of just 7.5% of G16's sample of rejected stories).

TABLE 4: OTHER FACTORS INFORMING REJECTION (G16 AND G15)

Negative Factor	Degree of reflection of negative factor in sample of stories rejected by editors where % is calculated on 40 stories for G16's sample and on 22 stories for G15's sample			
	G16		G15	
	No of Stories reflecting negative factor	Percentage	No of Stories reflecting negative factor	Percentage
Lacks routine format	3	7.5%	0	0%
Lacks detail	3	7.5%	0	0%
Deadline pressure	2	5%	0	0%
Reflected in other stories	1	2.5%	0	0%
No airtime	0	0%	5	22.7%
Personal dislike	2	5%	1	4.5%

As for G15, the main reason why he rejected certain stories not related to news value deficiency was the lack of sufficient airtime (reflected in 22.7% of his sample of rejected stories). But this was no match to the number of stories G15 rejected due to their deficiency in certain news values (as discussed above).

From the above interplay of factors, therefore, it could be averred that the news values of cultural proximity, threshold, unexpectedness/human interest, continuity and consonance resonate the most to some gatekeepers at SABC Radio in their selection/rejection international news for broadcast on SAfm's bulletins.

Below are examples of stories selected/rejected by bulletin editors G15 and G16, in line with some of the most resonant news values at the central radio newsroom of the SABC (the stories copied verbatim from Newstar, are accompanied by the editors' reasons for selecting/ rejecting them in italic form).

1. G16'S SELECTION BASED ON CULTURAL PROXIMITY: "OZ - CYCLONE-CROPS

The cyclone that struck northeastern [sic] Australia yesterday has destroyed sugar cane crops worth about 900-million rand, or about ten percent of the country's

sugar production for the season. Cyclone Larry laid waste to sugar cane and banana plantations in Queensland state, as well as scores of houses in the town of Innisfail. No one was killed, and only minor injuries were reported. Local banana and sugar prices are expected to rise as a result of the disaster. Australia's sugar export industry is the world's third-largest."

G16's Comment: *"Story resonance for our own farming community; scale of disaster; Australia is a "kindred" country with many SA immigrants (despite strong sporting rivalry!)"*

2. G16'S SELECTION BASED ON CULTURAL PROXIMITY: "UGANDA-TORTURE

Sixteen Ugandan treason suspects charged with opposition leader Kizza Besigye are suing the government for more than six-million rand, saying they were tortured in custody. They are among 22 men arrested and later accused of treason alongside Besigye. The 16 say they were kicked, beaten and threatened by state security agents who wanted them to confess to being rebels. Besigye lost to President Yoweri Museveni in last month's election, but he's challenging the results in court. Besigye's treason trial - which he says politically motivated - starts next month.

G16'S Comment: *"Good opposition struggles of this kind in Africa always resonate as AU tries to make continent more democratic (of Zimbabwe and others). Uganda relatively close to SA."*

3. G15'S SELECTION BASED ON CULTURAL PROXIMITY: "SB/IRAQ

U.S. President George W. Bush, speaking on the eve of the third anniversary of the Iraq invasion, has urged Iraqi leaders to form a government of national unity as quickly as possible. This comes as U.S. and Iraqi troops press ahead with a sweep for insurgents north of Baghdad. ..."

Editor G15's Comment: *"Third anniversary of war: SA played key role in opposing conflict."*

4. G15'S SELECTION BASED ON CULTURAL PROXIMITY: "IRISH-LUCK

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams has been detained at Washington's Reagan National Airport in the US for over an hour after his name, and that of a travelling companion, appeared on a terror watch list. They were then subjected to a lengthy inspection and only released after calls were made to the State Department and other officials seeking an explanation. Adams whose IRA-linked party represents

most Catholics in Northern Ireland attended a meeting yesterday of Irish leaders with President George W. Bush and Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern at the White House. His detention caused Adams to miss his flight and a scheduled St. Patrick's Day appearance in Buffalo.”

G15's Comment: *“Irish issues can be relevant to SA. Government consulted on a few occasions regarding troubles.”*

5. G16'S SELECTION BASED ON UNEXPECTEDNESS/HUMAN INTEREST: “GERMAN/TODDLER

German doctors say a toddler with suspected chronic asthma was found to have a metal screw in his lungs. The 19-month-old boy, from Bonn, was suffering from severe breathing difficulties. Doctors at the Sankt Augustin hospital had tried a number of different asthma treatments. In desperation they decided to take x-rays and found the boy literally had a screw loose - in his lungs.”

G16'S Comment: *“Bizarre human interest story.”*

6. G15'S SELECTION BASED ON CONTINUITY AND CULTURAL PROXIMITY: “SLOBO

Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party says it expects tens of thousands of people to attend the funeral service today for the late Serb strongman. However analysts say the figure may be a lot lower as most Serbs no longer view Milosevic as a national hero. He died in prison at The Hague from a heart attack. Milosevic had been standing trial for war crimes. He'll be laid to rest under a linden tree in his home town of Pozarevac outside Belgrade where he first kissed his future wife. The BBC's Matt Prodger says Milosevic's family, who are not in Serbia, fear arrest if they attend his funeral service...

G15's Comment: *“Major international running story. Issues of international justice. SA plays important role in on this.”*

7. G15'S REJECTION FOR LACK OF THRESHOLD AND CONSONANCE: “BC-IRAQ-SOLDIERS-DEATH TWO US SOLDIERS KILLED, ONE WOUNDED IN IRAQ ATTACK

“BAGHDAD, March 18 (Reuters) - Two U.S. soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division were killed and another wounded in an attack northwest of Tikrit on March 16, the U.S. military said in a statement on Saturday...”

G15's comment: *"Becoming routine. We want for these stories to 'pile up' and become significant."*

8. G16'S REJECTION FOR LACK OF CONSONANCE: "BRITAIN-CARTOONS"

"CARDIFF, Wales March 21 Sapa-AP

The Anglican Church in Wales on Tuesday asked readers to send back copies of a church magazine that contains a cartoon depicting the Prophet Muhammad. The church said it was recalling the magazine to avoid causing offense [sic] to Muslims."

G16's Comment: *"Usable story but Wales is a low-profile area."*

9. G16'S REJECTION LACK OF CONSONANCE AND THRESHOLD:

"AMMAN, March 22 **(Reuters)** - Jordan sentenced to death nine Islamist militants on Wednesday for their part in 2002 riots in the southern city of Maan in which seven people were killed. Four of them were sentenced in absentia by a three-man military court which also handed another militant a 10-year prison sentence. Dozens of others were acquitted. ..."

G16'S Comment: *"Not uncommon in Muslim world, where many countries have the death penalty. More usable after executions."*

10. G15'S REJECTION FOR LACK OF CULTURAL PROXIMITY:

"WASHINGTON, March 17 **(Reuters)** - Airport screeners need to do a better job of detecting unassembled bombs, the Transportation Security Administration chief said on Friday after an investigation showed bomb-making material had been smuggled through checkpoints at 21 airports. ..."

G15's Comment: *"At this stage, not critical to South African audiences."*

A brief comment about these examples is in order. In Story Example 1 (selected by G16), the values of cultural proximity, threshold and unexpectedness/human interest clearly play complementary roles as positive forces affecting its selection. The reason advanced by G15 for rejecting Story Example 7 indicates its lack of threshold and consonance with what the gatekeeper would like to see happen. If one could capture G15's sense of 'piling

up' (see his comments in italics above), then one could predict when a story of that sort would be allowed to get to the studio gate at SAfm. An international news item would be selected therefore if it tallies with G15's mental pre-image of it (see Galtung and Ruge 1965).

In association with news values indicated above, many gatekeepers in charge of international news selection at SABC Radio strongly assert their commitment to the empiricist norms of journalism such as factual 'accuracy', 'objectivity' (neutrality) and 'balance'. A major instance where the newswriters responsible for selecting international news for SAfm's bulletins execute their sense of news judgment and the journalistic norms discussed heretofore, is during the editing of such stories – the majority of which come through the wires. The impact of newsflow on the wires and the gatekeepers' approach to editing international stories from these services is what we now turn to.

5.2.2 Newsflow on the wires/editing

Although only a third of the news processors interviewed said the flow of news on the wires was the biggest broad factor affecting the selection of international news transmitted on SAfm's bulletins, observation revealed that this was an equally important factor influencing selection beside professional news values. An instance that showed the SABC Radio News' dependence on the wires for international news was the anxiety caused by the inaccessibility to SAPA files, in Newstar, on Thursday March 16 2006, following an apparent server breakdown at the agency. Once the SAPA problem was resolved and accessibility to its stories re-established on Friday March 17, the bulletin editors at SABC Radio News expressed great relief. As a point of fact, gatekeepers of international news in the central newsroom of SABC Radio trust the news judgment of the wire services they use (especially SAPA and Reuters). As such, foraging for stories to be used from these wires strictly on news values other than cultural proximity could prove a redundant task for the gatekeepers, given Soloski's (1997) submission that news values are a transorganisational control mechanism for journalists' gatekeeping output. Apart from those stories that were highly culturally proximate to South African/African

geopolitics, a high proportion of the stories selected followed the 'top stories' trend of the wire services themselves, i.e. SAPA and Reuters. What this demonstrates is that the headlining of certain stories (especially those found to be culturally proximate) by the wire services SAPA and Reuters constituted a strong force working to help them get to the SAfm broadcast gates, while the failure to treat such stories prominently made a weak force influencing their rejection as international news content on SAfm's bulletins.

5.2.3 The format of news items/availability of airtime

In the last point, it was indicated that international news stories given prominence by the wire services had an edge over those not highlighted in the wires. Similarly, for stories coming from non-SABC reporters, those in ready-made bulletin format were given more attention than those that had not been originally formatted for bulletins. Practically, shorter, terser stories (on the wires or from BBC Radio) judged to be newsworthy were most likely to pass through the routine gates leading to the SAfm airwaves, than longer, complicated ones that required too much editing time. A format that proved to be very 'seductive' for the gatekeepers studied was good sound bites, most of which emanated from BBC Radio. All the gatekeepers interviewed stressed the superiority of mere hard copy versions of stories that were more newsworthy over stories accompanied by sound bites that were less newsworthy; but it was clear from observation that once a case of newsworthiness had been established for a set of international stories, the ones with short, appealing and good quality sound bites were given preference, while those without necessary sound bites were relegated. A case in point occurred in the afternoon of Sunday March 19 2006, while presenter G11 was busy preparing her 4pm bulletin. G11 asked the output editor on duty if she could use a story on the convention held by Zimbabwe's MDC party, already selected and edited. The editor gave her accord and added that the presenter (G11) could also line up a story on Uganda's political situation. G11 took a look at the Uganda story and rejected it with the justification that it did not have a sound bite. The Uganda story was thus prevented from going through the studio gates by the boundary role gatekeeper – the presenter. This was due to the negative force of lack of sound bite acting on it that proved stronger than the force of newsworthiness, which had caused the bulletins editor to select the story from the wires in the first place.

In another instance, there was some interplay of energy between the positive force of availability of sound bite and the negative force of unavailability of airtime. Earlier on Sunday March 19 2006, in the newsroom, Bulletins Editor G15 laboriously listened to the BBC and edited a sound bite of former Iraqi interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi who described the unstable situation in Iraq as a “civil war”. In the 11 am bulletin following G15’s editing of that story, presenter G4 used the hard copy on the Iraqi situation but excluded the Allawi sound bite. I asked G4 why he left out the sound bite and he explained he dropped it because of insufficient airtime. He proceeded to ask his editor (G15) if he could still use the story during the midday bulletin. G15 responded with a broad smile: “Sure, it’s a good piece of sound” (2006 personal communication). In this case (even though a good sound bite is generally a positive routine force acting on the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm), limited airtime available for bulletins acted as a negative force constraining the passing of the story through the studio broadcast gates. However, the intensity of the force in front of the studio gate, i.e. ‘a good piece of sound’ from BBC Radio, coupled with the effort of the editor to copy and edit it, proved stronger than that of time constraint; hence the interview finally passed through the studio gates during the bulletin at noon.

In his concluding comment on the reasons for his rejection of a sample of international stories during his shifts of Tuesday March 21 and Wednesday March 22 2006, Bulletins Editor G16 returned to the issue of the unavailability of airtime:

Time and space at editor’s disposal (of bulletins) constraints play a huge role [in the rejection of some international news items]. Editor [sic] cannot spend time writing stories that have only a slight chance of being used. Most of the ... stories [I] rejected fall into this category. They would have a better chance of being written/used on a ‘dry’ news day such as on weekends (2006 personal communication).

5.2.4 Pressure from national stories/deadlines

G16’s comment above is also indicative of the fact that pressure from the traffic of national stories in the SABC News and Current Affairs’ content management system

(Newstar) acts as a negative force impeding an influx of international news items at the SAfm studio gates. An executive editor at SABC Radio News confirms this:

... the influx of international news is sometimes something that doesn't really bother us that much because you'd find that most of those stories ... don't have a bearing on us. Actually, we are more challenged by the influx of local stories (G12 2006 personal communication).

