Saving the *Sowetan*: The public interest and commercial imperatives in journalism practice

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Abstract

This thesis examines the complex ways in which notions of the public interest and commercial imperatives intertwine in journalism practice. It does this through a study of the 2004 takeover and relaunch of the *Sowetan* newspaper, the highest circulation daily in South Africa throughout the 1990s and an institution of black public life. The 'public interest' and 'the commercial' are recurring ideas in journalism scholarship and practice, and the relaunch appeared to be a challenge to reconcile the *Sowetan's* commercial challenges with its historical responsibility to a 'nation-building' public. However, the research shows that the public/commercial aspects of journalism were inextricably entangled with *Sowetan's* organisational culture, which was the matrix through which its journalism practice was expressed. Conflict in the organisation over the changes was not simply a contest between commercial realities and the public interest, with journalists defending a responsibility to the public and managers pushing commercial solutions, but a conflict between the culture of *Sowetan* "insiders", steeped in the legacy of the newspaper, and "outsiders", employed by the new owners to effect change.

Another conclusion of the research is that commercial "realities" – often conceptualised as counter to the public interest – are highly mutable. Basic conditions, such as a dependence on advertising, exist. However, media managers must choose from a range of strategies to be commercially viable, which requires risk-taking, innovation and, often, guesswork. In such situations, the 'wall' between media managers and senior editors is porous, as all executives must manage the relationship between business and editorial imperatives. Executives tend to overlook culture as a factor in changing organisations, but I argue that journalism could benefit from engaging with management theory and organisational psychology, which offer ways to understand the specific dynamics of the organisation.

Finally, I argue that the case of the *Sowetan* throws into question the idea that there may be a broadly universal journalism culture. The attachment of *Sowetan* journalists to their particular values and practice suggests that forms of journalism evolve in certain contexts to diverge from the 'professional' Anglo-American modes. These 'journalisms' use similar terms – such as the 'public interest' – but operationalise them quite differently. The responsibility to the public is imagined in very different ways, but remains a significant attachment for journalists.

Preface

The writing of a PhD is lonely process. There are so many times you skip social jollifications to revise a chapter, or try to explain to puzzled friends why it really is not possible for you to play a game of Scrabble ("just one?") on a Sunday night; there are weekends spent entirely in pyjamas, subsisting on coffee and toast; there are comments when you appear at a rare event: "I hear you've become a recluse!" The retreat from social life, and wrestling with a project that seems to expand beyond your capacity to contain it, can lead to an overwhelming sense of isolation.

However, looking back now on the years, I can see the many, many people who supported me in this project – a crowd of helpful faces. It is a testament to the generosity of the communities around me that, in writing the acknowledgements, I became aware that I couldn't name everyone who had helped along the way without this section running into many pages. There are some individuals and institutions that I would like to mention, however.

First, I would like to acknowledge Wits University, where as an undergraduate student I first discovered the pleasures of critical engagement. I was rescued from an inept undergraduate career when I stumbled into the department of Comparative Literature, headed by Professor Reingard Nethersole, who guided me into better writing and scholarship. There I also had the pleasure of studying with Tim Couzens, teaching in African Literature, and Peter John Delport, with whom I spent many hours in coffee shops with his small cohort of students ("the three witches"), debating the relative merits of Freud, Marx and Foucault.

Twenty years later, I was back at Wits, this time as a teacher in Journalism, and was fortunate enough to find myself in another invigorating group, the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life project. Led by Carolyn Hamilton and funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and the Ford Foundation, PIL (as it was dubbed) brought together a group of scholars from a variety of disciplines to work on questions of publicness in South Africa. I managed to talk my way into the project, and it became a home for me. Thanks to Carolyn Hamilton, Anthea Garman, Litheko Modisane, Rory Bester, Pascal Mwale, Alan Finlay and Windsor Leroke for creating this stimulating space, and for allowing me in. I have been inspired by your work over the years. I would like to particularly acknowledge Carolyn, who persuaded me to come back to Wits and begin a research life, and who has always made time for me when I have

needed advice. You are a consummate mentor, a generous colleague and a highly prized friend.

The wider Wits community, particularly the Faculty of Humanities, has offered support in tangible ways. The Faculty Research Committee has funded time off for writing and travel to conferences, where I could test my ideas. The faculty itself has sponsored a number of retreats for PhD writing. Many individuals helped along the way: Leon de Kock was instrumental in securing a Carnegie time-off grant for me and motivating me to get writing, Isabel Hofmeyr was an exemplary mentor, Susan van Zyl an adept editor, and Shireen Hassim an endlessly patient and encouraging breakfast companion. My doctoral work was supported by the Carnegie Foundation, and Hugo Canham was always available to facilitate the fellowship.

I am aware that members of my department, Journalism, lightened my workload so I could work on the PhD. Anton Harber, Glenda Daniels, Kevin Davie, Alan Finlay and Brigitte Read all took on extra responsibilities to free me up, and it is much appreciated. For help with practical, technical and institutional issues, I relied on Judi Mafika, Pierre Miller, Carol Townsend, Nooshin Erfani-Ghadimi and Sintha Chiumia (for help with graphs). Then there were those who read my work along the way, a very special (although small) group. The Journalism research group – Joanne Richards, Indra de Lanerolle, Ruth Becker, Kate Skinner and Joey Kok – offered crucial feedback in the final stages.

I could not have done this research were it not for the generosity of the Times Media and *Sowetan* journalists and executives. Apart from giving me their time for interviews, Andrew Gill, Taryn Gill, Thabo Leshilo, Len Maseko, Musa Zondi, and Mike Siluma also engaged passionately with the questions the project presented. Special thanks are due to Lloyd Coutts, whose account of the *Sowetan* relaunch first sparked my interest in the project, and Mike Tissong, who was endlessly available for follow-up questions and last-minute requests for stats and details.

Proving that television journalists have secret scholarly aspirations, Jimi Matthews, Mike Cadman and Victor Antonie all read an early chapter, offering some useful feedback. Victoria Stapf turned my thinking in a new direction at a crucial moment, and let me explore that while hosting me, feeding me and plying me with books in New York. Karen Martin introduced me to the little town of Greylingstad, its walks and dams, and I enjoyed a number of houses and views there, courtesy of her, Graeme Reid and Pat Pillai. Akiedah Mohamed, Joanne Richards and Micaela Smith

were motivational fellow writers, dragging me along in writing tandem. I was thankful for the quick intelligence of Susan Russell, who listened *ad nauseum* to all the variations of my arguments on readership, advertising, newspaper content over many years, never seemed to get bored, and often produced a delicious cooked dinner to go with the discussion. David Dison was another intelligent listener, who demonstrated an amazing ability to remember where the last conversation had left off. Shaun de Waal did a final read, offering me his vast editing experience.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisors Larry Strelitz and Lynette Steenveld, who read every word (every comma, every reference!) with great attention and many times, who engaged so fully with the project, and who brought such nuanced insights and encyclopaedic knowledge to the table. Thank you for your patience and understanding, as I argued every point and defended against every change, and for the rigorous "conversation" of the last few years.

Finally, thanks to my son, Lucas, for living with this project for almost half of his existence, and to my family, especially my mother Sheila, for her quiet but substantial acts of support in the background. They have not gone unnoticed and unappreciated.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1 Research question

This thesis examines the complex ways in which notions of the public interest and commercial imperatives intertwine in journalism work, focusing particularly on the role that organisational culture plays in mediating these and other journalism discourses. To examine this question, I look at the *Sowetan*, a daily newspaper with a legacy of service to the black urban communities of South Africa, at a particular moment in its history: its takeover and relaunch by Johnnic Communications (Johncom)[1] in 2004. In public discussion, the relaunch was conceptualised as a struggle to reconcile the *Sowetan's* commercial realities with the newspaperôs historical responsibility to a black ónation-buildingô public. This provided the project with its working question: how are the public interest and commercial imperatives negotiated in journalism work?

The project was thus focused at the outset on ideas of óthe public interestô and óthe commercialô at one news organisation (*Sowetan*) at a particular moment in its life. I chose to focus on the public interest and the commercial as they are recurring ideas in certain journalism theories, in recent contestation around South African journalism, and in the problems of the *Sowetan* relaunch. By public interest, I mean the normative expression in journalism of a nexus of ideas around publics, the public sphere, the public good etc, arguably a ñsocial imaginaryò (see Taylor 2002) in global contemporary society. By the commercial, I mean the business operations of news media that aim to make them commercially viable, as well as a range of discourses about these operations that constitute this idea. Although the commercial seems to be more tangibly linked to material operations in the world than the public interest, I approach both terms as sliding signifiers, which shift over different times and in different contexts. My thesis aims to probe their deployment or significance in the production of news, focusing on the re-launch of the *Sowetan*, as it surfaces the commercial ï often implicit in journalism production ï along with the public interest.

During the course of the research, it became evident that the public and commercial aspects of journalism at the *Sowetan* were inextricably entangled with its organisational culture, which was the matrix through which its journalism practice was expressed. Understanding the organisationôs culture was necessary in order to understand

the journalism that was practised there, which includes conceptions of the newspaperôs public role and the commercial necessities it faces. I chose to foreground the organisational culture of the *Sowetan* in the research, giving it equal attention alongside the public/commercial question. These three aspects of journalism work are ï in practice ï continuously intertwined; however, at particular historical moments and under certain conditions, one aspect may dominate. My analysis focuses on the public, commercial and organisational aspects as they surface through the life of the *Sowetan* at different times.

Organisational analyses of newspapers are not common in journalism literature, which subsumes organisational approaches under the sociology of news. I find that much of the literature cannot account for the phenomena that arise in my case, specifically, the organisational culture, its deep roots, how it operates and how it responds to change. Understanding the culture of the *Sowetan* requires going beyond the field of journalism studies to scholarship that engages with organisations and how they work as cultural entities. As Handy has noted, there are so many variables that combine in and around an organisation that it is important to start an analysis from the ground up ï what he calls the ñhistorianôs methodò (1993, 13). This requires an ethnographic orientation, examining phenomena in detail in order to surface the cultureôs underlying assumptions. I identify key aspects of the culture, examining the ways they shape (and are shaped by) the organisationôs journalism, its relationship to society, and its commercial operations. I draw on management and organisational theory to inform this inquiry.

At the heart of the organisation *Sowetan* is the question of its identity. The legacy of the newspaper ï in particular, its links to forerunner black newspapers and the ónation-buildingô editorship of Aggrey Klaaste ï emerges in the study as fundamental to this identity and the contestation over it. A subsidiary focus in the research is thus a reconstruction of *Sowetan's* role as an institution of black public life. This project does not attempt to be an exhaustive history, but explores the *Sowetan's* publicness at key moments in order to examine its role in creating and maintaining the organisational culture. I ask how *Sowetan*ôs publicness was constituted in its founding period, what imagined relationship it constructed with its readers, and how the newspaper positioned itself in South African public life. I examine the implications of *Sowetan's* public positioning for the workings of the organisation. I interrogate the ways in which certain

norms of journalism, often conceptualised as fairly standard in democracies, were constituted in the organisational and societal contexts in which *Sowetan* journalists worked.

The position of *Sowetan* as a black readership paper was key, also, to understanding its commercial operations. From a commercial perspective, a newspaperôs readership is understood in terms of ómarketsô, rather than ópublicsô (see Gandy 2000, 47). I attempt to locate the role of commercial factors in constructing the newspaper at particular moments, and explore the relationship of these factors to the internal dynamics of the organisation and to greater societal conditions. What emerges is a complex picture of entanglement, in which commercial imperatives and serving a public are not always in contestation or in balance. A subsidiary focus of the research is the way in which commercial órealitiesô are constructed by the discourses of the day, and shift according to current ideas of what makes good business sense. I examine whether an opposition between commercial imperatives and public responsibility can be seen in the actual dynamics of the *Sowetan's* operations, and if so, in what ways they play out. I also consider whether the commercial/public interest dichotomy is complicated ï or even overshadowed ï by unrelated factors of organisational culture.

2 Context of the research

The business of journalism and its relationship to the mediaôs normative role in democratic societies is a key issue for Journalism Studies and amongst journalists themselves (see Goldsmiths Media Group 2000, 22-38; Curran 2000, 9-16). Liberal schools of thought hold that a commercial press is necessary in order for media to remain independent of the state and provide citizens with the information they need to make decisions, and to engage in debate on issues of common concern (see Campbell 2004; McQuail 1994; Fraser 1992; Habermas 1989; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956 and Wright Mills 1956). Critical political economists, on the other hand, have argued that the adaptations news media have to make in order to remain profitable affect their ability to fulfil their societal role, and that the logic of the marketplace is not conducive to the production of the quality journalism necessary for a democracy (see Bagdikian 1983 and 2004; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Murdock 1992, and McChesney 2000 and 2003).

One aspect of this debate centres on news production, where, it has been argued, journalistic professional autonomy plays a role in mediating commercial and market influences. In this conception, the newsroom is a place of contestation, even resistance (Curran 2000, 25). John McManus has argued that there are two sets of norms in newsrooms: journalism norms, which represent citizensô interests and strive for public enlightenment; and business norms, which aim to maximise profits (1994, 24). However, with a few notable exceptions (for example, McManus 1994 and Underwood 1993), the mediation of these two competing sets of norms through particular organisational cultures has not been widely researched. McManus has argued that his study of television production was the first that sought explicitly to use micro-economics to analyse the making of news (1994, xii). More recently, Simon Cottle has argued that the ñmiddle groundò between economic and cultural approaches to understanding media ï the organisations and practices that produce journalism ï is ñrelatively unexplored and under-theorisedò (2003, 20). This research locates itself in that middle ground.