Consequently, a limited amount of traffic from national stories within Newstar, acts as a positive force for the selection of more international items to be broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. Around 11 am on Monday March 20 2006, for example, Bulletins Editor G1 complained of the shortage of national stories in Newstar since the start of the morning shift. I checked in the system and realised that between 4:55am (when the first morning editor signed in) and 11am, there had only been 18 national stories, fresh or reworked from the previous day in the files of Newstar. Contrarily, up to 20 international stories, all happening outside South Africa, had been edited and used in the morning bulletins. The dearth of national news stories in the system had therefore acted as a positive force for the passage of several international news items through the routine gates. This is a routine phenomenon that may affect many national media outfits, given that their primary audiences are thought of as not interested in foreign or international news as some studies have found (e.g. Hall 1973 in Motta 1977, Harcup and O'Neil 2001). Pressure from the influx of national stories also brings about deadline pressure in general.

5.2.5 Coverage of routine events

Observation at the central radio newsroom of the SABC showed that international news selection initiated by the SABC itself through its correspondents or home staff (mostly those of the Politics Desk) was heavily dependent on routine events organised by governmental bodies (such as the presidency or parliament), inter-governmental bodies (such as the UN, the AU or the EU) and well-known international NGOs. This point relates to social-institutional influences on the selection of international news, but it suffices to say here that the work schedule of SABC correspondents in Nairobi, Washington and Brussels, as well as that of the Politics Desk (that covers a lot of international stories) is bureaucratically organised by planned events, a circumstance

consistent with Fishman's (1980 in Schudson 2000) findings elsewhere. While almost all the correspondents and editors interviewed admitted that both events and social issues are important to cover, they also confessed that in practice bulletins on SAfm (unlike current affairs programmes) are not the ideal place to broadcast social issues given their 5-minute format. Bulletins Editor G1 (2006 personal communication) blamed the event-oriented outlook of international news on SAfm's bulletins on the wires; a situation which one of her bosses feels is regrettable:

The unfortunate situation that we find ourselves in when it comes to international news is that our sources mainly cover international events. It's on very few occasions that you find social issues – in fact human interest stories. Unless we commission them, we hardly get them. I must confess to you; here at the SABC, for sound purposes, we use the BBC for example and other media houses which mainly cover lots of big events. But when it comes to the stories that we do locally, we look at not only the events but we try to go deeper and find the issues out of those events (G13 2006 personal communication).

This event-prone approach in selecting international news stories is akin to what used to happen in the past at SABC (hence at SAfm) according to the corporation's Washington correspondent:

...both [events and social issues] are equally important, you know, the event and the social-economic aspect. But in the past, I must say to you, we tended to broadcast events at the SABC more than socio-economic issues. I'm not sure if there's been any drastic change. Right now, I'm unable to watch our news on a daily basis. But that was the case where [sic] we would go for events, and as such, we were not really informing people (2006 personal communication).

But that really is still the case at SABC Radio News, as the two-week observation for this study showed. In fact, a litany of official events such as presidential visits and conferences/sessions by international and governmental organisations dominated international news coverage. Examples of these included: the visit of UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to South Africa in March 2006, the visit of President Thabo Mbeki to the DRC, Italy and Libya in March 2006; the visit of Liberia's newly elected President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the US in March 2006 and the visit of Tanzania's President Jakaya Kikwete to Kenya in the same month. An examination of the stories rejected by

editors G15 and G16 in their written interviews also reveals their tendency to ignore stories on the wires that did not arise from coverage of organised events, especially if such stories were deficient in the newsworthy elements of threshold and unexpectedness/human interest. This signifies that organised events have a stronger propensity of passing through the bulletin gates of SAfm than stories on conceptual socio-economic/political issues.

The routine factors affecting the selection of international news broadcast on bulletins at SAfm, so far examined, could be expected to occur in other media organisations (especially broadcast media in this case) given Shoemaker's (1991), Shoemaker et al's (2001) and Soloski's (1997) contention that newswriters across different organisations are affected by the same routines in gatekeeping as a consequence of their shared journalistic ethos.

5.3. Conclusion

This chapter set out to establish patterns of selection of international news for SAfm's bulletins produced by forces related to the individual and routine levels of gatekeeping analysis. At the individual level, the data showed that the gatekeepers' rank, work experience, job function and level of education, combined, operated decisively but almost on equal terms with other forces to inform international news selection during the period of the study. Various factors at the routine level of analysis also influenced the selection of international news broadcast on the bulletins of SAfm during the time of the study but the motivation for selecting or rejecting stories was mostly hinged on news values. The flow of content on the wires was also a decisive routine factor affecting gatekeeping of international news.

The following chapter presents the data gleaned from the organisational and social-institutional levels of analysis of this study.

Chapter 6: Findings at the Organisational and Social Institutional Levels of Analysis

6.0 Introduction

While the previous chapter dwelt on the individual and routine factors impinging on the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm, this chapter visits the data obtained from observing the forces acting on international news selection for the station's bulletins at the organisational and social-institutional levels of analysis. The data gathered from the organisational level of analysis are presented first, followed by those distilled from the social-institutional level of analysis. Each of these levels is broken down into three operational factors that affected the gatekeeping of international news at SABC Radio News during the study. A description of the gates appearing at each level of analysis precedes the underpinnings of gatekeeping advanced therein, while the chapter ends with a reminder of some salient points noted.

6.1 The Organisational Level Factors

Just like all the international news gates identified at the individual level of analysis were subsumed into the routine gates, all the gates encountered at both of these levels combined, recur at the organisational level of analysis. However there is an additional gate specific to the organisational context of SABC Radio News – the regions//line talk gate (this gate is where representatives of all nine regions of SABC Radio news present their suggestions for news coverage and treatment). Meanwhile factors found to act on the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm at this level included SABC policies/organisational structure, editorial control and newsroom decision making, and organisational resources. Many issues pertaining to some of these factors have been examined at the routine level and, to some extent, the individual level of analysis; hence, the following discussion shall endeavour not to belabour points already made in this regard.

6.1.1 SABC policies/organisational structure

As was discussed in point 3.3, international stories broadcast on SAfm's newscasts are selected within a framework of policy emanating from the Charter of the Corporation (Broadcasting Act as amended in 2002 in Republic of South Africa 2003) which give rise to the SABC's own set of news policies (SABC Editorial Policies 2004). Summarily, the Charter of the Corporation underlines the editorial independence of the SABC and prescribes a modus operandi for its PBS stations (such as SAfm) that is consistent with the journalistic norms of objectivity, accuracy, and balance. All of these points are re-echoed in the corporation's editorial policies, which further insist on the need to reflect a South African point of view in the SABC's (hence SAfm's) coverage of world news.

Asked about their appreciation of these policies, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed at SABC Radio felt that the Corporation's editorial policies promote ideal international news coverage. Most of these gatekeepers showed a clear sense of what the SABC Editorial Policies (2004) stipulate about the reporting of international events (especially the boosting of Africa's image and the approach to stories from a South African point of view). However, it could be deduced that some of them (particularly the young presenters) may never have read the policies, but had simply internalised them through regular guidance from superiors, as Breed (1955) has noted. While Presenter G4 (2006 personal communication), for instance, thinks that "the SABC itself doesn't have a policy in black and white about it", G11 (2006 personal communication) asserts that "African news ... at the SABC does not constitute international news". In spite of her erroneous view that 'intra-continental' is not 'international', she knows that "African stories are huge at the SABC" (G11 2006 personal communication), hence she has a fundamental understanding of policy. One could therefore argue that the SABC Radio newswriters implicated in the selection of international news to be relayed on SAfm's bulletins, have SABC policy provisions buried in their subconsciousness. This therefore affects, to some extent, the general pattern of international news selected for bulletins on the station (more positive coverage of Africa than during apartheid) in spite of the fact that all the gatekeepers interviewed said most of their international news selection was

hinged on professional journalistic values as opposed to a conscious move to execute policy.

The SABC Editorial Policies (2004) also vest the authority for editorial decisions in the broadcaster's editorial staff. This creates an editorial structure (also discussed in Chapter 3) that is supposed to have a bearing on the selection of international news at SABC Radio for the bulletins of various SABC stations (but particularly for SAfm). From the bureaucratic structure of SABC News and Current Affairs, one would have expected to encounter an international news selection process bedevilled by procedures of upward referral, like it was in the apartheid era. But that was not the case during observation for this study. Instead, as noted earlier, the personnel with the most power to decide the type of international news items selected for broadcast on SAfm's news bulletins are the bulletin editors in the central newsroom of SABC Radio; a pattern that reflects Shoemaker's (1991) view that centrally located gatekeepers may have more power in decision making than gatekeepers located elsewhere. In fact, the direct boss of all the bulletin editors acknowledges that it would be counter-productive to maintain hard-and-fast rules for upward referral in the gatekeeping of international news (in particular) and news (in general) at SABC Radio's central newsroom (2006 personal communication). In the same vein, the Editor of the Foreign News Desk honestly admits that he does not decide what international stories ultimately go through the bulletin gates.

However, one must point out the antecedents of the bulletin editors' own worldview of international news – notably the stories on the Reuters and SAPA wires as well as sound bites from the BBC. The excessive use of international news stories from these external organisations is allowed at SABC Radio News because of its standing agreements with Reuters, SAPA and the BBC. This arrangement differentiates the SABC's central radio newsroom from the average American newsroom where, in Schudson's (2000) view, CNN is the taken-for-granted background television noise. There was hardly ever any constant television background noise in the newsroom, during this study, although the tendency was to have BBC World running on several occasions. Therefore, output on Reuters, SAPA and the BBC set much of the parameters of the kinds of international

news stories selected for broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. But the intensity of the forces of the Reuters-SAPA-BBC output interplays with SABC's policy of reflecting a more positive picture of Africa in its newscasts in direct contrast to what was obtainable during apartheid (see Chapter 3). Concretely, stories emanating from these organisations must carry some minimum value of cultural proximity to Africa and, in the case where they are directly linked to the continent, many of them are expected to reflect a better picture of it (unlike the practice by apartheid SAfm) in order to be selected and aired.

6.1.2 Editorial control and newsroom decision making

Notwithstanding the effect of the output from Reuters, SAPA and the BBC on the selection of international news broadcast on the bulletins of SAfm, there is a basic mechanism of editorial control at SABC Radio News that affects the selection of such news. Editorial control for international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins stems mainly from the line talks, especially in the case of stories covered by SABC correspondents or home-based staff in the regions. But because of the terse nature of bulletins, many decisions made at the line talks concerning international news filed by correspondents or local reporters are not relevant to these bulletins (but rather to current affairs programmes). Instead, an informal kind of decision making was observed to ensue between the bulletin editors and the presenters with regard to the selection of international news stories that were destined for SAfm's bulletins. A lot of camaraderie was noticed between the editors and their presenters. Presenters could be overheard making selection suggestions to the editors, mostly in relation to headlines of international news items. Presenter G4 and Bulletins Editor G9, for instance, constantly poked fun at each other; but G4's respect and admiration for G9 was discernible. Such respect and admiration of their editors and senior staff is one of the reasons why journalistic juniors in the newsroom keep to organisational policy (Breed 1955). Therefore, apart from the direct influence bulletin output editors wield over international news selection at SABC Radio News, an atmosphere of collective decision-making with their subordinates in the newsroom affects the general outlook of such stories that go through the studio gates of SAfm.

Nonetheless, the situation is not very rosy for correspondents and story initiatives could sometimes be killed because of bureaucratic control from the central newsroom:

Sometimes there's a story, for instance, in New York; I have to go to New York but I need to get an approval from Johannesburg [while] the people there are sitting on top of the story. They are going to [need to] tell me today that "ok you can go tomorrow". It affects the whole lot of my planning (Washington Bureau Chief 2006 personal communication).

Organisational bureaucracy therefore acts as a negative force to correspondents' enterprise or routine inputting of international stories in the content management system catering for bulletins on SAfm. And just like organisational bureaucracy, the selection of international news disseminated on SAfm's bulletins is affected by the availability or scarcity of infrastructural and human resources at SABC Radio News. The next point examines this issue.

6.1.3 Organisational resources

Both the editorial and junior staff directly concerned with the gatekeeping of international news transmitted on SAfm's bulletins acknowledge the deployment effort by the SABC News and Current Affairs management to cover international news for the station. The capacity and will of the Corporation to fulfill its PBS mandate and editorial policy by seriously educating South Africans on international current affairs, along with SAfm's payoff line as 'South Africa's news and information leader' contribute in mobilising efforts to select and churn out a huge amount of international news on the station's bulletins. An executive editor at SABC Radio News speaks of this proudly:

... we are sending people out to Africa, Europe and what have you. We're opening our own bureaux there because this is how much we want the news from other parts of the world... We send our own reporters to cover events outside South Africa... we send them to Mozambique, Malawi, you name it. Some of them have been to Israel. Some went [to Asia] to cover the Tsunami. They've been all over because we want to get news first hand – we want to get our own people to tell us what is happening... We established our presence in Pakistan, reporting on the earthquake; we established our presence in Malawi reporting on the floods. The same goes for Mozambique or what have you. We are there! (G13 2006 personal communication).

In terms of financial resources to cover (and therefore select) international news broadcast on SAfm, an executive editor submits that the Corporation has got the means though not in total abundance. To him, the limitations to covering international news (hence selecting such news) for SAfm's bulletins are mostly technological (G2 2006 personal communication); a constraint that could also be placed under routine factors impeding international news selection on that station. Two of the Corporation's correspondents confirmed this point. For the Washington Bureau Chief (personal communication 2006) there are usually problems with the SABC's satellite dishlink in Randburg – where his stories sometimes get stuck and miss deadlines. For the Brussels Bureau Head (personal communication 2006), the Clip Mail system he uses to email stories from Brussels is very unpredictable. The Foreign Desk Editor is familiar with these problems faced by his correspondents and adds that the impediments to international news coverage and selection, that would suit the needs of SAfm, are mostly infrastructural:

We have very limited bureaux. Sometimes we would have liked to get other angles or maybe other stories to what we're getting on the wires. So I think capacity would be the biggest factor (2006 personal communication).

Indeed, during the observation done for this study, infrastructural problems were noticed to constitute the most intense negative force acting against the generation of some international stories wanted by the SABC Radio News staff to be broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. The inadequacy of both equipment and human resources in African countries, for instance, was seen to be the major problem constraining SABC Radio News from covering (hence selecting) several angles on Zimbabwe's economic and political crises, by the morning line talk attendees of Friday March 17 2006. The argument here is that in having the capacity to generate stories, gatekeepers get choices to make in terms of selection of angles, sources, number of times to be rebroadcast, etc. The difficulties involved with covering the anticipated presidential elections in the DRC, owing to inadequate equipment there, also emerged from line talk discussions on that same date. The inadequacy of human and technological resources therefore increases SAfm's

dependence on the wires for selection of international news items aired on its bulletins as G1 (2006 personal communication) confirmed in point 5.2.5 above.

We now turn to the social institutional factors affecting the gatekeeping of international news on SAfm's bulletins.

6.2 The Social-institutional Level of Analysis

At the social-institutional level of analysis, there is a recurrence of just some of the gates seen at the three preceding levels of analysis. Observation showed that there are four main social-institutional gates that are essential to international news gatekeeping for the bulletins of SAfm: the source//reporter gate, the source//executive editor gate, the line talk//newsroom gate and the presenter//audience gate (which is the studio). What happens at any of these gates interrelates with what goes on at all other gates not directly linked to social institutions. Social institutions impacting on the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm include news sources, audiences and broadcasting regulatory bodies. During the two weeks of observation for this research, there was no clue on the impact of advertisers on the bulletins broadcast on SAfm, in contrast to the arguments of some political economists (e.g. Shoemaker 1991, Shoemaker et al 2001; Golding and Murdock 2000, Herman and Chomsky 1988). Even if SAfm gets additional income from advertising, apart from funding from the fiscus through TV licensing, such adverts have no direct impact on the kinds of international stories selected for its news bulletins by SABC Radio News, which simply acts as a news feeder to SAfm (as a radio station, SAfm is managed differently from SABC Radio News). With these points in mind, a step-by-step explication of the way these institutions influence the selection of international news for the bulletins of SAfm, is in order.

6.2.1 Sources: the space of officialdom

Even though most of the interviewees for this research said they had no particular preference for official/elite sources over unofficial sources⁶ in their international news selection decisions, observation (especially at the line talks) made it obvious that official sources, e.g. government/international organisations' spokespersons, made a huge impact on the types of items selected as international news for SAfm's bulletins; a pattern observed in similar studies conducted elsewhere (e.g. Schudson 2000, Manning 2001, Hall 1982, Hall 1997, Good 1989). The view that in foreign policy coverage, both print and broadcast media journalists prefer government officials to other kinds of sources (Steele 1995, Hallin et al 1993 in Schudson 2000) holds true for SABC Radio News especially in the instance of routine events, as affirmed by Bulletins Editor G5 (2006 personal communication): "... if it's a political decision or a foreign-affairs-decision-making story, then I would opt for the official sources". This point is supported in a more illustrative way by G2:

I think you have to work with official sources because it's officialdom that the international arena works with. So if [President] Mbeki is in [the] DRC, he's talking to Kabila, we're dealing with official sources. But ... where the stories impact on other issues, we depart from officialdom. Natural disasters for example, come into play. Genocide – you don't have to deal with officialdom if you're on the ground. They are just as important, if not more important than the officialdom (2006 personal communication).

Bulletins Editor G5 (2006 personal communication) argues that in a situation such as the collapse of a building, the reporter would use eye-witness reports but would endeavour to "get [his/her] real facts later". The implication of G5's statement is that 'real facts' come from official sources. This dependence by gatekeepers of international news, at SABC Radio, on official sources could be further gleaned from the work plan of its international bureau-chiefs. SABC's Washington Bureau Chief, for instance, plans his day as follows:

⁶ In this thesis, 'official/elite' sources refer to government spokespeople, diplomats, political party leaders, civil society group heads, 'experts', academics, etc.; unofficial sources refer to 'ordinary' citizens without leadership roles.

I wake up at 6 o'clock local time. I must reach the office at 7 o'clock. I start contacting my [sources] in South Africa ... and I contact my [sources] at the [US] Congress ..., the [South African] Embassy and everywhere. That's when I start writing my diary. Then there are times that I get emails from people who know me. They would tell me that my president will be here, you know, so and so will be here; [that] there is this event happening, and then I compile the diary for a week (2006 personal communication).

The prominence given to official sources in the above gatekeeper's diary in Washington is a mirror image of how the East Africa Bureau Chief operates from Nairobi:

When we put together our diary ... we call major agencies like the UN, that's UN Peace, because of the current situation in the horn of Africa at the moment, and that's where we gather information ... on some of the issues we could follow up [on] with stories (2006 personal communication).

The reliance on official sources (by SABC's news gatherers) for international news, eventually broadcast on SAfm, acts as a negative force against the selection of items that cannot be attributed to such sources in cases where they are unavailable or uncooperative with the newswriters:

... when you source information about a story, are the persons willing to give you the details? I am talking of a situation like one involving corruption, in Kenya here, which we have been covering. It [has not] been very easy to get information from the government; to get information from the Kenyan anti-corruption authorities and support our stories (East Africa Bureau Chief 2006 personal communication).

Many examples like this, of international stories not being able to go beyond the line talk-newsroom gate because the Foreign Desk Editor, the Politics Desk Editor or the Head of Regions was still anticipating the release of information by sources to their reporters on the field, abounded during observation for this research. At the afternoon line talk of Tuesday March 14 2006, for example, a story on a diarrhoea crisis in Botswana was placed on hold because the Mafikeng Region of SABC News was still trying to get in touch with officials of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Botswana. Thus, the inability to get an official source from an international governmental institution worked

as a negative force that outplayed the positive routine force of cultural proximity; and it consequently constrained the immediate selection of the diarrhoea story to be broadcast on SAfm's newscast. Similarly, in the morning line talk of Thursday March 23 2006, a follow-up on the EU's banning of 92 airlines (most of them from Africa) from flying its skies (for safety reasons) was stifled because the offices of those airlines in Brussels were closed and the Brussels Bureau Chief could not therefore procure sound bites from their officials. Consequently, the inaccessibility to official sources acted as a negative force hampering the selection of the EU-ban story from being further inserted into SAfm's newscasts. This example is a convergence of social-institutional and routine factors affecting international news selection for SAfm's bulletins.

The following are a list of other examples indicating the importance of official sources in the coverage of international news for SAfm's bulletins. On March 13, when the outbreak of avian flu was reported in Cameroon, line talk participants were very much concerned with getting an EU official to talk about the aid the EU had promised for African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries affected by the virus. Since SABC Radio News did not succeed to get an official on that day, they tried again the next day (March 14) and succeeded, hence bringing back the story to the limelight. In another instance on March 17 2006, Prince Philippe of Belgium was visiting SA and the Editor of the Foreign News Desk requested the reporter covering the story to ask the Prince what support Belgium was mobilising for the planned DRC election. Also, on March 22 it was reported that five million people faced starvation in East Africa due to drought. The morning line talk attendees asked the correspondent in East Africa to conduct an interview with a World Food Programme (WFP) official.

In spite of these and many other cases exposing the high dependence of SABC Radio News gatekeepers on governmental, inter-governmental and 'expert' sources to gather international stories, some of them still showed a commitment to seeking non-official sources. An example included the interviewing on March 17 2006 of wheelchair-bound Andrew Dube, who was one of 15 disabled people purportedly forced off South African Airways (SAA) Flight 170 from Lilongwe in Malawi to Johannesburg (SABC Radio

News also interviewed officials of SAA as a way of holding plutocrats account to the public for their misdeeds). Another such case was the selection from the BBC of an interview with one of London's protesters against the US-led attack on Iraq in 2003, Ben Griffin, during the third anniversary of the war on March 19 2006. Using interviews from such unofficial sources according to Bulletins Editor G1 (2006 personal communication), is done to deal with the problem of wire services using official sources of international organisations to try to push "the agenda of their [own] countries". Another output editor, voices his dislike for the official-source monotony in (international) news selection:

I don't like to go with just the official 'government-says, government-says'. I'd rather go with somebody who can give me the background story. But a source is a source. A government official may be a source who does not wish to be named and therefore could be a very valuable source. But yeah – a source is a source (G9 2006 personal communication).

This non-traditional journalistic approach to information sources also has some resonance for one of SABC's correspondents:

We generally spend a lot of time talking to contacts that we build up here, other journalists often talk about stories, [we read] local papers; and, generally, people in the community contact us, ... we meet them at social events and they tell us things that are happening. These are all the ways we source information (G10 2006 personal communication).

The Chief Editor of SABC's National Bulletins regrets this state of affairs but cannot apparently take the risk (see Golding and Murdock 2000) of changing such a well tested format:

With current affairs [programmes] we do get voices of the other people but when it comes to bulletin copy, bulletins are short and we get just a sound of this person or that person – **we unfortunately use the officials** [my emphasis – A. T.⁷]. We would prefer to have the voices of the people (2006 personal communication).

⁷ Referring to the emphasis of the author of this thesis – Akara Ticha (A. T.).

Just like in the apartheid era, SABC Radio News still seeks the patronage of Government in its efforts to cover international news in difficult circumstances. A case in point was a discussion at the morning line talk of Friday March 17 2006, on the difficulties in covering the DRC (in view of its anticipated presidential election) stemming from lack of the appropriate equipment on the field. The Head of Radio News said the SA government was deploying equipment there and he had commissioned the political desk reporter, who was in the DRC to cover Mbeki's visit to the country (the previous day) as well as the country's preparations for the election, to negotiate with South African government officials for help with equipment.

Apart from such direct dealings with Government with regards to international news, there was no hint of explicit governmental control on international news selection for SAfm's bulletins during observation for this study. Also, there was nothing concrete indicating any NP-style influence by SA's ruling party in 2006 (ANC) on the gatekeeping of international news for SAfm's newscasts. As Bulletins Editor G5 (2006 personal communication) maintains, SABC Radio News is "... not really under pressure to serve a certain agenda".

Besides the slight influence by Government as a benefactor to the coverage (and consequently selection) of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins, prominent inter-governmental institutions such as the UN affect the selection process not solely due to the dependence on them as sources but also as sponsors. In the same way the Head of SABC Radio News demanded for contact to be made with government officials in the DRC for help to cover the country's preparations for elections (seen above), instructions were given to the Politics Desk reporter, who was on that assignment, to get in touch with the officials of the UN Radio there.

After examining the way in which sources impact and could impact on the selection of international news broadcast on the bulletins of SAfm, let us turn to another important social-institution whose influence on such a process must not be overlooked – audiences.

6.2.2 The influence of audiences

The most important clue to how audiences influence the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins in 2006 was got from the responses of interviewees, especially with regard to their sense of news judgment. The gatekeepers overwhelmingly attributed their selection of international news stories to the relevance of such stories to SAfm's audiences (cultural proximity). These audiences, as was noted in Chapter 3, are estimated to be 347 000 people, most of them South Africans, able to understand English and spread over 95 % of the country's land mass. An executive editor of SABC Radio News in 2006 paints the following picture of the profile of SAfm's listeners:

SAfm is a station that has a complicated kind of audience. First, because we officially broadcast in English; second, because [it is] a news and information station. We first target people who can understand the language. Secondly we target people who are mostly from LSM 6⁸ upwards. [Before] 1994, it used to be very high because SAfm was targeting rich, white, retired professionals and all that. But now with the new South Africa, we said SAfm will also target those middle class blacks. But we also want to use the station as a mirror for those international tourists and visitors that come to the country. Our pay-off line, before we changed, used to be 'the station for the well-informed'. But really it's a station where you'd find mostly decision makers listening, people who would like to know about what's happening around the world (G12 2006 personal communication).