In South Africa, debates about the commercial mediaôs role and functions in the new democracy began in the 1990s and have flared up periodically over the last two decades (see Fourie 2008; Duncan 2009; and Hamilton 2009). In the early period of the democracy, the debate focused on the commercial pressôs historical role of serving a white public in the apartheid *status quo*, and how it should transform itself in order to serve the new citizenry, rather than sectional interests (Berger 1999; Steenveld 2004). Later critiques from the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), have drawn on critical political economy positions to argue that commercial media are beholden to advertisers and affluent readers (Duncan 2009, 10). During the Mbeki presidency, his office generated many attacks on the print media as the voice of white and (co-opted) black elites (Hamilton 2009, 360; Daniels 2010, 73). The state has also sought ï in the post-apartheid era ï to transform the economy through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), a process by which formerly marginalised South Africans could gain access to business and commercial interests.[2] The first BEE company was New Africa Investments Limited (Nail), which obtained a stake in *Sowetan* at the time of the first democratic elections (Mbeki 2009, 11). These developments have foregrounded the print mediaôs

position in South Africa as both an institution of society and a commercial industry, and brought their role into public discussion.

3 Rationale for the study

Despite the concerns about commercial and political influences on news media, research in South Africa has rarely examined the sites of media production in which news is made[3] and the impact of material conditions and political factors on the individuals, routines and structures in media organisations. But we know that these factors do not ripple directly into news production; they are mediated through the understandings of media practitioners, and a complex of strategies, structures and practices employed in the production of journalism (Cottle 2003, 4). The understandings of journalists are part of a larger system of ideas operating among journalists and media workers and in society, at play with each other and with other ideas.

Journalism Studies literature, as I show in chapter 4, does not engage with media organisations as *particular* organisations, with a focus on their specific culture, but tends to conceptualise organisations as sites of journalism, defined by similar production processes or professional ideologies. My research demonstrates the usefulness of approaching organisational culture as an analytical concept, and applying it to journalism organisations. Drawing on theories of organisations from scholarly traditions outside of journalism, I argue that the focus on media as an institution in society can overdetermine the understanding of journalism as a practice in particular circumstances and conditions. Further, it may not be possible to fully grasp the operations of journalism work without understanding the specific context of the organisation in which it is practised.

A subsidiary focus in my research on corporate strategy in a media company makes a contribution to a little studied area of journalism work. Schlesinger notes in 1987 that ñno sociological study, as far as I know, has been published on the higher reaches of policy-making and corporate planning by media owners and plannersò (xxxiii). He says the sensitivity of such information and the political or commercial implications of some policies becoming public worked against executives granting access to researchers. In the 1990s, Underwood (1993) and McManus (1994) examine the ways in which new strategies to retain audiences (so-called market-driven journalism) became popular in the

U.S. media sector, and the impact of these on journalism content and media production. However, they do not examine how the strategies are arrived at by media executives. My case enables me to focus on this under-researched group and to examine the ways in which the imagining of the public interest and commercial imperatives are significant to their work, as well as to the work of journalists. It also shows the ways in which media executives negotiate organisational culture.

Finally, my project contributes to South African media history. Although there are studies of the black press in the colonial era and in the early years of the commercial press (Switzer and Switzer 1979; Couzens 1976; Manoim 1983), there is little scholarship on the commercial black press from the 1980s and after. *Sowetan* produced a coffee table book in 2006 (Maseko 2006), sponsored by a local bank, with excerpts from editions of the newspaper, anecdotal accounts from previous staff, pictures and a heavy focus on the important news of the previous 25 years. However, as the editor of the book notes, a ñdefinitive bookò on the *Sowetan* remains to be written (Maseko 2006, 2). Although this project does not claim to be that definitive book, it does investigate significant historical moments in the *Sowetan's* life, which contributes to scholarship on the newspaper. I also examine the commercial features of the black press post-1980, during the apartheid era, and look at significant developments for black readership media post-apartheid.

4 *Sowetan* as the focus of study

The *Sowetan* has certain distinctive features, as this research will show. It is rooted in the early commercial black press,[4] and is a successor newspaper to the *World* and the *Post*, newspapers that were banned for their criticism of the apartheid state in the 1970s. *Sowetan* continued this legacy of opposition in the 1980s, and was seen to serve a marginalised constituency of black township dwellers and to promote their interests in a society that granted them few rights and privileges.

The newspaper was initially launched as a free community paper in Soweto in 1980 by the Argus Company, a white-owned company that dominated the black media market (Fenton 1981, 31). It grew to be a national paper after the *Post*, an Argus daily, was effectively banned. Like its predecessor, *Sowetan* was politically allied to Black Consciousness (BC) organisations through its journalists, rather than to the ANC-aligned

anti-apartheid ñCongressò movement (Charney 1993). The newspaper was not simply opposed to apartheid, but, under the leadership of its editor, Aggrey Klaaste, facilitated an ongoing process of social re-imagining called ñnation-buildingò, partly through its editorial columns, and partly through initiating and reporting on community projects. The nation-building project, the *Mail & Guardian* (*M&G*) later argued, ñchampioned a unique form of committed journalism, where newspapers are one with the community of readers they serveò (RIP Aggrey Klaaste 2004, 30). On his death in 2004, Klaaste was hailed as ña wise and far-sighted elder statesman whose contribution went beyond the purely journalisticò (RIP Aggrey Klaaste 2004, 30). By the early 1990s, *Sowetan* was the largest daily newspaper in the country at 200 000 circulation, a position it held for more than a decade. The *Sowetan* was thus an important institution of black public life.

With the inception of a new democratic era in 1994, the ownership of *Sowetan* changed, with the black-controlled company that would become Nail taking a majority interest in the holding company, New Africa Publications.[5] In the years that followed, the nation-building focus was sidelined, and the paper shifted its editorial approach under new leadership (Msomi 2003, 3). There was also an attempt in 2002 to move it more mainstream politically, broadly in support of the ANC project, and to attract more affluent readers (Msomi 2003, 3). Saki Macozoma,[6] an executive member of the ANC and businessman, who had taken over as Nail CEO in August 2001, said in an interview in the *Sunday Times* that the black middle class was likely to grow as a result of ñempowerment initiatives and poverty eradication é the *Sowetan* must seek to prosper with its traditional readers, otherwise it will remain chained to the ghettoò (Msomi 2003, 3). The newspaper was relaunched in January 2002 and by the end of that year had shed 43 682 copies, falling to a circulation of 154 757. It dropped to second place, behind the *Star,* in the daily market (You're reading SAôs no 1 paper 2003, 3). Circulation continued to fall in the months that followed.

The *Sun*, a new tabloid characterised by screaming headlines and sensational stories of sex, crime and the supernatural, was launched in 2002. The growth of the *Sun*, followed by similar tabloids, triggered an intense debate about the role these newspapers play in society, and criticism of their news values (Steenveld and Strelitz 2010, 540). One critique of tabloids was that they served their poorer black readers with morally

questionable content and views (Wasserman 2009, 2006). The *Sun* grew rapidly and overtook *Sowetan* in 2003. When the *Sowetan* had shed half its readers, Nail put the newspaper up for sale (Matthews 2004, 15).

The failure of Nailôs strategy to move the newspaper to a more affluent readership was widely commented on in the press, and *Sowetan* was variously described as ñailingò (Duncan 2004, 17; Matthews 2004, 15), ñon the declineò (Crotty 2004, 3), and ñin no-manôs landò (Harber 2004b, 23). Media columnist Anton Harber wrote that the newspaper had ñlost a huge chunk of its readership in the past two years since it pushed itself upmarket and abandoned its position as the leading black mass-market paperò (Harber 2004c, 22), while another commentator, Kevin Bloom, called ñNailôs repositioning towards a black middle-class audienceò a key factor in the decline (2004, 19).

Repositioning the *Sowetan* thus appeared to ask its new media owner, Johncom, to balance difficult commercial demands with the newspaperôs historical role of serving a black public. It is this tension between commercial demands and public responsibility that I examine through the study of the takeover, as the situation is one in which such tensions actively played out in the thinking and actions of media executives and journalists. The changing media and societal context intensified the challenges for journalists, pushing them to re-examine their public role, their media position and their commercial practices.

My focus on the process of re-imagining the newspaper, and the conflict over what it should become, manifests key (and contested) elements of journalistic practice that are usually implicit in media production. It focuses attention on issues and processes that are taken for granted ï or at least relatively established ï in a going concern. It also surfaces the significance of the *Sowetan's* organisational culture as the medium for its journalism values and practice. The selection of this case as a research project thus allows me to examine and make visible certain values and practices in the media organisations of Johncom and the *Sowetan*.

In addition, the *Sowetan*ôs relaunch was reported and commented on in the news and trade media, bringing its societal role and commercial circumstances into public discussion. This enables my research to identify and excavate a range of ideas about the

commercial print media afloat in South African society at that time. The thesis thus uses the case of the *Sowetan* to make explicit ideas, processes and practices implicated in the production of journalism and its place in South African public life.

5 The study

This project employed a range of qualitative methods. I selected a particular case and made use of a variety of methods in order to get at the cultures and concepts at play in journalism work at a critical moment for the organisation. My approach had an ethnographic orientation, drawing on insider knowledge. I sought to understand journalism as a lived culture, with its own rituals, beliefs and identity positions, and to examine the discourses of the public interest and the commercial within that culture. In that respect, although not an ethnography, my work resonates with ethnographic studies of the 1970s and early 1980s, in which researchers entered the newsrooms of print and broadcast media and observed and recorded what was happening, trying ñto see the world through the news workerôs point of viewò (Zelizer 2004, 65). Barbie Zelizer writes:

> ... ethnographic studies provided a different way of understanding the complexity of social life, in that they generated detailed accounts of the laws, rules, and practices by which a given group existed. (2004, 65)

The focus on a particular moment of change for the *Sowetan*, rather than day-to-day practice, meant that real-time participant observation was not possible. The project, in the mode of qualitative case studies, employed a number of other methods to investigate aspects of the problem. As Denzin and Lincoln argue, one research approach yields only a partial understanding; the use of a range of methods builds up a fuller knowledge about the object of study (2005, 4).

Qualitative research allows the research to follow the question, rather than stick to a pre-designed study. ñChoices regarding which interpretative practices to employ are not necessarily made in advance,ò Denzin and Lincoln point out (2005, 4). The researcher must be responsive to unexpected issues and phenomena that emerge during the course of the study, and employ whatever method is necessary to explain them (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 4). Further, Stake argues that case study work is ñóprogressively focusedô

(i.e. the organizing concepts change somewhat as the study moves along)ò (2005, 133). This is true of my project, which started with the case study, using interviews and document analysis. The interviews revealed the significance of the newspaperôs legacy and organisational culture, which were then further interrogated. I turned to newspaper archives to establish the *Sowetan's* public positioning in its founding era, and its imagined relationship with its readers. I went on to use organisational and cultural approaches to analyse the research material, paying attention to the day-to-day habits and practices of the employees. Each of these methodological approaches sought to contribute to a detailed picture of the organisation, and to track the ideas and practices of the public and the commercial within it.

The legacy of the *Sowetan* as a black readership newspaper during the apartheid era emerged as vital to understanding the journalistic and organisational cultures implicated in conflict around the relaunch. History thus took on a complex role in the thesis. Firstly, references to historical events or issues by the interviewees were subject to a range of uncertainties; the inaccuracies of memory, for example, or significance assigned to historical events because of a contemporary perspective ï ñcontemporary constructionsò[7] of history. There was also implicit, invisible or taken-for-granted historical knowledge that interviewees did not discuss. I did not attempt to adjudicate between an imagined historical record and the discourses that referenced the past, establishing the truth and accuracy of certain perspectives. However, I made extensive use of historical material to ground the discussions. This means that, in places, the thesis alternates between historical account and conceptual analysis ï story and theory. I use the history in different ways: first, to provide the reader with a context for the data analysis; second, as evidence for certain findings; and, occasionally, as analysis.

6 Chapter outline

In Chapter 1, I argue that the *Sowetan* provides a useful case for the study of the public interest and commercial imperatives in journalism work due to its historical position in South African journalism. I note that the research moves from the initial question (public/commercial) to address what arises in the case study of *Sowetan*: its organisational culture, the ócarrierô of its journalism values and practice. I note that a key

focus for the research is how the culture of *Sowetan* is constituted through its legacy, its leadership and its interaction with societal context.

Chapter 2 discusses the ways in which the project unfolded, and makes a case for the usefulness of qualitative research in understanding journalism practice. This research relies particularly on a qualitative approach, which privileges lived experience and cultural details in the mode of Geertzôs ñthick descriptionò (1973). In a case study of the *Sowetan*, a qualitative approach allows us to observe the range of factors that play out in the dynamics of an organisation at a particular moment of its history. Such approaches allow unanticipated facets of the problem to emerge, thus grounding the research in the órealô material conditions of journalism production. What emerges in this case is the significance of the organisational culture of the *Sowetan*, and the need for an ethnographic orientation in order to examine it.

Chapter 3 examines the two key theoretical concepts that are the starting point for this thesis: the public interest and the commercial. These form the *issues* that are explored through the case study of the *Sowetan.* The public and the commercial are a substantial focus of much media scholarship. I argue that these discourses are not simply ideas about the world, but ways of constructing it. Following Habermas (1989), Fraser (1992), Taylor (2002) and Warner (2002), I propose that discourses of the public and publicness operate as a form of imaginative mobilisation in society, or collective ñworld-makingò (Gaonkar 2002, 1). I argue further that journalists are linked in an imaginative connection to the larger social imaginary of the public sphere, and through that to forms of citizenship. Their work thus connects them imaginatively to something larger than themselves as individuals, and positions them as facilitators of publicness, and through publicness, democracy.

The concept of the commercial appears to have a lower status than the public interest in normative journalism theory; by which I mean that the commercial aspects of media are not valorised in the same way as the public interest. Commercial factors are said to either constrain or enable journalism, and there is not the same passionate attachment to the business of making money out of media, only to its capacity to enable media to be independent of the state. Despite the apparent opposition between the public interest and commercial necessities in journalism, I argue that ideas of the commercial

link to the imaginary of the market economy (as articulated by Taylor 2002), which is valorised as a productive exchange of goods and services to the mutual benefit of society. The opposition between commercial and public interest aspects in journalism derives from the traditional operations of news, in which commercial and editorial functions are separated, rather than fundamentally opposed to each other. I contend that the significance of imaginaries of the public sphere and the marketplace becomes discernable in the discourses of the public interest and the commercial that play out in the case of the *Sowetan*.