The group of people cited by G12 above is therefore always taken into consideration, in the process of selecting international news to be aired on SAfm's bulletins. These audiences were cited by most of the SABC Radio News staff, interviewed for this study, as the principal albeit indirect determinants of the kinds of international news items selected for broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. According to G8 (2006 personal communication), "what counts most to me as news value is what is relevant to the people of South Africa and the people of Africa who are actually my audience". Likewise, G12 (2006 personal communication) maintains that "If at all our audience would not readily associate with a particular event, then that would not necessarily be news". In this vein,

⁸ The South African Advertising Research Foundation's Living Standards Measure (LSM) is a reference marketing research tool in Southern Africa. It divides a population into 10 LSM Groups (with LSM-1 being the lowest and LSM-10 being the highest in rank). Variables measured include the degree of urbanisation, ownership of vehicles and modern appliances (SAARF 2006).

gatekeepers' mental image of what was irrelevant to South African audiences was one of the quickest excuses advanced for dropping certain stories from the wires. On Saturday 19th March 2006, for example, Bulletins Editor G15 rejected a story found in the SAPA wire files with the lead: "Villagers using machetes publicly beheaded a family of five in India's northeast for allegedly causing the death of two [people through witchcraft]". Commenting on why he did not select the story, G15 (2006 personal communication) wrote: "Gruesome – but how is it relevant to SA?" This example points to a certain fetishism by gatekeepers at SABC Radio News of what the audiences want or do not want, given that in a story about Pakistan's confirmation of the outbreak of bird flu in the country on March 21 2006, G15's colleague accounted for his selection of the story as follows: "Every new country to report H5N1 is of concern. **Many SA people ('Indians') originate from Pakistan and often visit family there** [my emphasis – A. T.]" (G16 2006 personal communication). One can deduce from G16's statement – confused as it is – that if he were the one editing during G15's shift on March 19, he might have possibly let the witchcraft story move through to the SAfm news studio gate under the pretext that 'Many SA people ('Indians') originate from India and often visit family there' (hypothetical).

The implicit difference in opinion as to what is relevant or irrelevant to SA audiences does not imply that there is a total lack of agreement (at SABC Radio News) as to what is culturally proximate to SAfm's audiences. In fact, many instances of story selection at line talks during observation for this research proved that gatekeepers concerned with the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm were indeed operationally identical in their view of most of what they considered relevant to their audiences. During the morning line talk of Friday March 24 2006, for example, there was a story proposal in the diary reading: "Two South African adventurers, Mike Horn and Borge Ousland, have become the first persons to reach the North Pole on foot, unassisted by machines". The story was unanimously described by the line talk attendees as a good one, and a lot of comments about it could later be overheard in the newsroom. The enthusiasm most of the gatekeepers at SABC Radio News showed for that story, apparently because it involved South Africans, was consistent with Peterson's (1981) finding that narcissism (see point

2.2) was a major phenomenon influencing gatekeepers' selection of international news items. Another example of unanimity on a story that was considered very relevant to SAfm's audiences was the discussion in the afternoon line talk of Tuesday March 14 2006, around the coverage of the diarrhoea epidemic situation in Botswana (mentioned above), by the North West Region of SABC Radio News. The line talk participants were clearly over-concerned with the story because Botswana's geographical proximity to the North West Province of South Africa, meant people in that region would not only be interested but could be affected by the epidemic. Hence the closer the story to (and the higher its anticipated effect on) SAfm's audiences, the more positive would be the force influencing its selection by the station's bulletin gatekeepers.

6.2.3 External regulatory bodies

Apart from the influence of audiences and sources on the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins, the South African Parliament (through Broadcasting Amendment Act No 64 of 2002 in RSA 2003) and the Act's enforcing body (ICASA) exert influence on the general functioning of the SABC. The Act has specific guidelines for the Corporation's approach to news – and consequently international news – and programming on its PBS stations. This point will not be belaboured following the discussion on the possible impact of policy on international news presented on SAfm's bulletins in point 3.3 above. Suffice it to say here that the amended Act's (in RSA 2003) provision in its sections 6(4c) and 6(4d) that the SABC should provide news from a "South African point of view" which "advances the national and public interest", serve as continuous reminders to gatekeepers of international news for SAfm to over-insist on the value of cultural proximity. And given ICASA's role to enforce the SABC's compliance with its Charter provided by the Broadcasting Act (as amended in 2002), all PBS stations were, in March 2006, requested to extend their current affairs programmes into the weekends; with SAfm required to produce at least an hour of such programmes on each Saturday and Sunday (G12 2006 personal communication). To reflect this new philosophy of more current affairs content on PBS stations at weekends, SAfm's bulletin editors were requested to depart from allowing their newscasters present shorter bulletins at weekends and to insist on having full five-minute newscasts.

6.3 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to present data indicating the factors that informed the selection of international news presented on the bulletins of SAfm (during this study) at the organisational and social-institutional levels of gatekeeping analysis. At the organisational level, there was an insistence on reflecting Africa in a positive light and selecting stories that had implications for South Africa from an SA point of view. This modus operandi is informed by social institutional forces, notably Parliament's Charter for the SABC, and enforced by ICASA. This regulating body insists on the professional norms of journalism which, in turn, enforce routine practices in the gatekeeping of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins. During the study, sources (especially official/elite ones) also impinged on the selection criteria while the gatekeepers' speculation of what the audiences want, made them select/reject particular stories.

The significance of both the patterns observed and their deviations from the practice of the gatekeeping of international news for SAfm's bulletins (presented in both chapters 5 and 6) are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.0 Introduction

Quite a few issues bordering on the significance of the intra-media and extra-media factors affecting the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins have emerged from the data presented in the last two chapters. The discussion below systematically unpacks the significance of the study in this regard at the four levels of analysis visited in chapters 5 and 6, notably the individual, routine, organisational and social-institutional factors informing SAfm's bulletin gatekeepers' decisions to either include or exclude stories that constitute international news.

7.1 Individual Level of Analysis

The data at the individual level of analysis show that the selection of international stories in the central newsroom of SABC Radio in 2006 is hinged on many factors. The first of them, i.e. the gatekeepers' historical experiences with apartheid, has produced a lot of opposition to US government discourses such as "terrorism/anti-terrorism"⁹, leading to the rejection or total overhauling of stories from the wires loaded with such terms. The second factor (the rank, work experience, job function and level of education of the non-executive gatekeeper) indicates that more leeway is given to the more experienced/qualified junior staff to select stories, while less is accorded to the less experienced/qualified. This modus operandi helps to ensure optimum performance of SAfm in terms of bulletins by limiting the margins of error of judgment that come with inexperience but it may impair innovative ways of thinking from reflecting in the station's international news content. Meanwhile, the individuals with almost unrestricted powers in international news selection are the bulletin editors, while the correspondents have the most powers to initiate stories. This creates a situation where the international worldview of the bulletin editors principally becomes the worldview of SAfm's bulletins and, possibly, that of some of its audiences.

⁹ This is also a social-system factor (it should be recalled that this level of analysis is not sufficiently probed in this study because it requires a different method of inquiry).

The third factor affecting individual selection decisions in terms of international news broadcast on the bulletins of SAfm is the 'gatekeeper' role conception (see Janovitz 1975) of most of the newswriters dealing with such decisions. Even the few centrally located gatekeepers who admit their subscription to the 'advocate' role of journalists (e.g. Bulletins Editor G1) encounter mostly 'factually' presented stories from the wires and have to deal with them with the 'gatekeeper' approach. The implication of this is that international news selected for broadcast on SAfm's bulletins is treated at various gates by newswriters who take representation for granted. Such a taken-for-grantedness has the potential of making journalists allow certain hegemonic discourses to go through their own gates (see Hall 1997, Hall 1982, Bennett 1982, Manning 2001, Janovitz 1975, Soloski 1997). Nonetheless, this is not a conscious desire of most gatekeepers, as Herman and Chomsky (1988) have pointed out. But there is an SABC Radio News 'advocate' journalist who can practice his advocacy role (thereby opposing globally hegemonic discourses), thanks to the fact that he functions at the first gate along the international news chain (see Galtung and Ruge 1965) and, as such, has plenty of latitude to initiate stories. This 'process' kind of journalism is, however, difficult to insert in SAfm bulletins, given its routine short format; hence the story would end up being used for current affairs live programmes.

In our instance, in radio/electronic news, I think it is very important to concentrate on facts because we can't really play around with the story like a newspaper. Our stories have to be short, factual and relevant... Obviously when you are in a situation where you can give an analysis of a news event, like a newspaper ... or current affairs at radio, then it's a different story. But in our situation, facts [are] definitely [what matter]! (G5 2006 personal communication).

From the vantage point of G5, above, radio bulletins allow little room for the 'active' construction of events/issues as (international) news (also a routine level factor). This is an effect of the use of well tested risk-avoiding formats (e.g. short reports and brief sound bite on bulletins) to signify events by media (see point 5.3.2). Due to their insistence on brevity, these formats have the potential of anchoring newscasts in society's common sense (Golding and Murdock 2000) which may, in turn, engineer the consent of

audiences (see Herman and Chomsky 1988, Hartley 2002, Manning 2001, Hall 1982, Good 1989).

The fourth factor affecting international news selection (by individuals) for the bulletins on SAfm is the 'information processing' model of thinking adopted by most gatekeepers at SABC Radio News. This mode of thinking has the propensity to keep the number of international stories broadcast on SAfm's bulletins to the barest minimum. It therefore eases, to some extent, the gatekeeper's huge task of selecting international stories from a vast repertoire in the wires, but has the dysfunction of reducing the magnitude of international politics presented to SAfm's audiences on fast news days. Apart from information processing, some gatekeepers, especially the correspondents, employ the tactic of planning (decision making theory) which increases their efficiency of delivery, given the pressures of news work. However, it also tends to circumscribe their selection of items to scheduled events, thereby serving to reinforce the recourse to official/elite sources, hence potentially representing some hegemonic discourses.

There is also the factor of personal taste in selecting stories; bulletin editors differ in what attracts their attention hence Editor B may drop certain stories selected (but not yet broadcast) by Editor A, in the case where Editor B has just taken over the editing shift. There is a high taste for soft news but the overwhelming impact of officialdom (a routine/social-institutional factor) limits the selection of non-official stories to 'dry' news days, notably weekends/holidays. However, the differences in taste, especially among bulletin editors, augur well for SAfm's audiences given that it leads to the presentation of a variety of perspectives on international affairs. Finally, bulletin editors undergo a lot of physical stress (due to the pressures of news work) which sometimes limits the volume of international news selected for SAfm's bulletins.

It is worth noting that the presentation of data on the factors affecting the gatekeeping of international news at SAfm at the level of individuals has been lengthy but should not be seen as an indication that individual factors overshadow the other broad categories of factors at the intra-media levels of analysis, notably routine and organisational factors.

The length may have ensued as a result of the difficulty in directly ascertaining the ways in which individuals bring their personal attitudes and experiences to bear on international news selection, by mere observation, which therefore required drawing inferences from the individuals' own comments.

Following is a discussion on routine level factors affecting the selection of international news for SAfm's bulletins.

7.2 The Level of Communication Routines

Data from the routine level of analysis indicate that the professional journalistic paradigm of objectivity and the naturalisation of the news values identified by Galtung and Ruge (1965) enormously affect selection of international stories for SAfm's bulletins in 2006. The non-advocate gatekeepers' upholding of the creed of factual accuracy and neutrality helps to 'de-bias' international news, hence protecting audiences from being duped by sources (this is an interface between individual and routine level factors). This stems from the fact that accuracy also entails second-guessing stories (i.e. re-evaluating their veracity) (see Shoemaker 1991). On the other side of the coin, the pursuit of 'the facts' and the desire to be 'neutral' implies the newswriters consider language, hence representation, as transparent phenomena; a taken-for-grantedness that results in the selection of stories containing hegemonic discourses, eventually representing relations of dominance in the global arena (see Hall 1997, Chomsky and Herman 1979, Manning 2001, Hartley 2002, Hall 1982, Good 1989). Likewise, the need for 'balance' in choosing international news for SAfm's bulletins, one could contend, leads the gatekeepers to resort to selecting items that, in a conflict of interest, exhibit two sources in any given case; a situation that begs the question: are there usually only two sides of a story? This approach to depicting two diametrically opposed opinions at any given instance superficially appears to widen the range of opinions (see Hackett 1984, Soloski 1997); but it may restrict the representation of international issues to official or elite sources and delimit the general spectrum of international debates to what factions within the dominating classes think. Further research could specifically analyse the content of

international news on SAfm to ascertain exactly how much space is allocated to official/elite on the one hand, and unofficial sources on the other hand.