Chapter 4 turns to that part of the research problem that arises in the qualitative exploration of the case: organisational culture. I attempt to understand firstly what journalism scholarship has to say about media organisations, reviewing literature on professionalism, newsroom organisation and media practice, much of which falls under the rubric of the sociology of news (Schudson 1997). I find that much of the literature on journalism tends to privilege the commonalities of media production over the particularities of media contexts. Professional conceptions of journalism ï with their strong links to the public interest ï dominate Western scholarship. It is my contention that this conception issues from the United States, which is a particular environment for journalism.

By contrast, I argue that versions of journalism may differ significantly in different societal contexts. Drawing on cultural approaches to media scholarship, I argue that it is not possible to fully grasp the operations of journalism work without interrogating its contexts, and attempting to identify the various ways in which the journalism of an organisation has been shaped. I contend that management theory and organisational psychology, which falls outside of journalism scholarship, provides useful insights into how organisations work. Approaches to organisational culture, for example, theorise the ways in which the founding period of an organisation lays down implicit but defining assumptions and paradigms, which may be difficult to identify and change. In this context, theorists such as Edgar Schein (2010), Kotter and Heskett (1992) and Richard Pascale (1991) argue that the role of leadership is to transform culture when necessary. In order to understand the culture of an organisation, it must be finely

observed and analysed on a number of different levels, suggesting an ethnographic orientation and an interpretive approach.

Chapter 5 locates *Sowetan* in the history of the black press in South Africa, in the struggles of black South Africans for access to the productive life of the country, and the conditions that shaped the post-war commercial press. I argue that the take-over of black-owned political publications by white-owned media companies expanded the reach of black readership publications, while simultaneously constraining their editorial autonomy. I show that *Sowetan*ôs establishment in the 1980s grew out of the demise of the *World* and the *Post*, which were leading institutions of black public life, and had strong links to Black Consciousness through journalists and their organisations. Commercial factors like the desire of advertisers to reach a black market and the need for the Argus Company to maintain its dominant position in that market were motivating factors for the newspaperôs establishment. I argue that ideas of the public interest and commercial imperatives were conditioned by the specifics of the South African media market and the racially stratified society. Further, the political and labour movement struggles on the early 1980s, especially a damaging strike by the Media Workersô Association of South Africa (Mwasa), and the detention and banning of black journalists, were significant in shaping the culture of *Sowetan* journalists.

Chapter 6 shows that *Sowetan,* like its forebears, the *World* and the *Post,* was inextricably bound up with black township life and the politics of struggle under apartheid. In its founding decade, *Sowetan's* public and political role evolved from representing the interest of the marginalised black majority to an actively ñnation-buildingò newspaper. Pushed by the editor, Aggrey Klaaste, nation-building became the keystone of the newspaperôs public positioning, and was gradually accepted by *Sowetan* journalists as fundamental to the newspaperôs role. The culture that was laid down in this founding period thus envisaged the role of *Sowetan* as a facilitator of community engagement and active citizenship. The readership was imagined as township, ñAfricanò communities. From a business perspective, the newspaper was successful in growing its circulation and bringing business on board to support its nation-building projects. From 1989, a productive partnership between the editorial and management departments led to improved resources for the newsroom and increased revenue.

Chapter 6 shows that, although nation-building evolved from prior citizenship projects, such as a Ballot Box exercise, it was initially opposed by activist journalists in the newsroom, who believed their efforts should be focused on tearing down the apartheid system, rather than building projects. Klaaste employed open and ongoing discussion of the issues, and an open-door policy in the newsroom, to gain the buy-in of the journalists. Drawing on organisational theorists, I argue that Klaaste thus occupied the ñfounderò position at *Sowetan*, i.e., as a leader responsible for creating and transforming culture. His iconic status among *Sowetan* journalists was demonstrated after his death in the wealth of memoirs written by them and published in a special edition of the newspaper.

Chapter 7 examines the *Sowetan* in the South African transition of the 1990s, a time of enormous change for media. Despite the shifting context, the newspaper managed to maintain a high circulation throughout the decade, becoming the top daily newspaper. Large societal tranformations materialised as challenges for *Sowetan* in aspects of journalism usually categorised as commercial in critical political economy theory; ownership, readership and advertising. I argue that the change in owners from white monopolistic capital to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) company, Nail, did not alter the conflicted relationship between management and editorial, a long-time legacy of the *Sowetan* and its forebears. Burgeoning circulation did not result in higher advertising revenue for the newspaper, a long-time problem for black-readership media, as Chapter 5 demonstrates. In addition, changes in the black middle strata (often referred to as ñthe black middle classò) by the end of the decade represented a clear danger for the newspaper, as its core readership began to diverge in life experience and aspirations.

In the early 2000s, readership appeared to decline and advertising to dip. Parliamentary hearings into the advertising industry demonstrated that two-thirds of adspend was directed at the most affluent segments of media consumers, ignoring the largely black and poor majority. *Sowetan's* new owners, BEE company Nail, reacted to this ócommercial realityô by repositioning the newspaper to focus on the so-called ñblack middle classò. A readership slump followed, triggering the sale of the newspaper to Johncom. I argue that, in this case, following a so-called ñcommercialò

route did not deliver commercial success, which points to the contingent nature of such strategies.

The Johncom takeover, described in Chapter 8, explores the competing discourses about the identity of the newspaper and its commercial survival that played out in the organisation. The chapter further demonstrates the mutability of commercial ideas and strategies, and the extent to which media executives and journalists operate in an environment of uncertainty (and even contestation) about their readership: how to grow it, what kind of identity to construct for their publication, and what production strategies would best achieve that. I argue that the contestation over the redesign was not simply a conflict between commercial realities pushed by Johncom, and the public interest defended by *Sowetan* journalists, (as certain critical political economy approaches might suggest), but that the fault-lines cut across those ideas in ways that belied conceptions of the commercial-public interest as the primary opposition in journalism production.

In addition, the conflict included aspects that appeared to be unrelated to journalism: differences between *Sowetan* ñinsidersò steeped in the legacy of the organisation and ñoutsidersò, executives and journalists from Johncom and other journalistic cultures. The ñreal *Sowetan* journalistò was thus implicitly defined as a black man, who was authentically of and for the township. The outsiders (whatever their ethnic background) tended to identify as journalists in a more generic professional mode, an occupational culture that was transferable across the newspapers of the so-called English press. Chapters 8 and 9 show that the organisational culture of the *Sowetan* emerged as a key problematic for the incoming Johncom executives, and one which they felt they never completely understood or resolved.

In the concluding chapter, I argue that the case of *Sowetan* demonstrates the importance of understanding journalism in the contexts in which it is practised, and throws into question the idea that there may be a broadly universal journalism culture. The notion of professional journalism culture that dominates in the United States has been installed there by a system of education and ratification, and exported through global systems of media and journalism studies. In alternative settings, the versions of journalism practised might be differently understood and enacted.

Further, I argue that the field of organisational psychology offers analytic concepts that have a great deal of explanatory value for journalism organisations. Theorists of organisational culture and change, such as Handy (1993), Schein (2010), Kotter and Heskett (1992) and Pascale (1991), have contributed for decades to the understanding of how organisations work and how best to effect change. Journalism scholarship could benefit from including such organisational theory in approaches to media work. Media companies, too, could benefit by recognising that particular cultures exist in organisations, and that changes to media production have more chance of being successful if they are accompanied by an explicit process of change management. Such a process needs to take account of journalistsô imaginings of their role and to engage the ñprofessional imaginationò (Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008) that allows journalists actively to transform their practice (and themselves) while retaining their attachment to their readers and their versions of the public interest.

Notes on Chapter 1

[1] Johnnic Communications was an outgrowth of South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN), one of South Africaôs big media groups. It became Times Media Limited (TML), then Johncom, then Avusa. It is currently trading as Times Media. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will refer to the company as Johncom, which is what it was called at the time of the acquisition of *Sowetan*.

[2] See, for example, the discussion document, Transformation of the media, on the ANC website (30 March 2007).

[3] A search on the databases Nexus and Sabinet (Current and completed research) using the keywords ñjournalismò, ñnewsroomò and ñmedia organisationò retrieved a handful of projects, only one specifically focused on organisational cultures in newsrooms (Delport 1999). Research by students in the Advertising and News research project at Wits University has looked at newsroom practices, but largely in relation to the placement of advertising and how it relates to editorial content. An example of this approach can be seen in Cowling, Hadland, and Tabi Tabe 2008.

[4] By commercial black press, I mean newspapers targeting a black readership, with a largely black staff, but owned and managed by white-owned companies, such as the Argus Company. These newspapers relied on advertising and, to a lesser extent, copy price for their income. In this context, black readership refers to the population categorised as ñAfricanò in the apartheid era (previously ñnativeò), as distinct from the categories of Coloured and Indian. Black came to be used as an inclusive political term, as in ñBlack Consciousnessò, but is now often used as distinct from Coloured and Indian. It is thus a contested and slippery term, as is African.

[5] The company was called Prospect Africa and evolved into New Africa Investments Limited (Nail).

[6] Saki Macozoma was an anti-apartheid activist, instrumental in the formation of the Congress-aligned United Democratic Front, and a Robben Island prisoner. He headed the ANCôs media liaison unit in 1990 and was elected to the movementôs National Executive Committee in 1991. In 1993, he moved into business, working for South African Breweries. In 1994 became an ANC MP, then was appointed as MD of the parastatal, Transnet (Rumney and Wilhelm 1999). Macozoma exemplifies the ANC ñdeployed cadreò, i.e., an executive of the organisation who moved into South African business.

[7] I rely on Carolyn Hamilton for this formulation (personal communication 2013).

Chapter 2: Methodology

1 Introduction

This thesis interrogates the complex ways in which the public interest and commercial imperatives intertwine in a newsroom and the critical role played by the newspaper's organisational culture in mediating these discourses. I began the project with the question of how ideas of the public and the commercial are negotiated in the *Sowetan*. The use of this particular case focuses attention on the processes implicated in journalism work. The case of the *Sowetan's* takeover by Johncom surfaces the values and practices of journalists and the media executives for examination. This is a key function of the case study method.

"Qualitative case study values multiple perspectives of stakeholders and participants, observation in naturally occurring circumstances, and interpretation in context," Simons argues (2009, 4). This approach accepts subjective data, and acknowledges the researcher as "the main instrument in data gathering, interpretation and reporting" (Simons 2009, 4). It is important to track the ways in which the "self" of the researcher may play into the research project, and shape the construction of the research project, the gathering of data and the interpretation of the data. The qualitative nature of the research thus requires me to examine my own positioning as a former practitioner, now journalism lecturer, close to the topics and subjects of my study.

2 The practitioner as researcher

My research draws on a knowledge base of experience in journalism. I worked as a journalist in South Africa for 14 years (as well as some years in the United States) and, by the time I began the research, had worked at two of the media companies featured here: the Argus Company, which founded *Sowetan*, and Johncom, which bought it in 2004 and currently owns it. The advantage of this for my research is that I bring an extensive store of knowledge of the taken-for-granted practices and values of South African journalists, the workings of the media organisations that structured the *Sowetan* newsroom, and the historical context of news media in South Africa from the 1980s until 2000. Much of my experience links directly to this research project in useful ways.

For example, I began my journalism career in 1984, as a trainee at the *Star*, doing the six-months "cadet course" that was then required as entry for both graduates and likely candidates without degrees. I worked there until 1988, alongside colleagues who would migrate to other Argus Company newspapers, including *Sowetan*, and colleagues who migrated in. One of my fellow cadets eventually became an editor of *Sowetan*, and another newsroom colleague would become publisher of *Sowetan* in time. Both gave me in-depth interviews. At times, in the 1980s, the *Star* and *Sowetan* would share stories, or reporters would go to news events together, so I learned something of the newspaper in the 1980s. *Sowetan* was considered to be both on the "frontline" of media opposition to government, and also on the "frontline" of reporting on township rebellions. But it was also considered a poor relation in terms of resources and the quality of journalism it produced.

In 1984, while I was still a trainee, resistance to apartheid rule erupted into violent protests in black and coloured townships across the country, and the state tried to contain this by declaring a state of emergency, arresting activists and patrolling townships with military and police troops. The regulations that went with the emergency restricted reporting still further. Given these circumstances, there was an ongoing jostling in the newsroom about the publication of news that showed the townships "in flames", to use a newspaper cliché from the era, and the brutal repression by government. Reporters would attempt to get their stories greater play by arguing for the significance of the events; photography became an important way to capture township violence and police brutality, in the face of official denials. (The role of photographers in showing the violence in township areas has been graphically captured in the film "The Bang Bang Club", based on a book of the same title by photographers Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva (2000)).

I became a member of the South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ), which represented most white reporters, while black reporters and other black workers at the *Star* mostly belonged to the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa). Mwasa was aligned to the Azanian Peoples' Organisation (Azapo), and a number of Azapo members were journalists in the newsroom I worked in. The SAUJ did the work of a union, in that it negotiated salary increases, perks, grievances etc., but it also increasingly made statements about the media's role in the society and the restrictions on

journalists. The division between black and white journalist unions reflected the differing circumstances and status of reporters, depending on race. These differences have been described by Craig Charney (1993) and set out in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report on the media (1998).

The variations in journalism practice across societal contexts became apparent to me when I went to the United States to do a journalism degree, which included a stint at Scripps Howard News Service in Washington DC. Journalists in America had journalism degrees, mostly, and interns came in to hone their skills in an actual news organisation. The writing style was also different – I noticed that rigorous sourcing was required and there seemed to be a standard style across newspapers. There was little or no culture of journalism resistance at Scripps Howard that I could discern (as described by Breed 1997), and there seemed to be a standardised policy on what reporters needed in order to be promoted. The media environment was very competitive, and qualifications and experience were vital to gain entry.

Back in South Africa in 1992, I worked for the *Weekly Mail* for several years. While I was there, it became the *Mail & Guardian*, with the UK Guardian group becoming the majority owner. Over time, the impact of the change in ownership was felt, as the parent company pushed through decisions that led to the resignation of the newspaper's long-time MD, losses of millions, and changes in editors and publishers. At the *Sunday Times*, where I spent a year, I also saw a change in editors, resulting in changes in the newsroom. The *Sunday Times* was the flagship newspaper of Johncom (known then as Times Media), and the relationships built then were pivotal in gaining me access to many of the executives I interviewed for this project.

In my newsroom experiences, I have witnessed contestation and resistance around the flag of 'the public interest' in opposition to the state. I have also witnessed and participated in the conflict around commercial demands, ownership changes, advertising and changes in the positioning and organisational culture of a newspaper. These experiences were a form of 'participant observation' over an extended period in different print organisations. I brought this 'embedded knowledge' to my investigation of the *Sowetan*, and it was instrumental to my articulation of some of the questions for this research project. My positioning on the research is thus both 'inside' and 'outside': inside

as a practitioner, steeped in the work of journalism, and outside, in that I attempt to approach the project with the critical distance of scholarly inquiry; there is nothing in the data that has not been independently verified.

There are a number of advantages to my insider position; firstly, I had privileged access to the key media executives, editors and journalists I needed to interview, both in terms of being able to secure time with them, and in being able to conduct the interviews as a conversation between peers. In addition to my former colleagues at the *Star*, many of the interviews are with people who are already known to me, as former colleagues or peers in the social world that journalists create, or as students in the journalism programme in which I currently teach. This made conversation easy, as I was seen as one of them. As Hayes Mabweazara notes, 'insider-status' not only helps the researcher with rapport, but also to avoid mistakes in a polarised or sensitive context (in his case political, in mine, organisational). What he says about ethnography also applies to my qualitative study: "ethnography *is not just about interviews and observations,* but is also very much about *informant cultivation* … probably the most important part of ethnographic fieldwork" (2010, 671).

My background knowledge meant that I did not have to ask questions about basic journalism activities and organisational structures and processes, saving time. It allowed me to hone in on tricky areas, pick up anomalies and aberrations, and spot variations in the journalistic discourse. It provided me with a safety net, and "data set" that I could check my work against, so that I did not enter that "parallel universe" that Zelizer (2004, 2) has described: where scholarly work does not adequately reflect the working world it seeks to study. However, I did not privilege my own experiences over the information I was given in interviews, or the data I collected from documents and newspapers.

My position as insider was also potentially problematic, as insiders easily take for granted things that a researcher coming in from outside may recognise as unusual. The point about research that examines culture – an ethnographic orientation – is that it seeks to note the specifics of practice and processes in order to understand more broadly what is at work in the process. For example, "Fishman drew a picture of a bureaucratically constructed journalistic universe" (Zelizer 2004, 67), while Tuchman described news as the result of strategic rituals and organisational routines (Zelizer 2004, 66). The lack of a

critical distance can lead to normative explanations that fail to grasp what is at play in the values and practices of the organisation. The studies I cite above were participant observation studies that involved the researcher going into the environment and, though participating in the day-to-day work of the organisation, maintaining a critical distance in the observation and recording of the practices. I was not a participant observer of the takeover and relaunch of *Sowetan*, as it had already happened when I decided on the research topic. I had to reconstruct that process, largely through interviews, by asking questions that could elicit details about the culture and practices of the newsroom. In other words, I had to depend on the perspectives of the protagonists. However, there were certain factors that helped to work against any tendency I might have to impose my own journalistic identity on the project

The first safeguard is that I came to the research with very few preconceived ideas of what I would find. My expectations, drawn from some of the initial reports of the process in the newspapers, as well as some preparatory interviews, was that there would be conflict, that the conflict would be between the *Sowetan's* long-serving journalists and Johncom's incoming executives, and that there would be competing ideas about the commercial and the public interest in this conflict. There was already an indication that Johncom was not taking a sensationalist tabloid route, but looking for a middle way, which suggested that a sense of public responsibility might be important to the executives. This is contrary to some arguments within the area of critical political economy, which suggest that managers are committed to commercial objectives at the expense of the public interest. This was an interesting aspect to explore, and my lack of knowledge about it meant that I could approach it with no idea of what I would find.

Secondly, the competing narratives of the various interviewees – some passionately and compellingly argued – made it difficult to settle on any one account of what could have and should have happened. This worked against any tendency to accept certain practices and ideas as natural, self-evident or desirable. I was required to constantly weigh arguments against other arguments, which meant a critical orientation was continuously activated.

3 Qualitative research

My project falls into the area of qualitative research. What qualitative research means is arguable, and highly contingent on where and when it is practised, as Denzin and Lincoln point out (2005, 3). However, they offer the following working definition:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations … (2005, 3)

The metaphor Denzin and Lincoln use to describe a qualitative researcher is the "bricoleur" – defined as someone who makes do with what she finds, patching things together to make meaning (2005, 5). The *bricoleur* can never be an independent, objective observer, but accesses the phenomena of the world through interpretative practices.

In qualitative research, no single methodological practice is privileged over another (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 6). Qualitative research recognises that one research approach to a phenomenon only yields a partial understanding of it, whether that research approach is qualitative or quantitative. Denzin and Lincoln argue that a range of methods is preferable to one, as it builds up knowledge about the object of study – by what they call "quilting" or "montage" (2005, 4). I prefer to think of the research approach in this particular project as an investigation, with the researcher conceptualised as "detective" or perhaps "investigative journalist", following whatever suggested itself as offering insights into the case. Thus my original research question – focusing on the commercial and the public interest – was extended during the project to include a third term, organisational culture, as it surfaced during the investigation as significant. This is one of the great advantages of a qualitative approach; it permits the researcher to follow the question, rather than stick to a pre-designed study, thus allowing for the emergence of issues and phenomena that are not predicted by the researcher. The researcher can put together a range of methods in order to illuminate the question, and the line of inquiry can be structured in response to what is excavated by the research.

In this study, I started with a focus on a case, using interviews and document analysis. I used the takeover of the *Sowetan* by Johncom as an occasion for reflection by the key players in that process. In response to the overwhelming references to the newspaper's legacy as a public institution, I turned to newspaper archives to establish its public positioning in media texts. I followed with an examination of the texts that constructed *Sowetan*'s public and nation building orientation, like Aggrey Klaaste's columns and news reports on nation building projects. Using archival material required some historical reconstruction of the time, for which I drew on studies of the politics and media of the era. The research also expanded to examine aspects of the organisational culture of the newspaper, which had emerged as significant. For this, I employed a thematic analysis of the interview material, paying attention to the details of the day-to-day habits and practices of the employees. Each of these methodological approaches sought to contribute to a detailed picture of the *Sowetan*, and to track the ideas and practices of the public and the commercial in it. This places my research methodologically in the area of the case study. The research design was triangulated, as more than one method of data collection was used.

3.1 Case study method

According to Robert Yin, the case study method …

> … is appropriate when investigators desire to (a) define topics broadly and not narrowly, (b) cover contextual conditions and not just the phenomenon of study, and (c) rely on multiple and not single sources of evidence. (Robert Yin 1993: xi)

Simons calls it "a study of the singular, the particular, the unique", a focus on a "bounded system" (2009, 3). She cites anthropologist Clifford Geertz's "thick description" – the rich detailing of the ways in which processes or people operate – as important to the case study method (1973).

Stake contends that case study research is not fundamentally qualitative. "Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied" (2005, 443). But he echoes Simons in his definition of a case: "The case is a specific One", a "functioning body", and, once again, "a bounded system" (2005, 444). There are different

kinds of case studies too: intrinsic case studies, where the interest is entirely in the specific case itself, and instrumental case studies, which are used to illustrate a class of cases or more general principles (2005, 445). Intrinsic case studies are designed to understand and engage with a case within its own world, and, to some extent, for its own sake: "[W]hile we are studying it, our meagre resources are concentrated on trying to understand its complexities" (Stake 2005, 444). The case of the *Sowetan* is largely intrinsic, as my project seeks to describe a particular organisation at a particular moment, with detailed attention to its dynamics, its context and its culture.

An intrinsic case study of the *Sowetan* has scholarly value, due to the important role the newspaper played in black public life in South Africa in a significant period of its history. However, I am also interested in the question of whether, and in what respects, the case of the *Sowetan* can deliver insights about journalism work as a global phenomenon, and about South African journalism in particular. Stake argues that an intrinsic case study can deliver some generalisation, "especially in a case that runs counter to a rule" (2005, 448). The existence of a case that does not conform to what is expected demands a rethinking of the general principles.

Further, Stake points out that even an intrinsic case is studied and organised in relation to particular issues.

> One needs to think through, in advance, what may come to pass. For some of it will pass too quickly or too subtly to notice … The design of all research requires conceptual organization, ideas to express needed understanding, conceptual bridges from what is already known, cognitive structures to guide data gathering, and outlines for presenting interpretations to others. (1995, 15)

The issues that are used to approach a case provide the connection to *general* theories and concerns. Stake argues that a focus on issues and a focus on the case are always held in tension in a case study: where the issues are prioritised, the case becomes an instrumental case study; where the case is prioritised, the study is intrinsic (1995, 25). He notes too that each issue can take on a life of its own, leading away from the case and becoming more complex and more intriguing. Deciding which focus to prioritise and how far down the track to go with the investigation is the key problem for case study research. Also,

case studies adapt to what the research throws up: it is "'progressively focused' (i.e. the organizing concepts change somewhat as the study moves along)" (Stake 2005, 133).

To apply Stake's perspective to my own study, "the issues" are commercial imperatives and the public interest and how they are intertwined, whereas "the case" reveals the nature of the organisational culture – and its mediating power. Organisational culture largely overlaps with the commercial and public issues of journalism work, but not completely; certain features of the organisational culture extend into different territory. In other words, some elements are related to the newspaper's role as a producer of journalism, but some seem unrelated; practices that relate to things such as food, drink, and township culture. The tension in this case was whether to prioritise the focus on the issues, or to shift to a detailed focus on organisational culture. However, both the issues and the case seemed to me equally significant, and I gave them equal weight, without privileging one over the other.

3.2 Ethnographic orientation

This project employs a range of qualitative methods, but my approach is ethnographic in orientation. I seek to articulate journalism as a lived culture, with its rituals, beliefs and identity positions. Unlike researchers who entered newsrooms to observe its work, like Herbert Gans (2004), Mark Fishman (1980) and Gaye Tuchman (1978), I did no participant observation. The focus of my research is not the day-to-day activity of a newsroom, which would throw up the practice of journalists in an established concern. I focus on the re-imagining of a newspaper, which throws up a range of issues relating to the newspaper's public positioning and to its commercial strategising. Although there is no direct observation, the project is ethnographic in orientation in that it pays attention to the *Sowetan's* culture, and tries to reconstruct it from the data. This kind of research "aims to understand another way of life from the native point of view … Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people" (Spradley quoted in Babbie and Mouton 2001, 279).

This study of *Sowetan* draws on Philip Schlesinger's groundbreaking examination of the BBC's organisational culture in the 1970s. Schlesinger, a sociologist, set out to examine, through interviews and participant observation, how news was put together at the British public broadcaster (Schlesinger 1987). Schlesinger did not rely solely on

immersing himself in the BBC culture, as ethnographic studies of the period did; he interviewed more than 90 employees, and developed a relationship with a group of journalists, who continued to talk to him after the interviews. Schlesinger thus largely employed interviews to embed himself in the culture of the BBC.

3.3 Use of in-depth interviews

I interviewed a number of key players in order to understand the ways in which they understood the 'problem', the processes, and the contestation of the relaunch. Elizabeth Bird notes that anthropologists, unlike sociologists, are not afraid of "subjectivity" in interviews, and expect to get to know the people they interview as individuals (2005, 302). "For many anthropologists, the ideal interview is akin to a conversation" (Bird 2005, 303), and this conversation is enriched and informed by other interviews, and by informal observation. Establishing an understanding with interviewees and seeing the world through their eyes is an important aspect of interviewing in an ethnographic approach (Bird 2005, 303). This means questions are directed not simply at the issues, but the context, the details and even the emotions that are part of the topic. I took this approach in my interviews.

First, I conducted pilot interviews with a few key individuals with insider knowledge. This revealed that the relaunch process was highly contested, and that there were many divergent views on what the *Sowetan* should look like, who its readers were, what its relationship with them should be, what the content should deliver, and how the newsroom should operate. It also became apparent that the newspaper's particular legacy as a representative of black aspirations and struggle was a huge factor in the contestation.

Then I interviewed key individuals at the newspaper and its holding company to map their understandings of what the relaunch strategies entailed, why they were considered necessary, what the concerns were (if any) about the impact on the newspaper's character, and what debates accompanied the changes. The interviewees consist largely of two groups: those responsible for rethinking and relaunching *Sowetan*, which includes executives in the commercial divisions of Johncom and the editorial managers they put in place to effect change; and the "old Sowetans", long-established senior journalists and section editors at the newspaper at the time the restructuring was being implemented. Some interviewees fell into both groups.

The one group of interviews were with the following Johncom appointees:

- Incoming publisher of the *Sowetan*, Andrew Gill, moving from Johncom Head Office;
- Incoming editor, Thabo Leshilo, employed for the position;
- Redesign consultant, Lloyd Coutts, employed for the relaunch;
- Marketing manager, Taryn Gill, responsible for selling the newspaper to advertisers.