Linked to the above professional ethos, is the gatekeepers' adherence to certain 'news values' in journalism as a major determinant of international news selection. The most relevant of these values to SABC Radio News gatekeepers are cultural proximity, threshold, unexpectedness/human interest, continuity and consonance. It is desirable to search for cultural proximity in international news stories aired on the bulletins of SAfm since it helps SABC Radio News to fulfil the Corporation's goal of approaching stories from a South African/pan-African point of view (also a social-system factor), while limiting the insertion of stories that are loaded with, for instance, US government discourses (e.g. the plethora of stories in the wires clearly positioned in favour of the US-led 2003 attack on Iraq, that reproduce the American government discursive order of terrorism/counter-terrorism). Also, unexpected/human interest stories contribute to unearthing outstanding issues and events that relate to the lives of all classes of people. Continuity is not significant on its own because to select a story on the premise that it has been on the headlines for a while, the gatekeeper understands that the story was first initiated thanks to some other news value(s) as distinct from that of continuity. The problem arises with threshold given that it tends to work towards excluding 'ordinary' people from being represented in international news on SAfm's bulletins, except as a result of some extraordinary performance on their part (e.g. the March 24 story on two South Africans who trekked to the North Pole), or due to their primary involvement in negative deeds/events (e.g. the March 21 story on the bludgeoning to death of Thanakorn Pakeepol by Hindu worshippers in Bangkok after he desecrated a statue of the god of Brahma; or the March 21 story on the American Tranda Conley accused of selling her daughters on the internet). As for the elite, Peterson (1979: 120) is right in positing that they possess a "natural salience which raises them above the threshold necessary before an actor and the act will be perceived". From the interviews with G15 and G16, consonance appears to be more useful at SABC Radio News in helping some gatekeepers reject rather than select. It was more common for a story to be rejected because it was not consonant with the expectations of either G15 or G16, than for one to be selected because

it was consonant with what any of them had expected. However, this cannot be generalised to all the other gatekeepers at SABC Radio News in 2006. The invoking of lack of consonance in rejecting stories implies that some gatekeepers of international news for SAfm's bulletins bring much of their personal expectations to bear on selection; it reduces journalism's ideal of 'the public's right to know' to that of 'the public's right to know what journalists want them to know'.

Still about the import of news values in the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins, as was noted in the presentation of findings, Galtung and Ruge's four sets of complementary news values purportedly responsible for most international news selection are untenable at SABC Radio News apart from the hypothesis of negative news referring to elite people.

Besides the gatekeepers' adherence to news values and the objective journalistic ethos, the findings of this study indicate that a major routine factor affecting international news selection at SABC Radio in 2006 is the dependence on output from wire services notably SAPA and Reuters. Given the political economy and reputation of Reuters (mainly British) and SAPA (mainly South African but dependent on some Western news agencies such as AP and AFP for a lot of international news¹⁰), the conscious oppositional stance to some Western government discourses by gatekeepers of SAfm's news bulletins is watered down. To fully verify the extent to which such discourses permeate international news content on SAfm's bulletins there is need for a discourse analysis. This was not the purview of this study but it is a rich field for further research.

Linked to SABC Radio News' dependence on other media organisations for its international news selection is the format of news items. The preference by gatekeepers of terser and shorter stories from the wires and the BBC indicates the general unwillingness of journalists to try formats that are not well tested in broadcasting and the

¹⁰ Many SAPA stories in SABC's news files during observation were sourced from Agence France Press (AFP). Many more were sourced from the US-owned Associated Press (AP), which is SAPA's main foreign partner (SA Consulate General New York 2006). SAPA itself is a co-operative news agency owned by a number of SA press organisations (SA Consulate General New York 2006).

need to make maximum use of limited bulletin airtime. As Chomsky (1992) has pointed out, the obsession with brevity by the news media considerably limits the news perspective and encourages the use of mainly elite/expert sources who are skilled in using a limited amount of time to make captivating phrases. This further helps to exclude non-elite views on international affairs on the bulletins presented to SAfm's audiences. The limitation of sound bites (from the BBC) on the third anniversary of the US-led 2003 attack on Iraq to excerpts of President Bush's speech and clips of Iraq's ex-Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's interview on SAfm's bulletins (March 19 2006) is a good example of this trend (there was no sound bite from 'ordinary' Iraqis affected by the war, but rather, one from a British protester).

The findings of this study also demonstrate that the influx of national stories in SABC Radio News' content management database places a lot of pressure on processor gatekeepers. This makes them resort to the 'factory system' (i.e. a repeated pattern) of information processing (Bantz et al 1981 in Shoemaker 1991) through categorisation that broadens the categories of stories selected, on the one hand, and severely limits the volume of international stories selected, on the other. As gleaned from interviews with many of the journalists, when there is less pressure from national stories on the processor gatekeepers, e.g. at weekends and on public holidays, considered 'dry news' days, the volume of international news selected for the bulletins of SAfm increases. As for the gatherer-gatekeepers (the correspondents), such pressures lead them to resort to planning stories in advance (all three foreign bureaux chiefs interviewed confirmed this); and this results in the over-reliance on the coverage of routine events as opposed to social issues. As a consequence of this preference of actuality to depth in foreign news coverage (Hall 1973 in Motta 1977), the conceptual views on international affairs of those audience members who rely mostly on SAfm's bulletins for information could be limited.

7.3 The Organisational Level

Even though there is an emphasis on 'actuality' as opposed to 'depth' in the selection of international news that is broadcast on SAfm's bulletins in 2006, the provisions in the Charter and editorial policies of the SABC that require a wider and more positive

coverage of Africa (and coverage from a South African point of view) are well observed by the bulletin gatekeepers at SABC Radio News (an overlap between organisational and social-institutional forces). This is an effort to correct the inadequacies and bias of apartheid SABC Radio through SAfm's bulletins.

In terms of organisational structure, the constantly changing news environment guarantees substantial autonomy to the bulletin editors in the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm, in harmony with Soloski's (1997) argument. This creates a situation where the international worldview of the bulletin editors principally becomes the worldview of SAfm's bulletins and possibly that of some of its audiences. The bulletin editors therefore have the possibility of changing the face of international news selected for SAfm's bulletins but they are also limited to stories from the choices that have been made by their organisation (the SABC) viz: Reuters, SAPA and the BBC. It should be stated however that though they have an upper hand in selecting stories, the bulletin editors at SABC Radio News do not dictate to their subordinates what has to get into SAfm's bulletins. The international stories heard on such bulletins are the products of decisions taken in an atmosphere of camaraderie. This departure from the top-down approach obtainable at SABC Radio during apartheid favours the broadcast of better researched stories. Notwithstanding, there is an instance where organisational bureaucracy still inhibits productiveness – the link between correspondents and the seat of SABC News in Johannesburg. Organisational bureaucracy acts as some hindrance to correspondents' enterprise and routine inputting of stories as clearance for the correspondents to travel out of their base for coverage is sometimes delayed.

Another organisational factor that affects international news selection is capacity. The SABC has made strides in establishing bureaux and contacts with stringers in some parts of the world, which provides SAfm with a wider range of perspectives in international news broadcast on its bulletins than was the case during apartheid. However, the limited infrastructural resources deployed to the African continent inhibit proper coverage of the region as the Corporation would have desired. Therefore, in spite of the progress perceived by the interviewees as having been made in re-representing Africa on SAfm's

bulletins, industrialised centres of the world still appear to be more represented than Africa while Asia and South America are relegated; an impressionistic observation confirmed by G14 (2006 personal communication).

The ensuing section delves into the import of social-institutional factors affecting the selection of international news cast on SAfm's bulletins.

7.4 The Social-institutional Level

The significance of the social-institutional factors influencing the gatekeeping of international news at SABC Radio News in 2006 is multifold. First, international news is over-officiated. As we saw in point 6.2.1, G2 posits that although official sources are the main role players in the international arena, SABC Radio also considers unofficial sources to be equally important. However, as observation showed, official sources are given far more opportunities to insert messages on SAfm's bulletins than unofficial sources. Even in trying to deny any total dependence on official sources for the material used to construct non-routine international stories broadcast on SAfm, G2 unwittingly confirms the tendency of the media to grant accreditation to official sources as primary definers (see Manning 2001, Schlesinger 1990, Good 1989) by adding that "... officialdom is the person [sic] you go to later to explain or to answer the initial story" (G2 2006 personal communication). If an official source must explain the initial story, it cannot be denied that official sources are privileged to inscribe messages that define the limits of any debate surrounding socio-economic and political issues. Therefore, the recourse to officialdom in presenting international news stories aired on SAfm, it could be argued, can help reproduce the relations of imbalance between the ruling class (officials in this case) and the ruled (unofficial sources in this instance).

Some gatekeepers involved in selecting international news for bulletins on SAfm in 2006, even seem to equate the PBS mandate of the SABC to that of officialdom, in the international arena. The following comment by G12 adumbrates this point:

For your credibility it's always better to get official positions but, nowadays, communities are also organised. So if at all we have community leaders, then we

are able also to use them. But we can't just take any other person who at the end of the day would not be able to account for the statement that he or she makes. So, we as a public broadcaster ... also have that responsibility in terms of maintaining law and order in this part of the world (2006 personal communication).

G12's remark above speaks of a certain taken-for-grantedness by newswriters, of the media's role in enforcing the coercion that society's ruling class imposes on the ruled, partly thanks to the media's circumscription of access to the so-called public sphere to leaders (see Thompson 1995, Chomsky 2003, Hall 1982, Manning 2001). Most gatekeepers of international news at SABC Radio News in 2006 unconsciously support this state-of-affairs, with their tendency to search for explanations of spontaneous events from official sources no matter how much time they have to wait for such explanations. This propensity to wait upon official sources sometimes limits the amount of information on certain international problems available to SAfm's audiences in 2006.

Although the above circumstances limit the opportunity to insert messages into international news broadcast on SAfm's bulletins mostly to official sources, the spectrum of opinions allowed in the bulletins by this mechanism are far wider than what obtained during apartheid; when there were lists of organisations and persons (some of them official sources too) whose voices were barred from ever reaching the studio gates of SAfm, as far as news bulletins were concerned (see Chapter 3). As a matter of fact, the recourse to official sources for international news sometimes helps journalists to hold plutocrats and rulers to account for some of their negative actions, even if these elites may want to use such occasions to further legitimate their actions.

As regards the influence of governmental/international institutions on the coverage of international news for the bulletins of SAfm during the study, the following observations are in order. First, what could be seen as the present South African government's direct impact on international news gatekeeping comparable to the situation during apartheid is not, one could argue, a totally restrictive but rather a benign enterprise (in terms of aiding the journalists' routine chores). However, the direct demand for subsidies (in the form of equipment) from the government, could lead to a situation where certain government

messages on South Africa's foreign policy get slotted into the news in an unquestioning manner, hence helping it promote its self-aggrandisement. This holds true for the seeking of resource-sponsorship from the UN Radio as we saw in point 6.2.1 above. This inferential comment could be followed up in discursive content analysis, which is not within the precincts of this research.

Beyond these governmental and inter-governmental bodies, the data showed that SAfm's bulletin gatekeepers in 2006 seriously invoke relevance to their audiences as the main reason why they consider selecting or rejecting certain international news items. There is an agreement among the gatekeepers interviewed that their audiences are English-speaking South Africans and other nationals residing in SA who must be provided with what is relevant to them. This is a valid argument because international news may have implications for the way SAfm's bulletins' listeners relate to the world. In fact, the keenness with which SABC Radio News pursued the story on the outbreak of diarrhoea in neighbouring Botswana (see point 6.2.1 above) demonstrates the commendable intention of gatekeepers of SAfm's bulletins to select international stories that would help them perform a surveillance function for their SA audiences. However, there are certain differences between gatekeepers as to what is relevant to their audiences. This is a hint that SAfm's audiences might get different mixes of international news that may not necessarily be a unanimous definition of what is relevant to them, but simply what the gatekeeper, who selects the story, defines as relevant. This phenomenon is consistent with Cohen's (1963 in Shoemaker 1991) findings (see point 2.5 above).

While audiences influence the selection decisions made at SABC Radio News in manufacturing international news for SAfm's bulletins only in a subtle way, the regulatory bodies – Parliament and ICASA – wield influence over international news selection in a manifest manner. Following the provisions of the Corporation's Charter which was enacted by parliament, SABC Radio News staffers are required to cover international news from an SA-centric point. This encourages the promotion of pan-Africanism which is one of the foreign policy objectives of the SA government in 2006 (see point 3.5 above) (pan-Africanism is also a discursive, hence, social-system feature).

At the same time, it informs the gatekeepers' great deal of narcissism as a news phenomenon.

On its part, ICASA enforces the philosophies enshrined by Parliament in the Charter of SABC. The data in point 6.2.3 have indicated how ICASA's requirements for more current affairs content on SAfm at the weekends as from March 2006, weigh on the gatekeepers at SABC Radio News to opt for the selection of more international news from the wires to fill the gap created by the dearth of national stories at the weekends. Speaking about the 'dryness' of weekend newscasts on SAfm (in the morning line talk of March 23 2006), SABC's MD of News (who was attending the line talk to discuss ICASA's new requirements) insisted on the need for good sound bites as a way of circumventing the problem. In this instance, we witness the trickledown effect of the requirements of a regulatory institution (ICASA) on news/international gatekeeping at SABC Radio News. That is to say ICASA's requirements are mediated by organisational factors (instructions from the MD), which could, in turn, tailor routine practices, in confirmation of Shoemaker's (1991) argument that the various levels of gatekeeping analysis are interwoven. And if the gatekeepers of SAfm's bulletins have to heed this call, it could be argued that they may have to increase their reliance on sound bites from the BBC, hence expanding the opportunity for Western media organisations to "push their countries' agenda" which G1 (2006 personal communication) argues, SABC News wants to limit on SAfm's bulletins.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked the significance of the factors affecting international news broadcast on the bulletins of SAfm at four levels of analysis. From the discussion, there are some cardinal points to note: 1) Bulletin editors have the power to make international news on SAfm's newscasts tally with their own worldviews as well as the power to change the face of international news broadcast on the station's newscasts (individual level). 2) The short format of bulletins restricts the depth of discussion on international affairs; there is a reliance on wire stories sourced from the West, which causes the

insertion of Western hegemonic or ideological discourses¹¹ on the bulletins; the creed of professionalism leads to the desirable de-biasing of dubious messages (see point 2.4.4) though neutrality means representation is taken for granted (communication routines). 3) There is an espousal of the philosophy of African renaissance (understood by SABC News gatekeepers as ‘Africans telling their own stories’ and projecting a more positive image of the continent) as the *Weltanschauung* of SABC Radio News; hence, an insistence on the news value of cultural proximity, which results in an SA-centric view of the world being reflected on the bulletins (organisational and routine factors). 4) The accreditation given to official/elite sources allows the insertion of hegemonic discourses on air while limited infrastructural capacity encourages the demand for sponsorship from governmental/inter-governmental bodies (the latter could be both productive and counter-productive); audiences are taken into consideration for the surveillance function of the SAfm’s bulletins; regulatory bodies demand for a greater volume of news which leads to the insistence for more sound bites from officials who sometimes use the space to promote hegemonic discourses of the powerful (be it in the light of North-South domination or powerful-class/ruled class domination)¹² (social institutional and routine levels).

This chapter demonstrates that factors affecting the selection of international news broadcast on SAfm in 2006 cross-fertilise one another in producing results. These factors have both positive and negative implications for the role of SABC Radio News in shaping the image of the world for its audiences, but it must be acknowledged that the

¹¹ Consider for example the discursive term ‘strongman’ used to describe Slobodan Milosevic in story example 6 selected from Reuters and the BBC by G15 (on page 73). Milosevic was still on trial for war crimes but the BBC and Reuters already considered him a candidate on the list of several leaders styled ‘strongmen’ in Western nations such as the UK and USA. This is hegemonic because the SABC News gatekeeper consented to it. Consider also ‘invaded’ in G16’s selection from the British website *annanova.com* on March 22 2006: “The Eskimos have invaded Switzerland - and the Swiss are not at all cheesed off about it. A group of Swiss Eskimo enthusiasts is claiming a record after building a massive igloo village on a frozen lake.” The sense of ‘invasion’ here is also discursive because it could suggest that the Eskimos, though ‘Swiss’, do not belong there culturally. Their building of ‘igloos’ (an invasion), therefore is considered an act outside the social meaning of the mainstream Swiss who, however, are not bothered (“not... cheesed off”).

¹² E.g. the repeated broadcasts on March 19 2006 of President Bush’s statements on the Iraq war which he described as a war against ‘terrorism’.

gatekeepers have changed the motivations and enterprise of international news gatekeeping at SAfm that occurred during apartheid (notably the high refraction of the news to tally with the ruling party and government propaganda). The next chapter draws a conclusion on this research, proposes alternatives to some of the patterns in international news selection observed at SABC Radio News and advances suggestions for the extension of this study.

Chapter 8: Towards a Conclusion

8.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the issues captured in this research and positions the researcher with regards to the approach gatekeepers at SABC Radio News take to select international news stories broadcast on SAfm. After summing up the findings of the study, suggestions are made in the light of a possible policy re-enactment at SABC Radio News in the province of selecting international news that goes on SAfm's bulletins. Opportunities for further research in the field are then broached and the methodology employed to accomplish the task is re-examined.

8.1 Recapitulating the Main Thread of the Thesis

International news stories aired on the bulletins of South Africa's most important station in terms of geographical reach and demographic diversity of audiences, in 2006, is the outcome of complex and interwoven factors ranging from the personal characteristics of individual gatekeepers to structural factors such as organisational policy and certain South African government discourses. To borrow Saussure's metaphors (see Hall 1997), several individual choices made by SABC Radio News gatekeepers in selecting international news during this study were, to an extent, their 'paroles' drawn from an antecedent repertoire of 'langue' in the form of routine and organisational factors. In fact, the dependence on official sources for international news for SAfm's bulletins in 2006 is a social-institutional factor that has become routinised, while a range of routine factors inform individual selection decisions in line with the findings, elsewhere, of Shoemaker et al (2001).

At the very visible level, routine factors (news values, the dogmas of 'objectivity', 'balance' and 'accuracy'; and even the recourse to official sources belonging to social-institutions) and organisational factors (SABC's editorial policies and organisational procedures) affect selection decisions the most. However, SABC Radio's organisational approach to international news gatekeeping, to an extent, spins off from the ideological discourses of South African nationalism/pan-Africanism. Although this study did not

delve into an analysis of ideology and discourse, which belong to the social system level of analysis, the interplay of factors at the other levels points to this fact. Hence, one could safely point out that some social system factors predetermine and co-determine international news selection at all levels of analysis. The gatekeepers are constantly reminded of their citizenship of the South African and African nations by the organisation to which they belong. They respond to this interpellation by making some international news selection choices that work to reproduce what Billig (1996) terms banal nationalism, and consequently helping to reproduce and sustain some aspects of the social system. This augurs well for the SA government's professed foreign policy motivation of African/'Third World' renaissance.

Further, the findings of this study show that gatekeepers of international news for SAfm's bulletins in 2006 imbibe professional values unlike their apartheid colleagues who operated with direct instructions from the NP government authorities (high social-institutional influence) to thwart the image of black-ruled countries and uphold its (NP's) apartheid propaganda. The NP authorities placed mostly Broederbond members in positions of editorial command to make sure news items coming from outside South Africa were consonant to the apartheid government's ideological discourses. No such instructions from government party structures were evident at SABC Radio News during this study. Rather, many gatekeepers at SABC Radio News, in 2006, willingly consent to some features of SA's foreign policy (especially African renaissance), which have been incorporated into the Charter of the Corporation and into SABC's present Editorial Policies. These platforms hail gatekeepers to select international news items that are culturally proximate to SA and from an SA-centric viewpoint. This practice works to favour the country's foreign policy and, to some extent, it produces counter-discourses to what Chomsky (2003), Bond (2004) and Nel (2002) have identified as the 'American [government's] Empire'.

8.2 Suggestions to be Considered by SABC Radio News Policy Makers

Therefore, like other sub-genres of news, the selection of international news for SAfm's newscasts may be a more ideological enterprise than some of its gatekeepers are

conscious of, or are ready to admit. The position of this study is that it is in realising some ideological traits of international news selection that gatekeepers become fully aware of what Hall (1973: 181) terms “the operationalisation of an ideology of news”, and consequently work to limit the inequalities created by this structure. Such a realisation that the innate nature of professional news values sustains relations of inequality between elite and non-elite nations (Galtung and Ruge 1965), could inspire a more conscious move in SAfm’s bulletin gatekeepers to resolve certain gaps in representing the world to their audiences; e.g. what G14 (2006 personal communication) rightly states as the under-representation of the Americas and Asia on the station’s newscasts. This realisation would add more meaning to the SABC’s goal of promoting the discourses of ‘Third World nationalism’ and pan-Africanism, which seem to be desirable philosophical underpinnings of African journalism. It could be achievable if the advocacy role of journalism is embraced with an understanding that representation can hardly be a neutral enterprise.

Moreover, the very nature of the bulletin format of news, plus the professional standards of journalism (‘objectivity’, ‘balance’ and ‘facticity’) seem to be factors that limit the wish by many gatekeepers at SABC Radio News to give more space to non-official sources in the international public sphere, in order to alter the absolute advantage given to the powerful to be primary definers of discourses. (However, it is acknowledged here that the recourse to official sources is sometimes a factor that positively seeks to hold plutocrats and rulers to account for their actions that affect the common weal e.g. the interviewing of SAA officials over the manhandling of flight passengers in Malawi; see point 6.2.1.) So the time seems ripe for journalists to rethink the formats of bulletins, to make them more flexible, more encompassing and less formal. To illustrate this argument, let us consider Bulletins Editor G15’s selection of the following story on Saturday March 25 2006 from SAPA (which he did not reframe):

“BRAD/PITT

And finally Brad Pitt has won gold in the boxing ring at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. **And his good looks were apparently not too badly altered during the bout** [my emphasis – A. T.]. Pitt beat Harpreet Sing of India in the heavyweight category. **However he's not the Pitt of the Silver Screen and Angelina Jolie fame** [my emphasis – A. T.]. This bad Brad is from Australia and he's involved in a real life fight club in the Games in Melbourne.”

This story is an example of an international news item from the wires that ‘plays around’ with straight ‘facts’ to catch the listener’s fancy, given the accent placed on the Hollywood star not concerned with the story than on the Australian boxer himself (G15 confirmed this when asked why he selected the story from SAPA). G15’s rationale for choosing the story was that on such a slow news day, it was good to make audience members relax. The question, then, is: what makes it so impossible to select items that “play around with facts” on radio bulletins (see G5’s comment on page 98) during ‘fast news days’ but possible to do so on ‘slow news days’ when, in essence, stories that ‘play around’ with facts entail ‘active’ news construction that many of the gatekeepers interviewed oppose in favour of factual reflection? Is the well known facticity or empiricism of journalism a sacrament to be respected by newswriters on certain ‘holy’ days, notably fast news days, and to be discarded on ‘unholy’ slow news days, notably weekends, as some gatekeepers at SABC Radio News in 2006 operate? Do weekends/holidays possess any magical quality that suddenly changes opinions to facts or sensational details to brevity (e.g. in the “Brad/Pitt” story above)? During field observation for this study, when the powerful primary definers took their siesta at weekends or on slow news days, the empiricist ethos of journalism also seemed to go to rest at SABC Radio News. On such occasions, gatekeepers got an excuse to select items that were less formal, less officiated, and less factual. It is the position of this study that the selection of such items need to be extended to fast news days.

8.3 Suggestions for Future Research

Following the above comments, it is necessary to state that this study does not claim to be representative of the factors that affect the general nature of international news gatekeeping by SABC Radio News for SAfm. This investigation has been limited to the

factors affecting international news selection for the bulletins, not current affairs programmes on SAfm. Therefore, this is only a broaching of the broader enterprise of gatekeeping at SABC Radio News. Notwithstanding, the study has addressed the nature of the selection of international news within a specific PBS context that operates and partakes in a sphere of globalisation (as would be seen from its relationship with international wire services and broadcast organisations, in selection practices aimed at representing the world to its audiences as well as its ways of contributing to the South African/African voice in global discourses). Also, the research method, time and space for this study did not permit a thorough investigation of the ideological factors (social system level of analysis) that inform the selection of international news for the bulletins of SAfm in 2006. However, it has laid a foundation for an ethnographic study, and also for discourse analysis of international news content, to further ascertain the ways in which the social system impacts upon the gatekeeping of international news for the bulletins of SAfm.

Moreover, this study has not examined the factors affecting the gatekeeping of other genres of news or news in general. In addition, the observations made here cannot be superimposed on the way the gatekeeping of news for other SABC stations is conducted. This research may simply open up a new vista for gatekeeping studies that could strive to compare international news selection processes between SABC Radio and SABC TV, and between selection for bulletins and selection for Current Affairs shows. Future research may also want to compare the differences in factors affecting the selection of the news sub-genres of international news and national news. Further, gatekeeping does not end at selection (Shoemaker 1991). How do the gatekeepers actively shape and deliver the international news they present? Could there be basic differences between the gatekeeping practices of broadcast outfits and those of print media in South Africa, for instance? These are questions that require answers from further research.

8.4 Sizing up the Research Approach

It is also important to state that the methods employed to gather the data interpreted here (participant observation and interviewing) do not claim to capture the absolute 'truth' of

the gatekeeping of international news at SAfm). In teasing out the factors informing the selection of international news at SABC Radio, Shoemaker's (1991) and Shoemaker et al's (2001) input in gatekeeping theory have proved to be useful in both the understanding of the key concepts around news production and in methodically disaggregating the precursors of international news selection within four out of their five strata of analysis. Although the various layers interrelate, it might have been difficult to present data succinctly without recourse to such a schema.

The above difficulties create the need for an ethnographic study (one of really long periods on the field) to be carried out in future to provide additional understanding of the antecedents of gatekeeping for the bulletins/current affairs programmes of SAfm. It is also necessary to proffer here that as an instrument of data collection, the participant observer "is not a chameleon 'perfectly self-tuned to his [or her] exotic surroundings, a walking miracle of empathy, tact, patience and cosmopolitanism'" (Geertz 1983: 56 in Deacon et al et al 1999: 275). Hence, there might have been some oversights in the data collection and interpretation due to human miscalculation. However, this research may play the role of a pilot study offering useful variables to be more deeply probed in future studies of news production.

Bibliography

Barnett, C. 1999. The limits of media democratization in South Africa: politics, privatisation and regulation. Media, Culture and Society. 21. 649-671.

BBC. 2000. The world's nuclear arsenal. [Online]
Available: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/733162.stm>
Accessed May 5 2006.

BBC. 2005. On this day 11 of February. [Online] Available:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/february/11/newsid2539000/2539947.stm>
Accessed March 23, 2005.

Bechan, N. 1999. An evaluation of SAfm as a public service broadcaster. Communicatio. 25(1&2). 95-100.