The second group of interviews were with *Sowetan* long-timers:

- Outgoing MD, Mike Tissong, at *Sowetan* since 1988;
- Len Maseko, senior journalist, at *Sowetan* since 1980;
- Musa Zondi, who had two stints at *Sowetan* as sub-editor, in the 1990s and in the 2000s.
- Mike Siluma, who edited *Sowetan* from 1995 – 2000. I interviewed him in order to get a sense of the culture of the newspaper at a different (but transitional) time from the 2004 takeover period.

In the interviews, I did not take a social science position as a rational and disengaged observer, but I approached the interviews as a "negotiated accomplishment" (Fontana and Frey 2005, 717). In keeping with qualitative research, I saw my interviewees as informants, rather than subjects (Mabweazara 2010, 671); in other words, I took their perspectives on the case seriously, and the interview process as an attempt to understand what happened at the *Sowetan* in the course of the relaunch. The interviews were in-depth, unstructured and open-ended; "a qualitative interview is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction … and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (Babbie and Mouton 2001, 288).

However, I did introduce certain themes. For example, I asked them for their first impressions of *Sowetan*, which brought up all kinds of unscripted observations and opinions. It also surfaced what Edgar Schein (2010) has called "the artefacts" of an organisational culture: observable things, from the fittings of the physical environment to ways in which people talk to each other. These contribute to a picture of the organisation.

I also asked the interviewees to tell me about the relaunch and interjected to ask questions at certain stages. My questions are directed at:

- The strategy discussions at Johnnic and the *Sowetan* offices in the planning of changes at the *Sowetan*;
- The implementation of the retrenchments, staff changes and relaunches;
- Discussions with editorial and other staff about the changes at the *Sowetan*;
- What they thought had led to the decline of *Sowetan* and their perception of its problems at the time Johncom took over;
- And a range of other issues related to the relaunch, the legacy of the newspaper, Aggrey Klaaste's editorship, and their owners.

I let issues relating to the commercial imperatives and the public interest emerge from the discussion rather than suggesting them. This approach allowed various issues to surface naturally in the discussion and helped me to understand how the interviewees articulated the issues to themselves.

As my interviews were mostly with people I knew, some felt free to express their feelings (rather than opinions) about the relaunch, which made visible elements of a passionate connection the journalists and media executives felt to their work. This surfaced the ways in which the practices, values and discourses of my interviewees were bound up with individual and collective journalistic identities.

3.4 Processing the interviews

The eight interviews were recorded and transcribed, and are long qualitative narratives, with rich detail. As I followed the open-ended process outlined above, the issues and concerns of interviews varied per interview. Also, with the later interviews, I inserted some of the ideas that had emerged in the earlier interviews into the discussion, in order to gauge the levels of agreement and disagreement. In the mode of the negotiated interview, the topics were explored as a dialogue between interviewee and researcher.

The processing of data made use of thematic analysis, described by Judith Lapadat as:

> … a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data, usually textual, according to themes; and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalities, relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles. (2010, 925)

As she notes, thematic analysis is a flexible method that may seem loose to certain researchers, but it is valued by scholars in the humanities due to its capacity to deliver insights that are contextually grounded (2010, 927).

In order to make sure that the interviews were examined on their own terms, I subjected each one to "vertical processing", looking for themes and narrative strands that might arise.[1] This involved editing out unnecessary or repeated information, identifying themes and ordering them, and highlighting parts of the interview that seemed significant. So, for example, if the interviewee referred to journalistic professionalism and this was a theme throughout, I noted the themes in an excel spreadsheet, then further subdivided them into the elements that appear in the narrative. I did this with each interview analysis, expanding the spreadsheet themes and sub-themes rather than trying to shoehorn the information into a pre-existing pattern.

After the vertical processing, I used "horizontal processing" of all the interviews to look at overlaps, contradictions, congruencies and variations of discourses and themes. This involved reading across the interviews to establish the degree of agreement and divergence on key topics among the interviewees. The resulting analysis was drawn largely from the ideas that emerged through discussing the relaunch of the *Sowetan*, rather than as answers to specific questions about beliefs, attitudes and values. The themes that emerged in the mapping exercise are presented in narrative form in chapters 8 and 9. In Chapter 8, the various ideas of the interviewees about why the *Sowetan* lost readers so dramatically in 2002 and 2003, their understandings of who the readers were, and their thoughts about strategies for change are set out. In Chapter 9, I subjected the "map" of organisational themes that emerged from the interviews and other documents to a secondary analysis, where I ordered the themes according to Edgar Schein's levels of organisational culture (Schein 2010).

3.5 Reading newspaper texts

The interviews indicated that the newspaper's legacy, in particular the role of its legendary editor Aggrey Klaaste and the nation-building project, had been a contested issue in re-imagining the newspaper. In order to understand the ways in which nation-building manifested in the newspaper's content over time, it was necessary to look at newspaper texts. In addition, there was little available documentation of the *Sowetan* as an organisation, its advertising revenue, readership and internal struggles. I attempted to reconstruct an organisational history from reporting about the *Sowetan* in other newspapers. My study thus makes extensive use of newspaper reports from the late 1970s, when the *Sowetan* was established, until its sale to Johncom in 2004.

As Tom Lodge argues, newspapers "can represent a staple primary source of information for scholars" and "deserve to be treated with respect as a primary source of evidence" (2002, 1). Although newspaper reporting "at best presents a selective and often tendentious filter through which we can obtain information", he suggests:

> … they are illuminating – perhaps to a greater extent than an official archival document – about the ways in which events or ideas or personalities were understood or regarded or perceived at a particular time – at least from the perspective of people who wrote for and read newspapers. (2002, 2)

The focus on the era of the 1980s – historical despite being part of living memory – is primarily in order to provide background, context, and factual accuracy to the accounts from the interviewees.

In addition to providing the background necessary to understand the themes that emerged from the interviews, I also seek to establish the shape of the newspaper's public positioning over time. The content of a newspaper is where the organisation constructs its societal role, and where it articulates its imagined relationship with its readers. An analysis of editorials and columns in the newspaper is thus important in order to establish how the *Sowetan* positioned itself in the apartheid era, how it related to its readers, and in particular, what version of publicness it constructed.

Secondly, an examination of articles about the newspaper by other newspapers showed the ways in which the *Sowetan* was positioned in mediated public space their imaginings of the paper's relationship with a black public; and of its role in society. This enables me to track the shifts in the *Sowetan's* perceived position in the society over time. For example, the 1980s stories about the *Sowetan* tended to focus on its public and political role. In later years, discussions of the *Sowetan* and its commercial troubles dominated print coverage. I examine these stories across the years in order to locate the ways in which the *Sowetan* was constructed; first as a political entity and then as a commercial problem.

In looking at the reports from different newspapers, I was aware that certain versions of reality and particular perspectives order the information in certain ways; newspapers select certain events and issues for publication over others, and (often unthinkingly) reproduce mores and attitudes of the time (Lodge 2002, 2). However, it was precisely this aspect of newspaper texts that I drew on, in order to describe ideas and discourses that appeared in certain places at certain times. Lodge writes:

> Through newspapers, we can track the progress and the spread of particular ideas – newspapers allow us more insight into historical shifts in public consciousness than any archival documentation or retrospective oral testimony. (2002, 3)

Thus newspapers are a rich repository of contextual information, as well as a medium for identifying long-term historical developments (Lodge 2002, 3). They provide both rich contemporaneous detail of the time under examination and can also be read for development and change across the years. Lodge cites Charney (1993) on the movement of Black Consciousness ideas in the 1970s through black newspapers as an exemplary study of that kind. What is important, too, for my work are the ways in which the newspaper articles reconstruct a time – with all its vivid and grotesque details and discourses. This operates as a counterweight to present-day narratives of the past, which are "contemporary constructions" [2] rather than a misty and imperfect memory of an historical event.

I began the research with a keyword search on "Sowetan" through the Sabinet SAMedia database, an online repository of a clippings archive from the University of the Free State, which covers most South African newspapers. The database is not exhaustive, and does not have the capacity for sensitive searches that web searches have, as all the articles have been catalogued and categorised by librarians, many prior to the internet age.[3] However, because of the expanse of time and the range of publications, the search generated a large number of articles, and I consider the data set to be big enough to delineate what is out there. I was looking for the *Sowetan's* established position, which would show up through the extent to which certain representations were repeated and circulated. In the keyword search of the *Sowetan*, I downloaded every article that listed the *Sowetan* and filed them in my own database. I discarded a few articles in which the word *Sowetan* was listed in passing; for example, a car accident outside the *Sowetan* building, or an announcement of a competition in the newspaper and so on. There were very few such articles in the database (the advantage of not having keyword search capacity).

I organised the articles I had downloaded into time periods, and developed a chronology of events for the newspaper in a spreadsheet. This was important in order to track the appearance of the newspaper as an event or an issue over time; for example, the first articles were about the birth of the newspaper as a free paper in Soweto. Then there were articles about the banning of the *Sowetan's* predecessor, the *Post*, and the relaunch of the *Sowetan* as a daily. I focused on each "moment" – the moment of the launch, the moment of the banning and relaunch, etc – and read all the articles about that. I processed the information and sentiments that seemed most representative of the general tenor of the articles of that time, as well as noting any particularly divergent reports or analyses. In order to contextualise some of the events, I included more material from SAMedia. These included reports on the *Post*, Mwasa, Aggrey Klaaste and nation building.

The newspaper texts I collected fell into a number of categories: news reports about the *Sowetan*; reports about the business of media; editorials and opinion pieces on the *Sowetan*; "black press" overviews; reports from the *Sowetan* about the *Sowetan*, and nation-building columns from the Klaaste era. Each type of text addressed different aspects of the newspaper. News articles reported on the *Sowetan* when it became news;

for example, when its journalists went on strike, or were banned and detained, or when the newspaper was in conflict with the state or political organisations. As Chapter 6 shows, this type of reporting dominated the early establishment of the newspaper. The articles that came out of media and marketing sections of newspapers, or from business publications, tended to cover commercial aspects of the *Sowetan*, sometimes as part of wider reporting on readership, advertising and business developments of the media. I include the regular reports on the circulation and readership of newspapers (ABCs and AMPS) in this category. These reports provided information that could not be accessed due to the unavailability of the documents of the private and listed companies that owned *Sowetan* over three decades.

Articles about the *Sowetan* that fell into the category of opinion (whether editorials, analytical features, or columns) tended to deal with the newspaper's political positioning (i.e. Mwasa's actions or Aggrey Klaaste's nation-building). The *Sowetan* was almost always mentioned in "black press" columns; these were regular columns by certain white newspapers that purported to tell their readers what the black press was saying. These columns were run in the 1980s,[4] and have now disappeared.

Articles in the *Sowetan* referring to itself have tended to report either on political issues (such as the "Ballot Box", see Chapter 6), on readership and circulation (ABCs and AMPS) or on new developments in the newspaper (relaunches etc). Closely aligned to the reporting on itself was an ongoing discussion about the *Sowetan's* public positioning – how it defined itself in relation to the state and to its readers. The evolution of its self-defined role and the emergence of nation-building is described in Chapter 6. This discussion also makes use of columns and reports on nation-building, accessed through SAMedia. A final set of newspaper texts on the *Sowetan* was included in the obituaries and tributes to Aggrey Klaaste following his death.

Having such a wide collection of newspaper clippings across three decades is enormously useful in seeing the ways in which the *Sowetan's* public positioning changed over time, as well as the ways in which South African concerns and issues changed over the periods of apartheid opposition, transition and the post-apartheid era. It is also useful in recovering the ways in which Aggrey Klaaste and others at the *Sowetan* positioned the newspaper as a representative institution of black public life. Understanding the

newspaper's positioning enabled me to develop insights into how its organisational culture was shaped by (and shapes) its context, its community and its readers. In addition, much information about the *Sowetan* as a commercial concern was collected through the reports.

4 Conclusion

I began the research project with a question about how the concepts of the public and the commercial are negotiated in journalism work, and examined this through the case of the *Sowetan*'s takeover and relaunch. I chose this particular case as it appeared to focus attention on the values and practice of the journalists and media executives involved in rethinking the *Sowetan*. The case, like most qualitative case studies, threw up certain aspects that had not been predicted at the outset – specifically, the organisational culture of the newspaper – and I adjusted my approach to include an examination of that culture. As Stake points out, "Case study work is often said to be 'progressively focused' (i.e. the organizing concepts change somewhat as the study moves along)" (2005, 133). The significance of the newspaper's legacy to the organisational culture was interrogated by archival research on the *Sowetan's* public positioning in its founding era. In addition, I employed a thematic and cultural analysis of the research material, paying attention to the details of the day-to-day habits and practices of the employees. The use of a range of methodological approaches, in keeping with the qualitative method, contributed to a detailed picture of the organisation, and to the status of the public interest and commercial imperatives within it.

Notes on Chapter 2

[1] Unpublished lecture by Susan van Zyl, 2012.
[2] As Carolyn Hamilton puts it (personal communication).
[3] According to the Wits University research library, the Sabinet SAMedia database is only updated a few times a year, and it does not have a keyword search facility.
[4] For example, the *Financial Mail* had a regular column titled The Press, or Black Press (see Black press: Situation vacant 1981; The press: Ex post-facto 1981), the *Cape Times* ran a column in the mid-1980s titled "Barry Streek reviews the black press" (Streek 1986), and the *Argus* ran a column titled "David Wightman looks at the Black Press" (Wightman 1987). Similar columns were carried in the Afrikaans press.

Chapter 3: The public and the commercial in discourses of journalism

This research examines the complex ways in which commercial imperatives and the public interest intertwine in a journalism organisation. The concepts of 'the public' and 'the commercial' and their operations are the *issues* that are explored through the study of the *Sowetan*, while the focus on the organisational culture arises from the *case study* process. The public and the commercial are selected because they function as significant discourses in newsrooms and media companies, and emerge as issues of contestation in the case of the *Sowetan*. These concepts also loom large in current debates about journalism in South Africa, and are a substantial focus of much media scholarship, as this chapter shows.