Becker, H. S. 1996. The epistemology of qualitative research. In Jessor, R., Colby, A. and Shweder, R. A. (eds). Ethnography and human development: context and meaning in social inquiry. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 53-71.

Bennett, T. 1982. Theories of the media, theories of society. In Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J. and Woollacott, J. (eds). Culture, society and the media. London: Methuen. 30-55.

Berger, G. 2001. Ownership and control in the SA media after apartheid. Unpublished manuscript.

Billig, M. 1995. Banal nationalism London: Sage.

Bond, P. 2004. Talk left, walk right: South Africa's frustrated global reforms. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Breed, W. 1955. Social control in the newsroom: a functional analysis. Social Forces. 33(4). 326-335.

Bryant, A. T. 1949. The Zulu people before the Whiteman came. Pietermaritzburg: The Natal Witness.

Bryman, A. 1988. Quantity and quality in social research. London: Routledge.

Bussiek, C. and Bussiek, H. 1998. Notes on the apartheid SABC. Paper submitted to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Handout.

Carey, J. 1993. Mass media and democracy: between the modern and postmodern. Journal of International Affairs. 47(1). 1-12.

Chang, T. and Lee, J. 1992. Factors affecting gatekeepers' selection of foreign news. Journalism Quarterly. 69(3). 554-561.

Chomsky, N. 1992. Manufacturing consent: Noam Chomsky and the media. In Achabar, M. and Wintonick, P. (eds). Montreal: Necessary Illusions. Videocassette.

Chomsky, N. 2003. Hegemony or survival: America's quest for global dominance. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Chomsky, N. and Herman, E. S. 1979. The political economy of human rights vol. 1: the Washington connection and third world fascism. Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Clark, N. L. and Worger, W. H. 2004. South Africa: the rise and fall of apartheid. Harlow: Pearson.

Clausen, L. 2004. Localizing the global: 'domestication' processes in international news production. Media, Culture and Society. 26(1). London: Sage. 25-44.

Collins. 2005. Collins English dictionary: complete and unabridged. Glasgow: Collins.

Dahlgren, P. 1992. Journalism and popular culture: introduction. In Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C. (eds). Journalism and popular culture. London: Sage. 1-23.

Davidow, A. B. "Making the news": a case study of East Cape News (ECN). Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts of Rhodes University.

Dawson, A. 2001. Crossing "the line": a case study in South African media practice and democratization. Television and new media. 2(2). 117-132.

De Beer, A. S., Serfontein, L. and Naudè, A. 1996. The new South Africa and international news flow: is it new or is it much of the same story? Communicare. 15(2). 12-24.

Deacon, D., Pickering, M., Golding, P. and Murdock, G. 1999. Researching communications: a practical guide to methods in media and cultural analysis. London: Arnold.

Erasmus, F. 2004. The history of South African broadcasting. The Pumamouse. [Online] Available: <http://pumamouse.com/SABbrbHistory> Accessed May 26 2006.

Evans, G. and Newnham, J. 1998. The Penguin dictionary of international relations. London: Penguin.

- Fairclough, N. 1995. Critical analysis of media discourse. Media discourse. London: Arnold. 53-74.
- Galtung, J. and Ruge, M. H. 1965. The structure of foreign news. Journal of Peace Research. 2(1). 64-91.
- Golding, P. and Murdock, G. 2000. Culture, communications and political economy. In Curran, J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds). Mass media and society. (3rd Edition). London: Arnold. 71-92.
- Good, L. T. 1989. Power, hegemony and communication theory. In Angus, I. and Jhally, S. (eds). Culture, society and the media. London: Routledge. 51-64.
- Fiske, J. 1987. Narrative. Television culture. London, Routledge: 128-148.
- Fontana, A. and Frey, J. H. 1994. Interviewing: the art of science. In Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds). Handbook of qualitative research. CA: Sage. 361-376.
- Hackett, R. A. 1984. Decline of a paradigm? Bias and objectivity in news media studies. Critical Studies in Mass Communication. 1(3). 229-259.
- Hall, S. 1973. The determinations of news photographs. In Cohen, S. and Young, J. (eds). The manufacture of news: social problems, deviance and the mass media. London: Constable. 226-243.
- Hall, S. 1982. The rediscovery of 'ideology': return of the repressed in media studies. In Gurevitch, M., Bennett, T., Curran, J. and Woollacott, J. (eds). Culture, society and the media. London: Methuen. 56-90.
- Hall, S., Held, D. and McGrew, T. (eds). 1992. Modernity and its features. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hall, S. (Ed.) 1997. The work of representation. Representation: cultural representation and signifying practices. London: Sage. 42-63.
- Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R. and Newbold, C. 1998. Content analysis. Mass communication research methods. London: Macmillan.
- Harcup, T., O'Neill, D. 2001. What Is News? Galtung and Ruge revisited. Journalism Studies. 2(2). 261-280.
- Hartley, J. 2002. Communication, cultural and media studies: the key concepts. London: Routledge.

Hayman, G. and Tomaselli, R. 1989. Ideology and technology in the growth of South African broadcasting, 1924-1971. In Tomaselli, R., Tomaselli, K. and Muller, J. (eds). Currents of power: state broadcasting in South Africa. Bellville: Anthropos. 23-83.

Herman, E. S. and Chomsky, N. 1998. Manufacturing consent: a propaganda model. [Online] Available:
http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Herman%20/Manufac_Consent_Prop_Model.html
Accessed April 20 2005.

Hjarvard, S. 2002. The study of international news. In Jensen, K. B. (Ed.) A handbook of media and communication research: qualitative and quantitative methodologies. London: Routledge. 91-97.

Horwitz, Robert B. 2001. 'Negotiated liberalization': stakeholder politics and communication sector reform in South Africa. [Online] Available:
<http://www.informatik.uni-trier.de/~ley/db/journals/corr/corr0109.html#cs-CY-0109097>
Accessed March 19 2005.

Human Development Report. 2005. International cooperation at a crossroads: aid, trade and security in an unequal world. New York: UNDP.

ICASA. 2005a. Broadcasting Act no. 4 of 1999. [Online] Available: <http://www.icasa.org.za/Default.aspx?Page=2>
Accessed 1 October 2005.

ICASA, 2005b. Summary of submissions to the Triple Inquiry on the protection and viability of public service broadcasting. Handout.

Janovitz, M. 1975. Professional models in journalism: the gatekeeper and the advocate. Journalism Quarterly. 52(4) Winter. 618-622; 662.

Jensen, K. B. 2002. The qualitative research process. In Jensen, K. B. (Ed.) A handbook of media communication research. London: Routledge.

Jjuuko, D. 2005. Understanding editorial independence and public accountability issues in public broadcasting service: a study of editorial policies at SABC. MA thesis. Grahamstown: Rhodes University.

Kellner, D. 1995. Theory wars and cultural studies. Media culture: cultural studies, identity and politics between the modern and postmodern. London: Routledge. 15-54.

Kim, S. 2002. Gatekeeping international news: an attitudinal profile of U.S. television journalists. Journal of broadcasting & electronic media. 46. [Online] Available: <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5000834886>
Accessed September 20 2005.

- Kim, K. 2003. Organizational determinants of international news coverage in Korean newspapers. Gazette: the international journal for communication studies. 61(5). 65-85.
- Krabill, R. 2001. Symbiosis: mass media and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. Media, Culture and Society. 23 (5). 567-585.
- Le Pere, G. and Van Nieuwkerk, A. 2002. Facing the new millennium: South Africa's foreign policy in a globalizing world. In Adar, K. G. and Ajulu, R. (eds). Globalization and emerging trends in African states' foreign policy-making: a comparative perspective of Southern Africa. Hampshire: Ashgate. 173-210.
- Lofland, J. 1971. Analyzing social settings. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- MacKinnon, A. S. 2004. The making of South Africa: culture and politics. Upper Saddle River: Pearson.
- Mamdani, M. 1996. Citizen and subject: contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism. Kampala: Fountain Publishers. 3-34.
- Manning, P. 2001. News and news sources: a critical introduction. London: Sage.
- Manoim, Irwin. 1996. You have been warned: the first ten years of the Mail & Guardian. London: Penguin.
- Mbaine, A. E. 2005. Why radio continues to matter in Uganda. Paper presented at the Highway Africa Conference, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 12-14 September. [Online] Available: <http://www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za/resources.cfm>
Accessed October 14 2005.
- Mbhalati, M. T. 2005. The birth of SAfm. Paper presented at the Highway Africa Conference, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 12-14 September. [Online] Available: <http://www.highwayafrica.ru.ac.za/resources.cfm>
Accessed 14 October 2005.
- McLuhan, M. and Powers, B. R. 1989. The global village: transformations in world life and media in the 21st century. New York: Oxford University Press.
- MISA, 2003. Campaign for public service broadcasting in Southern Africa. Booklet published as support to national and regional advocacy groups promoting the media as tools for democracy, cultural identity and the base of a knowledge society.
- Motta, L. G. F. 1977. Ideological control and newsroom decision making: a Q analysis of Brazilian editors' news selection. Michigan: University Microfilms International.
- Nel, P. 2002. Untangling the "gamble on investment": élite perceptions of globalization and South Africa's foreign policy during the Mandela era. In Adar, K. G. and Ajulu, R.

(eds). Globalization and emerging trends in African states' foreign policy-making: a comparative perspective of Southern Africa. Hampshire: Ashgate. 153-172.

Nossek, H. 2004. Our news and their news: the role of national identity in the coverage of foreign news. Journalism. 5(3). 343-368.

Nyamnjoh, F. B. 2005. Africa's media: democracy and the politics of belonging. London: Zed Books.

O'Dowd, C. F. 1996. An examination of the factors underlying the decision-making about selection and presentation of photographs of political conflict in South African newspapers. Rhodes University MA Thesis.

Orgeret, K. S. 2004. Unifying and dividing processes in national media: the Janus face of South Africa. Critical arts: a South-North Journal of Cultural & Media Studies. 18(1). 147-162.

Padovani, C. and Tracey, M. 2003. Report on the conditions of public service broadcasting. Television and New Media. 4(2). 131-153.

Peterson, S. 1979. Foreign news gatekeepers and criteria of newsworthiness. Journalism Quarterly. 56. 116-125.

Peterson, S. 1981. International news selection by the elite press: a case study. Public Opinion Quarterly. 45(2). 143-163.

Psych Central. 2006. Media in South Africa [Online]
Available: http://psychcentral.com/psypsych/Media_in_South_Africa
Accessed February 06 2006.

RSA. 2003. Broadcasting Amendment Act No 64, 2002. Government Gazette. 452.

SA Consulate General New York. 2006. News and media. [Online]
Available: <http://www.southafrica-newyork.net/consulate/news.htm>
Accessed May 25 2006.

SAARF. 2006. Living Standards Measure. [Online]
Available: <http://www.saarf.co.za/>
Accessed May 22 2006.

SABC. 2006. People and structure: SABC board. [Online] Available:
<http://www.sabc.co.za/portal/site/menuitem.2dd409d7e2136ee48891f2e75401aeb9/>
Accessed January 12 2006

SABC. 2005. Radio. "About the SABC." [Online] Available:
<http://www.sabc.co.za/portal/site/menuitem.01b93ed679dcd7e48891f2e75401aeb9/>

Accessed September 15 2005

SABC Annual Report. 2003/2004. Untitled booklet. Johannesburg: SABC.

SABC Annual Report. 2004/2005. Our SABC. Johannesburg: SABC.

SABC Editorial Policies. 2004.

Schlesinger, P. 1990. Rethinking the sociology of journalism: source strategies and limits of media-centrism. In Ferguson, M. (Ed.) Public communication: the new imperatives. Future directions for media research. London: Sage. 61-83.

Schudson, M. 2000. The sociology of news production revisited again. In Curran, J. R. and Gurevitch, M. (eds). Mass media and society. 3rd edition. London: Arnold. 175-200.

Shoemaker, P. J., 1991. Gatekeeping. California: Sage.

Shoemaker, P., Eichhoh, M., Kim, E. and Wrigley, B. 2001. Individual and routine forces in gatekeeping. Journalism and mass communication quarterly. 78(2). 233-246.

Silva, P. nd. South African English: oppressor or liberator? [Online] Available: <http://www.ru.ac.za/affiliates/dsae/MAVEN.HTML>
Accessed June 21 2006.

Soloski, J. 1997. News reporting and professionalism: some constraints on the reporting of news. In Berkowitz, D. (Ed.) Social meanings of news: a text reader. London: Sage. 138-154.

SouthAfrica.info. 2005. History of the press in South Africa. [Online] Available: http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/constitution/971558.htm
Accessed May 20 2005.

SouthAfrica.info. 2006. The languages of South Africa. [Online] Available: http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/demographics/language.htm
Accessed June 21 2006.

Spradley, J. 1980. Participant observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Stein, E. 1998. Media policy: framework for an expanding world. In de Beer, A. S. (Ed.) Mass media towards the millennium: the South African handbook of mass communication. Pretoria: Van Schaik. 447-468.

Stein, M. L. 1974. Shaping the news. New York: Washington Square Press

Strelitz, L. 2002. Where the global meets the local: South African youth and their experience of global media. Grahamstown: Rhodes University PhD Thesis. [Online]

Available: <http://echea.ru.ac.za/search/a?a>
Accessed January 15 2006.

Thompson, J. B. 1988. Mass communication and modern culture: contribution to a critical theory of ideology. Sociology. 22(3). 359-383.

Thompson, J. B. 1995. Communication and social context. The media and modernity: a social theory of the media. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tomaselli, R. Tomaselli, K. and Muller, J. 1989. Currents of power: state broadcasting in South Africa. Bellville: Anthropos.

Tuchman, G. 1972. Objectivity as a strategic ritual: an examination of newsmen's notion of objectivity. American Journal of Sociology. 77(4). 660-679.

Tuchman, G. 2002. The production of news. In Jensen, K. B. (Ed.) A handbook of media and communication research: qualitative and quantitative methodologies. 78-90.

Venter, D. 1997. South Africa and Africa: relations in a time of change. In Carlsnaes W. and Muller, M. (eds). Change and South African external relations. Halfway House: ITP. 73-101.

Westerståhl, J. and Johansson, F. 1994. Foreign news: news values and ideologies. European Journal of Communication. 9. 71-89.

Wimmer, R. D. and Dominick, J. R. 1991. Mass media research: an introduction. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Woods, D. 2000. Rainbow nation revisited. London: André Deutsch.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Gatekeepers interviewed

(The gatekeepers' job positions and date of employment are withheld in order not to reveal the name coding in the study findings. The presentation order does not reflect order of name coding)

1. Cowley, Nick
2. Dubase, Manelisi
3. Dube, Alinah
4. Gouws, Greg
5. Heyl, Genée
6. Jenkinson, Craig
7. Kaikai, Linus
8. Makatees, Kenneth
9. Newton, Richard
10. Peters, Rozanne
11. Phetoe, Solly
12. Shreuder, Hugo
13. Simelane, Mpumi
14. Sithole, Vusi
15. Taylor, Denzil
16. White, Ray

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

Selecting Stories to Tell: the Gatekeeping of international news at SAfm

A. [GATEKEEPER'S BACKGROUND]

1. Gender and race:
2. What's your home language? What other languages do you speak?
3. Your religion...
4. Educational background and place of training...
5. How long have you been in the media?
6. When did you join SABC?
7. Age group (below or above 35):

B. [GENERAL]

1. How do you define news?
2. In considering what to select as international news for international news stories, what do you consider more important: the reporting of events or the reporting of social issues that ossify over time?
3. What generally are the constraints to your international news selection process?

C. [ROUTINES]

1. To judge the relevance of an international news item to be broadcast on SAfm, which of these values count most? Please indicate in order of preference [Galtung and Ruge's taxonomy on see supplementary page 1a] Please include values relevant to you but not found on the list.
2. Consider this scenario: You've just received news that President Yoweri Museveni has resigned and has arranged fresh elections in Uganda. At the same time, you learn that the US has declared war on Iran. Only one of these items has to be the international news headline on the next bulletin on SAfm. As the person to make this headline decision, which story will be selected? Please explain your answer.

3. In selecting sound bites for of international news stories, do you prefer official sources or unofficial sources (official sources refer to government spokespeople, political party leaders, civil society group figures, experts and academics; unofficial sources are ordinary citizens without leadership roles).
4. Please, list your main sources of international news in order of preference (e.g. wire services, your own correspondents, institutions such as government department of foreign affairs, etc.). (Supplementary sheet 4)
5. Which would you prefer to include in a news bulletin when faced with a deadline: a very newsworthy story without a sound bite or an average story with a sound bite?

D. [ROLE CONCEPTIONS]

1. What do you think is the role of a journalist: to reflect facts or to advocate causes [gatekeeper vs. advocate, Janovitz 1975]?

E. [POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND SOCIAL SYSTEM ISSUES]

1. Do you think it is permissible for journalists to have strong political opinions?
2. Do you personally belong to a political party?
3. Do you think the free market economic system is the best?
4. Are you of the opinion that the US shapes the international news agenda? Explain.
5. Do you think South Africa sets the news agenda on the African continent? Explain.
6. Do you agree with America's policy on nuclear non-proliferation vis-à-vis India on the one hand, and Iran on the other?
7. Do you use the expressions 'terrorist/terrorism' in your international news stories? (Ask why or why not.)
8. Tell me what you consider each of the following figures to be: a soldier, a terrorist or something else:
Osama bin Laden – Head of Al Qaeda
Ariel Sharon – Israel's PM
George Bush – US President
Khaled Meshaal (leader, in exile, of Hamas)
Mahmoud Amedinejad – President of Iran

F. [SAfm's HISTORICAL CONTEXT]

1. In selecting international news items to be aired on SAfm, do you consciously work to foster any change between the SABC radio of the apartheid days and the SABC radio of today? If so, what are your reasons for doing that?
2. What do you consider some of the differences and similarities in the way international news was selected here in the past and at present?

G. [MODEL OF THINKING]

1. If you were involved with desk-editing, how would you cope with deadline pressures in selecting international news stories on a fast news day?

H. [ORGANISATIONAL]

1. Do you think the editorial policies of the SABC with regards to international news promote ideal international news coverage?
2. If you were the foreign news editor, what would you consider the most important factor to influence your choice of international news? (Supplementary Sheet 3)
 - a. *Decisions made at the line conferences [routine/org]*
 - b. *Your personal opinion about what is newsworthy [ind/routines]*
 - c. *Editorial policies of SABC [org]*
 - d. *South Africa's foreign policy [Social inst]*
 - e. *Dictated by newsflow on the wires [routines]*
 - f. *Others*
3. Were you told what SABC news policy in general and international news policy in particular was, when you started working here? [Breed 1955 says journalists are never told what policy is].
4. Were you given any training by the SABC at the start of your job?
5. Were you given a style book? [Breed 1955 posits that style books deal with literary style not policy]
6. Are there explicit policy rules that you follow when you make decisions about news and international news broadcast on SABC radio? [see Soloski 1989 in Hansen et al 1998: 40]

7. How often do you have disagreements with your subordinates concerning the selection of international news items?
8. How are those disagreements resolved?

I. [UNCERTAINTY ABSORPTION]

9. How would you deal with international news stories which you may consider important but difficult for you to understand based on the fact that they possess culturally unfamiliar ingredients?

J. [SOCIAL-INSTITUTIONAL]

1. Do you think it is mandatory for you to contextualise international news for your SA audiences?
2. As radio news editor, do you ever receive press releases on international news items?
3. Who do you target with the international news you package for SAfm?

K. [ORGANISATIONAL VERSUS INDIVIDUAL]

1. When faced with a situation where your organization's policy clashes with the values of newsworthiness and objectivity, what takes primacy in shaping your decision: Corporation's policy or journalistic values?

L. [MISCELLANEOUS]

1. Anything you'd like to add to our discussion?

Appendix 3: Example of field notes entered into an index card

INDEX CARD C: ORGANISATIONAL FORCES

Note: forces include:

- Policy
- Editors' decisions
- Colleagues' consensus
- Others

Newsroom 1.30 pm Monday 13 march

It appears at this stage that the bulletins output editors are the most powerful gatekeepers of international news at SABC radio. They play a boundary role, for all the input and output of international stories from the wires that are broadcast on SAfm is approved by them.

*The relationship between G4 – staffer and presenter, and G9 – (editor) is very informal. They poke fun at each other and act like real friends.

Conviviality in the newsroom

* G9 – Morning shift editor for today is around to give a helping hand to his colleague G1. He suggests that the presenter G4 could include an interesting new angle in the Milosevic story. G9 has just found out on news24.com that Milosevic was allegedly taking the wrong pills in order to develop more problems that will guarantee his transportation to Moscow, where he could die in the hands of his wife.

G9's suggestion (not orders) to G4 is indicative of the leeway staffers could have over the shaping (perhaps not the selection) of international stories. Although G4 and his editor, G9, poke fun at each other, it is clear to me that G4 respects and admires G9. This is one of the reasons advanced by Breed (1955) why cubs in the newsroom keep to organisational policy (i.e. respect and admiration of their editors and senior staff).

Conference Room, Wednesday March 15 9.08 am:

Meeting on the launching of current affairs programme at weekends on SABC PBS radio stations.

AN EXECUTIVE EDITOR: "I expect most of the weekend shows to carry feature stories". He adds that the SABC should also identify people to be trained in producing TV documentaries.

AN EXECUTIVE EDITOR about weekends: "let's try to be more people-oriented, human interest stories".

News bulletins at the weekends would take the form of those of normal weekdays. That is, full bulletins at the top of each hour and headlines at half past each hour instead of just

hourly bulletins at weekends. Bulletins run from 5.30 am to 11 pm on week days, and 6am to 9pm at weekends and public holidays.

Line talk, 3pm Thursday March 16

No foreign desk representation. No issues or debates on the international news diary; same on Monday March 20 at 8.30 am; same Monday March 20 at 3:30 pm; also Line talk, 3pm of Wednesday 22 March [*this is an indication, like several interviews have said, that international news is not the priority of SABC News*]

Friday 17 March, 8.30 am line talk

Organisational Constraint – Cost

* Zimbabwe, Congress of one of the factions of the MDC. Morgan Tsvangirai may be re-elected leader.

* Inflation is running high in Zimbabwe.

Participant questions how the inflation story is going to be covered. There's a problem of cost. It is quite difficult to cover Zimbabwe, he avers. AN EXECUTIVE EDITOR asks for people to forward names of those they know can cover Zimbabwe from there.

The difficulties in covering the DRC are discussed in view of upcoming elections.

AN EXECUTIVE EDITOR says he asked D N (political reporter) to contact the UN office there; they could help with their radio. The SA government is also helping to deploy equipment there. So they'll talk with SA government officials there [outright recourse to social institutions to help out in reaching stories].

Two negative forces that act on the selection of international news items to be reported on SABC radio include lack of equipment in African countries (as in the DRC) and lack of human resources (as in the case of Zimbabwe).

Sunday March 19, 10:04 am Newsroom,

Bulletins Editor is listening to 'Newshour' on BBC radio, where there is an interview of former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. He tries to find out from G4 and another colleague what exactly Mr Allawi's portfolio was (i.e. interim PM or President?).

There is both a top-down and bottom-up exchange of ideas that are used in the selection of international news between editors and staffers.

Monday March 20, 9am. Newsroom

G16, bulletin editor is asking several colleagues, including presenter – G3 if they know whether Zambia is the first Southern African country to take concrete measures to check bird flu. This follows Zambia's ban on the importation of birds and the movement of all poultry within Zambia. Finally, G16 goes to the research section where he gets confirmation from someone that Zambia is the first to do so.

* There is a bit of a hiccup about the bird flu story concerning Zambia. Someone later calls from the research unit to complain that the bird flu story has been wrongly framed. Zambia is not the first southern African country to take measures against bird flu. It could be the first to take such measures in 'recent times' (following the report of the discovery of the H5N1 virus in Cameroon and Egypt; after Nigeria).

I notice a lot of horizontal consultation on international stories that are problematic; a sort of uncertainty absorption.

Wednesday March 22, newsroom

Presenter G11 brings to the attention of editor G16, a story about the Ayatollah of Iran. G16 agrees it is a good story and edits it.

G11's proposal to editor G16 reveals a flexible exchange (bottom-up approach) between junior and editorial staff with regards to the selection of international news to be broadcast on SAfm.

Thursday March 23, Line talk, 8.30 am

Executive editor emphasises that the editors must follow-up to ensure their presenters give out five minutes of news during the bulletins in line with the SABC's submission to ICASA. He intimates that presenters must not take advantage of the evenings in order to present 2½ minutes bulletins [*This is a tacit suggestion that there is some leeway given to presenters as boundary role gatekeepers.*]

*MD OF NEWS ATTENDS THE LINE TALK TODAY. He complains about the dryness of Saturdays and Sundays [I earlier remarked more international news stories are selected at weekends owing to dryness of national stories]. He insists that reporters in the regions must be sent to the fields at weekends.

Executive Editor orders that the political reporter trailing President Mbeki's international tour must do a lengthy package for current affairs shows when he returns.

Thursday March 23, Newsroom, 11.45 am.

I notice that there's hardly ever CNN television on in the newsroom. Instead, it is mostly BBC World. G16 (one of the Bulletin desk editors) explains to me that it's because of the standing agreement between the SABC and the BBC (for SABC to use BBC sound and vice versa).

Appendix 4: Example of Oral-interview coding at the routines level of analysis

“ROUTINES

Which is more important: events or social issues?

01: Both – not biased on events but it depends on the wires

02: Both: events first, then social issues – ‘We look at the sociology of news...’

03: Social issues (good example)

04: Events; international news not priority [considers Africa as a nation]

05: Events first; but human interest issues are preferred ‘on a quiet day’

06: Events first; then social issues

07: Both are equally important

08: Both. But SABC used to concentrate on events, which is not informative (best ex)

09: N/A [Missed it]

10: Issues are more important

11: Social issues deserve preference [PROCESS JOURNALISM]

12: Both but events for bulletins; social issues mostly for current affairs progs

13: Soc issues – regrets it’s mostly events covered in the wires [ROLE & EVENTS Qs]

14: N/A”.