In this chapter, I locate my *issues* question by setting out some of the theory that has informed my focus on the concepts of the public and the commercial, critical theories that attempt to explain the relationship of discourse, representation and power. These are my theoretical roots, in the sense that I could not have asked the question in the way that I did without this theory, and it permeates my approach to the study. I draw on this theory in order to consider what a concept is, what a discourse is, and what work they do in the world.

Second, I look at the public and the commercial as concepts and discourses in macro theories in theories of society, democracy and the public sphere. I focus on theories of the public and its nexus of related concepts – public sphere, public interest, public good, etc – in which the concept of public is foregrounded. Next, I examine the public and the commercial in theories of the role of journalism and media in society. Finally, I look at the categories of the public interest and the commercial in critical political economy, which has tended to foreground the role of economic factors in journalism. I use these macro approaches in order to consider the ways in which questions of the commercial and the public interest play out in the *Sowetan*.

1 Conceptual approaches: Language, discourse and power

How are ideas about the public and commercial connected to journalism work and larger society? The ways in which we talk about the world – or represent it to ourselves – often

assume a one-to-one correspondence between "ideas in our heads" and "things out there". However, this is an "old view of representation" (Casey et al. 2002, 124), which sees representation as a reflection of reality. The "new view", as Stuart Hall calls it, sees representation as constitutive of 'reality' (see Hall 1997; Jhally 1997). He argues that we understand and classify the world through shared conceptual maps. Values are also implicated in representational practices, rather than separate from them. Eagleton points out that the idea that values are "subjective" implies that the world is divided between "solid facts 'out there'" and "arbitrary value-judgments 'in here'" (1983, 12). But values and concepts cannot be separated from facts and objects (Eagleton 1983, 13).

The view of representation as constitutive, rather than separate from reality, has implications for journalists in their imaginings of what their role is in society and what the media do and should do. The rallying cry of journalists the world over – truth in the public interest – is complicated by the idea of representation as constructing reality. By contrast, the idea that representation constructs reality has been central to studies of media, particularly Cultural Studies approaches (see Hall 1996; Casey et al. 2002). Representation is how we make meaning of the world (see Hall 1997; Jhally 1997).

On the other side of the Atlantic, sociological approaches to journalism similarly see representation as constitutive. Schudson writes:

> Social scientists who study the news speak a language that journalists mistrust and misunderstand. They speak of "constructing the news", of "making news", of the "social construction of reality". (1997, 7)

These sociological approaches (explored further in Chapter 4) draw on research that shows the ways in which newsroom and other pressures shape news production, thus "constructing" news. In this, they differ from Cultural Studies approaches that draw on a "philosophical stance to language and discourse and the signifying capacity of media representations to 'construct' social realities, not simply 'reflect them'" (Cottle 2003, 11).

The new view of representation – which sees it as constructing 'reality' rather reflecting it – developed from the recognition that we understand the world through "signifying systems" (see Hawkes 2003, 1-7). Language as a representational system

became a key focus of analysis (Eagleton 1983, 96). The work of linguist Ferdinand Saussure (1959) had undermined the 'old version' of representation, as he proposed that there was an arbitrary relationship between the "signifier" (the word in its spoken or written form) and what was "signified". The signified was not so much an object in the real world, but a concept in people's minds (see Eagleton 1983, 96-97; Hawkes 2003, 8-14). The classification of certain signs in relation to each other and into categories constructs the world in certain ways for the users of the language.

Saussure's linguistic theory has been applied to objects and activities other than language itself (Eagleton 1983, 97), such as anthropology, psychology and cultural studies – the "linguistic turn" (Hall 1996, 270). Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss argues that deep structures underlie the myths and rituals of daily life, and are structured around binary oppositions, such as light/dark, male/female, and so on (see Eagleton 1983, 103-104; Hawkes 2003, 19-43). Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan argues that "the discourse of the unconscious is structured like a language" (Althusser 2001, 141), using metaphor and metonymy to create associative paths or chains of signifiers. Language thus has a certain flux, as it moves and changes through these devices along associative paths (Cowling 1984, 42).

I note this slipperiness of language to underline the point that what we see as individual concepts (such as public, public interest, public good) are likely to slide along a continuum of ideas and never be quite fixed. They are strung together along associative paths. Thus a concept is not fixed in one unchanging meaning, but can evolve and migrate. As Purvis and Hunt remind us: "Concepts of the social are never fully referential, in the sense of identifying a verbal sign that stands for or refers to (and thus comes to represent) some unambiguously identifiable feature of an external reality" (1993, 474). Discourses read over time are not static, but shift and change; they may also evolve in relation to different contexts.

If linguistic approaches argue that various human processes are structured like a language, and that individual subjects are spoken by and through language, then Marxism brings the question of power – particularly class power – to the issue. Marx did not have an elaborated theory of representation; however, he proposed that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas ... the class that has the means of material

production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production" (2006, 9). The ways in which human beings understand their society are fundamentally ***ideological***; in other words, certain ideas, practices and knowledge in society are naturalised to seem self-evident and pre-existing, rather than constructed out of a range of material, social and cultural factors (Eagleton 1983, 15). Marxist literary theorist Terry Eagleton defines ideology as "the way in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in" (1983 14). For Marx, that would have been the maintenance and reproduction of class power and inequality.

Louis Althusser argues that "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (2001, 109); in other words, the way we understand who we are and why we fit into the world in the ways that we do. In Idealist philosophy, the individual is the reflective, conscious subject, who can make decisions, has choices and agency. But the idea that a system (language, for example, or myth-making) is pre-existing led to a "'decentring' of the individual subject, who is no longer to be regarded as the source or end of meaning" (Eagleton 1983, 104). For Althusser, ideology operates through the category of "the subject". The concept of the subject is an alternative to that notion of the individual (Fiske 1987, 48). Althusser argues that subjects are constituted by ideology – called into particular positions – simultaneously being asked to act while being inserted into ideological formations (see discussion on interpellation, 2001, 115-124). For Althusser, then, the individual has little agency, as the individual cannot exist outside of the subjectivity already assigned by ideology.

Althusser's theory of ideology has been criticised as deterministic (Fiske 1987, 40). Fiske prefers Gramsci's theory of hegemony, which he says grants resistance a significant role: "… hegemony may be defined as the process whereby the subordinate are led to consent to the system that subordinates them" (1987, 40) partly by accepting it as "natural". Fiske sees hegemony as ongoing struggle against a multitude of resistances, and any ascendancy it achieves is always precarious: He writes:

> Hegemony's victories are never final, and any society will evidence numerous points where subordinate groups have

> resisted the total domination that is hegemony's aim and have withheld their consent to the system. (1987, 41)

So, where linguistic approaches argue that that individual subjects are spoken by and through language, Marxist approaches propose a theory of ideology that explicitly links human "thinking" to power and how it operates in society. In the Marxist conceptions of power, the material conditions of human life – in particular the relations of production and class dominance – are determining. The subject is an "interpellated" subject, hailed into a particular position (Althusser 2001, 115-120), or, in the concept of hegemony, resisting or consenting to the subordination of the *status quo*. Theories of ideology link power to the material and economic conditions of society and the imaginary relationship of subjects to that system.

For Michel Foucault, Marxist accounts of power are inadequate. "The way power [is] exercised – concretely and in detail – with its specificity, its techniques, and tactics, was something no-one attempted to ascertain," he argues (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 57). For Foucault, power is not simply "repressive", imposed by one force on another (the state, the dominant class, the economic, as in certain Marxist conceptions), but is "productive".

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 61)

Foucault also finds linguistic approaches inadequate: "I believe one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle" (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 56). For him, the idea of an underlying structure or a set of underlying events is too static, and limited in that it is imagined at one level. He writes: "[T]here is actually a whole order of levels of different types of events, differing in amplitude, chronological breadth, and capacity to produce effects" (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 56).

Foucault distinguishes between types of power dominant in different historical times. "Deduction" – the power to take things away – is an historical form of power that, although still present, has been superseded by mechanisms of power that are bent on "generating forces, making them grow and ordering them" (1984, 56). Among these mechanisms are "the power of the norm" (1984, 56), which does not punish for infractions so much as require individuals to "measure up" (1984, 94) to standards required of certain tasks and skills associated with the discipline within which the individual is working.

Foucault's move into theorising discourse as multi-layered, as shifting and moving texts and practices, has been criticised for its refusal to engage with the issue of the linkages between discourses and with the aggregation of discourses into social unities (Hall 1985, 92). However, I would argue that Foucault focuses our attention on the smaller operations of power, which can be discerned through discourse. He also makes a case for practice as an indivisible part of discourse. Observing practice up close can thus deliver insights about the way in which power (and resistance) operates in society. In the case of the *Sowetan*, for example, we see the ways in which power is exercised and resisted through continual small acts, and through the marshalling of the commercial and public interest discourses.

The critical theories I have outlined offer important perspectives on how concepts function in relation to meaning, to social practice, and to power. Deploying the public interest and the commercial through these various theoretical lenses demonstrates, first and most fundamentally, that these concepts are not ideas about the "outside world", as in an 'old view' of representation, but are part of a representational system that constructs the world in certain kinds of ways. Further, the linguistic turn suggests that the public interest and the commercial, like other concepts, are part of a discursive network of ideas, values and practices that are plural, slippery, relational and shifting. Although meaning is impossible to fix, and there is a sliding between discourses and along associative paths, certain shared understandings may be discernible. A concept is not a separate entity from the values and practices of journalists, but deeply imbricated in the everyday operations of the organisation.

The theories discussed in this section also indicate that concepts of the public interest and the commercial cannot be separated from questions of power. The understanding of power differs according to different theoretical positions; I prefer to go beyond conceptions of power as a repressive force to include Foucault's ideas of power as productive. Here we think of power as operating on a range of levels, with a range of effects. Foucault links the mechanisms of power in the modern world to notions of truth, knowledge and the norm (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 56); any time norms and truth claims appear, they alert us to look for specific operations of power. In journalism, truth-telling and ethics are often seen as fundamental to the legitimacy of news and the practice of journalists. Notions of service to a public are normative; such discourse produces certain actions. If individual journalists operate collectively in marshalling this discourse, we can observe a form of power being enacted. This research seeks to make this visible through observing the contestation at *Sowetan*.

Althusser's description of ideology and the interpellation of individuals into particular subject positions tends towards determinism, but I would argue that journalists' power is inextricably tied into their subject positions; their power is enacted in particular ways and under particular conditions. It is also fundamentally discursive. As Purvis and Hunt point out, discursive practices are "potential arenas of contestation": "There is always a possibility of opening up 'new discursive spaces' that aim to unite disparate and dispersed discursive elements into cohesive popular social movements" (1993, 484). This potential needs to be borne in mind when looking at the way journalistic discourses play out in organisations and society.

To return to the question: How are ideas about the public and commercial connected to journalism work in an organisation? My question sets out concept and practice as separate, but in operation they are bound together; the "old differentiation between ideas and actions in which they participate" is untenable (Laclau 2005, 13). A concept is idea and action; a practice reveals the discourse it inhabits. Key journalistic concepts such as the public interest and commercial imperatives can thus illuminate a range of operations that are linked both to societal power and to individual subjectivity.

2 Theories of the public and the commercial

Serving the public and operating in a commercial environment are often characterised as incompatible goals. McManus characterises the relationship between the public interest and the commercial like this:

> In most newsrooms, there are two competing sets of norms: those of journalism, which represent citizens' interests and strive for public enlightenment; and those of business, which represent investors' interests and aim to maximize profits. (1994, 25)

Shoemaker and Reese note that media sociologists "typically view economic considerations as constraints on newswork" (1996, 145). Although the concepts relating to the public are often related to ideas of the commercial as an opposition, this can shift in different contexts. Public can be contrasted with private (in journalism discourses around why personal information has been reported) and public interest with national interest (see Cowling and Hamilton 2010; Netshitenzhe 2002). In other words, the conceptual nexus of the public seems to operate widely and in relation to many ideas. It has an idealistic quality. It is thus a different kind of concept to the commercial, which is associated with such terms as 'hard realities' and 'necessities'.

2.1 The public sphere

To understand how the concept of 'the public' functions in society, we need to understand how it is connected to the concept of the public sphere and to the notion of public opinion (Hannay 2005, 9). The public sphere was defined by Jürgen Habermas in his influential work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, as a space between the state and the people in which questions of common concern are debated (1989, 301). In his work, Habermas revisits Enlightenment conceptions of public opinion and publics, in order to describe the historical constitution of *öffentlichkeit*, translated as "the public sphere" but more properly as "publicness" or "publicity" (1989, xv). Kant's public use of reason and Bentham's ideas of public opinion[1] as a check on the state are re-imagined in Habermas's powerful conceptualisation of the public sphere. His work has been taken up, extended and critiqued by a range of theorists. As historian Geoff Eley points out:

> Ideas of the public sphere permeate discussion in a wide variety of transnational and cross-disciplinary fields, linking literary scholars, historians and theorists of art and architecture, film specialists, sociologists, anthropologists, political theorists and anyone placing themselves in the disorderly and un-disciplined field of cultural studies. (2002, 5)

In other words, the concept extends far beyond the field of journalism.

Structural Transformation was only translated into English in 1989, so Habermas's thinking was not directly available to media-society theorists until then, although discussion of the public sphere did make its way into media studies in the 1980s through the journal *Media, Culture and Society* (Sabry 2007, 5). However, Habermas's ideas resonate with much of the normative thinking about media's role in society, as many media theorists and policymakers also work in terrain set out by the Enlightenment. Public sphere theories thus overlap and interact with media-society debates.

The manner in which Habermas theorises the public sphere allows us to focus on concepts of the public, the public interest, public opinion, and the distinction between the private and the public so crucial to contemporary understandings of the media. Habermas's approach has "the public sphere," or publicness, as its primary focus, so the operations of the media are discussed in relation to the operations of the public sphere and as a component of the public sphere. Habermas's location of the public sphere in the historical structural arrangements of the developing democracies of the Enlightenment reminds us of the importance of context, and shows the movement of concepts over time.

Significantly, Habermas introduces *Structural Transformation* with a discussion of terms:

> The usage of the words "public" and "public sphere" betrays a multiplicity of concurrent meanings. Their origins go back to various historical phases and, when applied synchronically to the conditions of a bourgeois society that is industrially advanced and constituted as a social-welfare state, they fuse into a clouded amalgam. (1989, 1)

He goes on to track the terminology related to the concepts of "public" and "public sphere" while simultaneously describing changes in social structures and practices that he argues brought a public sphere into being. The scope of Habermas's study is large and wide-ranging – social, economic and political developments on the European continent (with some limited reference to the Unites States) over two centuries. Some of his focus is on shared continental conditions (the development of manufacturing and the rise of a reading public, for example) and some on specific nation-states, which he uses as case studies to build a more general account of the public sphere.

Habermas notes that the German word for publicity/public opinion (*öffentlichkeit*) only appears during the eighteenth century and is little used until the nineteenth. Thus, he argues, "if the public sphere did not require a name of its own before this period, we may assume that this sphere first emerged and took on its function only at that time, at least in Germany" (1989, 3). Put another way, if there is no word for it, there is no concept of it, and so it does not exist, a position which resonates with the 'new' view of representation and the linguistic turn, discussed above. Then he moves to look at the historical context that pre-dates the public sphere, the feudal era. Here, he notes two significant conceptual issues. The first is the existence of a distinction between the notions of the private and the public – a distinction that originates in the Greek city-state – buried in the definitions in Roman law, but which has no force in societal interactions and practice (1989, 3). The second point is that feudal society had an entirely different concept of what was public – it was not understood as a realm or a place, but as a kind of status or quality, which applied only to kings and lords. The concept of representation as 'standing for', so fundamental to contemporary democracy, did not exist (see Habermas 1989, 5-14).

I draw attention to these specific points because they are instances in which Habermas demonstrates the way certain concepts work in their historical contexts. Habermas does not explicitly apply a discursive approach, but reading his historical narrative while alert to such approaches surfaces what is implicit in his description. Firstly, his work shows how difficult it is to think in concepts that have become dislocated from a historical context and are not linked to structures and practices. Secondly, he describes the concepts as they are associated with practices (courtly rituals)

and places (the squares for public assembly in Greek cities). Thirdly, he shows that the shift in one concept brings about a change in certain related concepts.

Habermas also draws attention to the operations of power instrumental in the growth of the public sphere. In this, his concept of power has a lot in common with the class analysis of Marxist approaches. It is Habermas's contention that the project of compelling the state to be accountable to reasoned public debate was fundamentally (although not exclusively) a project of the bourgeoisie's desire for autonomy from the feudal state. This began with the need for freedom to trade and conduct business, but was soon complicated by other social phenomena. It is in this class, mostly, that he identifies some significant precursors to the public sphere in what he calls "the political realm", "social structures" (1989, 27-56) that were essential forerunners to the public sphere. So although the foregrounding of terms is critical to Habermas's approach, as Eley points out, he is not merely mapping out a history of ideas – he is drawing on Marxist approaches to society, in which notions of class and of economic conditions are strongly causative: "*Strukturwandel* offered an account of democracy's cultural prerequisites that remained grounded in highly materialist ways" (Eley 2002, 6).

Despite Habermas's normative adherence to the ideal of the public sphere, he describes the appeal to public opinion as part of the struggle of a particular class – the bourgeoisie of Europe – for autonomy in pursuit of its interests, and thus an exercise of power.

> In other words, the public sphere derives only partly from the conscious demands of reformers and their articulation into government. Indeed, the latter were as much an effect of its emergence as a cause. Socially, the public sphere was the manifest consequence of a much deeper and long-term process of societal transformation that Habermas locates between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century as a trade-driven transition from feudalism to capitalism ... (Eley 1992, 291)

Following certain versions of Marxism, Habermas's account could be read as the story of a developing ideology of the public sphere that arose from the changing conditions of production. However, I would argue that Habermas does not characterise the notion of

the public sphere simply as a by-product of the material changes in society; his account of the interaction between concepts and material developments in a period of change suggests that they come into being together and create each other. He approaches the ideas that underpin the public sphere (i.e. the ideas of Western Enlightenment) as being equivalent forces with economic and material factors, and describes them as interacting with each other in the historical development of the public sphere. The ideology at work in the notion of the public sphere therefore does not simply arise in a mechanistic base/superstructure formulation. In that sense, Habermas's account can be read to reveal the importance of the discursive, and the productive power implicit in the conceptual.

For example, Habermas acknowledges that those who were able to speak in the bourgeois public sphere would have to be educated landowners, members of the bourgeois class. But an individual could gain access to the public sphere if he attained the qualifications of property and education. This opened the possibility for excluded groups to agitate for access on the same terms of equality despite not having the qualifications. Hence, the ideas and practices of a limited public sphere open up the possibility of a wider public sphere; the thin end of a transformative wedge.

Why is this important? It offers a middle way between two opposed positions on the public sphere: that the public sphere is ideological, a chimera to hide (and justify) the real operations of class privilege and power; or (in an Enlightenment-derived idealisation) a space where the people of society can come together to decide their own fate and hold the authorities accountable. What Habermas shows us through his close focus is a more complex process where the operations of power are more fractured and uneven – a view that is more consistent with the accounts of how discourse and power work in critical conceptual theory than with early Marxist-derived accounts of ideology. Even though Habermas may not explicitly position himself in discourse theory, he sets up a relation between concept and practice that shows how notions of the public can be inextricably woven into the actual functions of society. His detailing of the changes in the concepts of the public sphere, publics, public opinion over time and the variety of meanings across nations and cultures demonstrates just how mutable ideas and social structures can be, and he makes a case for the intermingling of concepts and practices.

Much of the critique of Habermas's work has been around the question of whether the public sphere as he describes it actually existed (see the Calhoun collection of 1992) and whether it offered the access to the public deliberation it promised. However, if Habermas's public sphere is reframed as conceptual, it gives his work a different purchase. From this position, Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere is a further elaboration of a concept that has impact on the social world.

Eley argues persuasively that Habermas was doing two things in *Structural Transformation*: analyzing an historical change and abstracting a normative ideal of the public sphere that could be used in 1960s German polity (Eley 2002, 227). For Eley, the public sphere is a migrating concept, which can even change its name and its meanings, but do similar work.

> In contemporary discourse, 'the public sphere' now signifies the general questing for democratic agency in an era of declining electoral participation, compromised sovereignties, and frustrated or disappointed citizenship. The term is called upon wherever people come together for collective exchange and expression of opinion, aiming both for a coherent enunciation and the transmission of messages onward to parallel or subordinate bodies. (2002, 6)

Eley is suggesting here the ways in which a concept can become powerfully normative in its usage in social discourse.

Habermas draws attention in his work to the power inherent in the discourse of the public sphere, and its related term, public opinion. He locates it in modernity – inextricably part of the growth of nation-states, democracy, media, and global capitalism. It is difficult to think of the democratic nation-state without public sphere activity, in the way he describes. His account shows how the notion of a public sphere, publics, public opinion, mobilises the idea of holding governments accountable to the people, and the principle of granting equal status to participants in public discussion. Following Habermas, a people "questing for democratic agency" (Eley 2002, 6) engage in public sphere activity in order to compel the attention of the state and enact the principle of equality and citizenship. Public opinion can be mobilised to support the aspirations of a

marginalised public within the public sphere, such as black South Africans in the apartheid era.

Accounting for the contestation of different publics complicates Habermas's notion of a national public sphere. Nancy Fraser has critiqued the notion of a unitary public sphere as inadequate for the complexity of "actually existing democracies", which have systemic inequalities and, in some cases, may have a heterogeneous collection of peoples (1992, 121). This means that there may be many competing interests that cannot be resolved in one common good. Fraser writes:

> … when social arrangements operate to the systemic profit of some groups of people and to the systemic detriment of others, there are *prima facie* reasons for thinking that the postulation of a common good shared by exploiters and exploited may well be a mystification. (1992, 131)

Instead of a multiplicity of competing voices on terms of equality in a unitary public sphere, there are alternative and subaltern counterpublics struggling to be heard, and powerful publics that dominate the deliberative space, she argues (1992, 123). Counterpublics often need to have their own deliberative processes in order to develop sufficient consensus and authority to contest the dominant groups in society. In Fraser's conceptualisation, there are always multiple publics and multiple public spheres, in different relations of domination, subordination, and contestation. While not undermining the power of Habermas's concept of the public sphere as an ideal for democracy, Fraser significantly rethinks it for understanding stratified contemporary societies.

Habermas and Fraser alert us to the importance of publics and public sphere activities to societies where there is a "questing for democratic agency", or societies attempting to establish democracy – such as South Africa of the apartheid past and the post-authoritarian present. Where Habermas points to the power of public opinion to hold the state accountable and to mobilise for equal rights to speak, Fraser shows that subordinate and alternative publics are always at work.

News media express the discourse of "publicness" in their contexts through normative ideals of 'serving the public' and the related term of 'the public interest'. Moore sees the phrase as similar to "freedom of the press, free speech, the fourth estate"

and argues it has lost much of its power because news organisations frequently invoke it (2007, 33). News organisations are able to call on "the public interest" because it is an occupational elaboration of the larger concept of the public sphere, with its service of the common good. Public interest is also associated with ethical and legal issues that arise in day-to-day reporting, particularly around the publication of information generally deemed to be private.

In the South African context, the public interest is important in media law. Public interest is a legal defence and motivation for publication of information or views, and is the overarching rationale for privileging the media with freedom of expression (see Louw 2005, 122). The reason for this special privilege is that the media are believed to be an institution of the public sphere, with its power to hold the state accountable to the public. Like the notion of the public sphere, the public interest signifies a mechanism of accountability, an expression of agency vested in an imagined public. Reading across Habermas and the critiques of Habermas, what emerges is that ideas of the public sphere have an imaginative and mobilising power in the world.

2.2 The public as social imaginary

Researchers at the Chicago-based Center for Transcultural Studies began to explore the idea of imaginative "world-making" power in the late 1980s, as it seemed relevant to the resurgence of democratic movements across the globe. Drawing on Castoriadis (1987), they conceptualised this as a "social imaginary"; "an enabling but not fully explicable symbolic matrix within which a people imagine and act as a world-making collective" (Gaonkar 2002, 1). In the introduction to an influential issue of *Public Culture* in 2002, Gaonkar argues "social imaginaries are ways of understanding the social that become social entities themselves, mediating collective life" (2002, 4). These entities include people's self-understandings, the "first-person subjectivities that build upon implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices" (Gaonkar 2002, 4). Taylor concurs: "The social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" (2002, 91). In this approach, the public sphere is a key social imaginary for society.

For Taylor, the basis of the imagining of society is an assumed moral order, which, in modernity, is an new understanding of sociality as "the society of mutual

benefit … whose members are fundamentally equal" (Taylor 2002, 99). This is different from the hierarchical forms of complementarity that existed in previous eras (2002, 98). The modern moral order produced three major mutations, he argues: the market economy, the public sphere and the self-governing people (2002, 92). Taylor sees the modern public sphere as "a space of discussion that is self-consciously seen as being outside power" (2002, 114). The public sphere knits together discussions in a range of locations, such as a newspaper report, a discussion in a coffee shop, a radio debate, through the collective understandings of participants.

> [A] public sphere can exist only if it is imagined as such. Unless all the dispersed discussions are seen by their participants as linked in one great exchange, there can be no sense of a resultant "public opinion." (Taylor 2002, 113)

Michael Warner further delineates this by describing publics as being a relation among strangers, in that the individuals who form a public do not have to know each other, or be in the same city or country (Warner 2002, 55). They form a public, he argues, by virtue of their relationship to a text. So where Habermas's conceptualisation grounds publics in a space ("the public sphere"), Warner imagines publicness as something far more fluid – publics are constituted through the circulation of texts that address them. Warner thus introduces the notion of circulation into the operations of the public sphere, and the significance of texts as the creator of publics. Warner's critical conception of publics is different from the concept in its everyday usage, as a stable and pre-existing entity. Warner's public only comes into being in relation to a text (broadly defined as anything from an actual piece of writing to a performance or a media talk show).

In media production, publics come into being in relation to the active orchestration of media producers, and the kind of public that arises is created by the forms of media production employed by journalists (see Cowling and Hamilton 2010, 85-98). Research at the South African public broadcaster and at the *Sunday Times* has found that the routines, practices and values of journalists employed in producing debate at the public broadcaster relied heavily on understandings of the public that resonated with the Habermas's conception of the public sphere (Cowling and Hamilton 2010; Serino 2010).

Here we see Taylor's point exemplified: that the public sphere exists through the collective imaginings of the participants, who understand themselves as acting within it. In the case of the journalists at the South African public broadcaster and the *Sunday Times*, the imagined role is more than just participating, but actively orchestrating public discussion (see Cowling and Hamilton 2010; Serino 2010). It follows that their connection to the imaginary of the public sphere is distinctive, almost privileged.

Discourses of the public interest are thus not simply ideas or settings in which news media enact the usual work routines, but are productive mobilisations of forms of power associated with "publicness". For Habermas, this is the power of a bourgeois public versus the state; for Fraser, a contestation between and within publics; for Taylor a key (and enabling) imaginary of modernity; and for Warner, a multiple, mutable and uneven flow of "publicness" within societies and in relation to various texts.
These theories focus on the ways in which people and groups engage in imaginative world-making, the ways in which social and collective agency is mobilised through ideas of the public. Individuals and groups who engage in public sphere operations are connected to something bigger than themselves or their local communities; the project of modernity, linked to the economic free market and democracy. Drawing on Taylor, I propose that journalists are linked to the social imaginaries of the market, the public sphere and citizenship through their professional identities and their media organisations. In the case of the *Sowetan*, we shall see that the journalists drew on the imaginary of the public sphere in particular ways to create and mobilise a black nation-building and self-governing public.

2.3 Theories of the media and society

Public sphere theories take a broad view of society, and the role of the media is not considered in isolation, but as part of the operations of "publicness", which take place in group activities, parliaments, and so on (see Taylor 2002, 111-116). On the other hand, many theories of the media and society, as this chapter shows, see the media as vital to the operations of the public sphere and as *the* institution that holds the state and other powerful interests accountable. Many of these theories depend on normative understandings of the media's role in society and the position of 'the public' and

commercial in such discourse. Such normative theory is not critical as much as descriptive.

Take, for example, the 1956 text, *Four Theories of the Press*, an early, and until recently, foundational text for the discussion of global media systems. Siebert et al identified four models of the relationship between the media and the state, arguing that, with some variation, every national system of journalism exemplifies one of these models: the authoritarian, the libertarian, the social responsibility and the Soviet (essentially a variation of the authoritarian). The differences between the models reflects the differences between the social systems in which the media operate: differences of beliefs, they argued, about "the nature of man, the nature of society and the state, the relation of man to the state and the nature of knowledge and truth" (1956, 2).

The libertarian model, they argue, historically came after the authoritarian model, and is influenced by the Enlightenment-era belief in reasoned discussion and rationality, and "a 'free market place' of ideas and information" (Siebert et al 1956, 3). What ensures a free marketplace of ideas is a free marketplace of media – media separate from the state, largely unregulated, and independent by virtue of its commercial nature (Siebert et al 1956, 50-57). The media are separate from the state in order to provide a check upon it, as the state in democracies is the servant of the people, and needs to be constantly scrutinised and watched for abuses of power or failure to do its duty by citizens. Here normative media theory resonates with the Habermasean conceptualisation of the public sphere, as a space where public opinion is formed that can hold the state accountable. It also resonates with the imaginary of modernity as set out by Taylor (2002) – where the market economy is a societal necessity for productive exchange among equals.

Libertarian approaches believe that media that is commercially self-reliant will have the independence to fulfil a watchdog function and act as a "Fourth Estate"[2]. States that exemplify the libertarian model (the U.S., for example) keep statutory and other restrictions of the media to a minimum, applying regulation only to issues of national security or to disputes between freedom of expression and other constitutional or legislated freedoms (Murdock 1992, 29). In Siebert et al's account of libertarian media systems, the concept of the commercial is valorised as enabling "a marketplace of ideas" and the commercial independence of the media from the state.

However, in "social responsibility" conceptions of the press, Siebert et al identify commercial conditions from the 1920s as more problematic, with the media falling into the hands of "a powerful few" (1956, 4). This led to the concern, articulated in particular by the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press in the U.S., that "protection against government is now not enough to guarantee that a man who has something to say shall have a chance to say it" (Siebert et al 1956, 4-5). The media therefore needed to be held accountable through press codes, community opinion, consumer action and professional codes: "The media must assume [the] obligation of social responsibility; and if they do not, someone must see that they do" (Siebert et al 1956, 5). In certain cases, it may be necessary for government to provide social responsibility media through public service broadcasting, they argue. Here we see the commercial characterised as needing to be balanced by an explicit commitment to social responsibility, a shift from the uncritical libertarian approaches, and propelled by larger changes in the workings of the market, with large firms becoming increasingly dominant in the commercial sectors of various societies.

Four Theories presents a number of basic normative assumptions about the role of the media in society. The first is that the media is critical to the effective functioning of society (Murdock 1992, 2), an idea that is common to all four theories. The second is that, for democracies to function, media should be permitted a great degree of freedom (particularly from government) in their operations. The third assumption is that the media needs to fulfil certain specific functions, expressed as a form of social responsibility, which includes serving a diversity of interests rather than the majority alone, and having a certain seriousness of purpose.

Many contemporary normative theorists and media policymakers still operate on these assumptions and express similar concerns. The debate among various schools of thought is often about what kind of media/government relationship, what media systems and what types of journalism would make the greatest contribution to society. Murdock argues that there has been "a central belief present in many free-market liberal democracies that the less the state intervenes in news production, and the more the free market is left to structure the news media, then the less restrained journalists will be in doing their jobs" (1992, 6); in other words, the libertarian approach has most value for

democracy. The commercial imperative functions as a mechanism, the argument goes, that allows 'the people' – as the consumers of the media – to decide the media landscape by buying products that serve them and thus making them commercially viable. Thus commercial viability does not supplant the normative functions of the media, but helps it fulfil its public interest function.

Liberal approaches to media thus see the commercial and the public interest functions of media as held in balance, although there may be a tension between them. In this conception, the dangers of rampant commercialism are acknowledged, but it is argued that they can be checked by regulation, by newsroom professionalism, and – in certain cases – complemented by public service media. Here commercial necessities and public responsibility are not at odds with each other, but must be negotiated in order for media to fulfil their societal functions. Such normative approaches express the ideas of the social imaginaries that Taylor identifies as crucial to modernity; the market economy, the public sphere, and the democratic people, and locate the media as significant in those imaginaries.

2.4 Critical political economy of the media

The commercial has a different status in critical political economy, which has critiqued liberal pluralism, arguing that the need for media companies to make a profit stands in the way of them fulfilling their normative role in society. Critical political economy of communication is concerned with "the relationship of media systems to the broader social and power relations of society ... what role do the media play in reinforcing and/or undermining political and economic inequality? To what extent are media a democratic force" (McChesney 2003, 29)? A key focus for political economy approaches, according to McChesney, is to "specifically examine the structure of media industries – questions of ownership, market structure and commercial support – and how these affect media content, performance and impact" (2003, 29).

Critical political economy approaches diverge from Marxist ideas of the media, in which they figure as institutions of capitalist ideology, and are instrumental in maintaining a hegemonic *status quo*. They differ in that they align with the position that the media should serve society; their critique focuses on the ways in which economic conditions prevent the media from fulfilling this ideal role (Herman and Chomsky 1988;

Bagdikian 1983). They thus echo normative theories in desiring that the media serve a public and support the functioning of democratic societies. Many critical political economists do not see the commercial nature of the press *per se* as problematic, but decry changes in the 20th century that have led to increased commercialism; what Robert McChesney has called "hypercommercialism" (McChesney 2004, 145). These include the conglomeration of media companies and the gradual disappearance of family-owned newspapers (specifically in the United States) (Bagdikian 2004), the drive for increased profits to pay shareholders, drastic cost-cutting, and an increased dependence on advertising for revenue (McChesney 2004, 145).

McChesney argues that consolidation of global media companies through acquisitions and convergence has meant that a handful of transnational companies dominate the international media market: "As the media conglomerates spread their tentacles, there is reason to believe they will encourage popular tastes to become more uniform in at least some forms of media" (2003, 29). This promotes de-politicisation and consumerism, he argues, and shows class inequality and individualism as the natural order of things.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Graham Murdock also sees media as crucial to democracy (much as Siebert et al describe), in that they provide information that enables people to make choices as citizens, provide a space for the voices of ordinary people to register their opinions on public issues, and give them the opportunity to recognise themselves in the range of representations on offer (1992, 21). He argues that their link (as a vehicle for advertising) to mass consumption has created a tension between citizenship and consumption cultures. Media now sell consumers to advertisers rather than selling its products to readers, Murdock (and others) point out (see, for example, Herman and Chomsky 1988; Bagdikian 2004). This has implications for the type of media content and products available to society. It also has a knock-on effect on the public service ethos of broadcasting.

Although critical political economy has compelled an important focus on the commercial base of media production, certain aspects of the critique are sometimes generalised beyond their usefulness. Cottle points to:

> … an instrumental explanation [that] suggests that the operations and performance of the media can be adequately explained in terms of proprietorial intervention and the instrumental pursuit of ruling interests and/or political allegiances, a position often aligned to forms of conspiracy theory. (2003, 5)

However, more developed versions of critical political economy seek to demonstrate the ways in which the "impersonal laws (economic determinants) of the marketplace" (Cottle 2003, 9) structure media organisations, routines and products in ways that are almost imperceptible.

The structure of the news business is a physical manifestation of both their public and commercial interests. Traditionally, newspapers divide their content into two distinct categories: editorial, written for readers by journalists; and advertising, paid for and produced by advertisers (Cowling et al 2008, 102). This decision is reflected in the separation between advertising sales and editorial departments, which produce their content separately and without knowing what the other department is doing.

> The act of dividing editorial and advertising functions is seen by journalists as a particularly important protection for the integrity of a news publication, and journalists have often fiercely resisted any assaults on their autonomy over editorial decisions. (Cowling et al 2008, 102)

Bagdikian calls this the outcome of "centuries of tension between the purity of news and the greed of publishers" (2000, xxvi). Journalists are insulated by this "Chinese Wall" from commercial concerns in their day-to-day decision-making.

However, commercial factors impact on news production in other ways, as a number of studies have shown.[3] The primary goal of a news organisation, as Shoemaker and Reese remind us, "is economic, to make a profit" (1996, 145). The ultimate power of the market is to determine which products survive and which disappear. Further, as noted by critical political economists, the "economic logic" (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 149) of commercial media is that their revenue comes largely from the money advertisers pay to place ads in their products; they "make their money by delivering audiences to advertisers" (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 149). This may seem to put the power in the

hands of the readers, with their likes dictating content, but that is not as simple a process as a liberal pluralist interpretation might suggest.

Advertisers make decisions based on more than just numbers. For example, there has been a move away from creating products for mass audiences to targeting "an identifiable group with predictable habits" (see Schudson 1984, pp. 63–66), or "niching" (Cowling et al 2008, 101), in which advertising may go towards targeted publications and sections rather than a broader church. Advertisers generally favour groups that are affluent, as they have the resources to buy the products being advertised (Cowling 2004). Thus the reliance on advertising shapes media production and content in certain ways. These include which readers are targeted, what kind of product the company produces, how much advertising is carried in proportion to editorial, whether light "fluffy" inserts and extra editorial products are carried, and where the paper is distributed. As later chapters show, the pursuit of advertising was a key problem for the *Sowetan* – and for the black press generally.

Another commercial factor that was significant for the *Sowetan* for many years was the cost-watching and cutting that go hand-in-hand with a drive for profits. These have an impact on the newsroom through the limiting of budgets to hire staff, to buy freelance or syndicated copy, to employ experienced (and relatively more expensive) production staff over juniors, to fund travel and to operate newspaper libraries. In the case of the black press under the apartheid system, this led to the hiring of black untrained journalists who could be paid less than their white counterparts. This had certain unexpected results, however, as the research will show.

One area of discussion in critical political economy is ownership and its potential to influence political and editorial coverage. Australian press magnate Rupert Murdoch is cited as an example of what a crusading publisher/owner can do to change the identity and content of newspapers, and how he can use them for political influence.[4] However, Shoemaker and Reese argue that most owners do not impose a political bias on their newspapers, because they are more interested in economic returns (1996, 165). For McChesney, the move from privately owned media to listed companies puts the emphasis on profits at the expense of content (McChesney 2004, 145).

The specific type of ownership affects media companies in various ways: "… the form of ownership and the nature of influence of the sources of capital are fundamental for understanding the behaviour of managers and firm performance" (Picard and Van Weezel 2008, 23). Picard and Van Weezel categorise the ownership of commercial firms into sole proprietors or partnerships, privately owned companies, and listed [or publicly traded] companies (2008, 25). In private companies, they point out, owners often have a closer relationship with their media than listed companies, as shareholders in listed companies are mostly looking for a return on their investments. Privately owned media can thus experience a lot of interference from owners (Picard and Van Weezel 2008, 26). In companies listed on the stock exchange, "the dispersal of ownership through traded shares reduces the direct influence of owners by separating control from ownership" (Picard and Van Weezel 2008, 26). Control of the firm rests in the managers, who must make the decisions necessary to grow the business and keep it stable.

The composition of the shareholders – and the influence of institutional investors' interests on firms – has generated debate about their influence on media (see Picard and Van Weezel 2008, 26). One concern is that short-term profit-taking is prized above long-term stability and reinvestment in the product (see, for example, studies by McManus 1993 and Underwood 1995).[5] However, Picard and Van Weezel argue that big media companies have the capital to invest in their products and to fund risk and innovation (2008, 26). Some companies have provided newsroom autonomy, invested in quality journalism, and promoted diversity (2008, 26). Thus it does not directly follow that listed companies and big corporates are 'bad for journalism'.

Owners or managers generally appoint the editors of publications. The editor's mandate is to deliver what owners want in terms of circulation and profits, and an editor must implement the company's policy or be fired. The editor reports to the board of the company or directly to a business manager or publisher, and must operate within budgets decided by management. On the other hand, the editor has authority in the journalism arena; if an editor can bring in the audience and make the product attractive, he or she has significant negotiating power. As Steenveld (2007) has shown, different editors bring different visions and management styles, and play a crucial role in the organisational culture. In selecting the editor, owners (or their proxies, managers) are also setting the

vision and strategy for the newspaper. This is an arms-length power, which does not involve direct day-to-day involvement in the work of the organisation. But it is crucial for the direction the newspaper takes, and the success of that strategy.

The form of ownership also has an impact on the way resources are allocated to a particular media product. For example, one small newspaper with a sole proprietor might find it difficult to attract investment, as profits would be small, and the opportunities of economies of scale and scope through sharing resources and consolidating departments across a number of media is not there. Big companies that have a stable of media can direct resources to struggling products or promising publications in order to grow them, but there would necessarily be an inner hierarchy of individual media within that corporation. Picard argues that managing a slate of media products is a key challenge for management, requiring "an understanding of the rationales for, influences upon, and structures and operations of portfolios" (2005, 2). Leona Achtenhagen points out that, although diversification across a range of media products has been recommended for reducing risk (especially in an environment where one class of media may be losing audience to another), it can also introduce risks within the firm.

> … different products have an impact on each other, which moreover changes over time. These relationships between products and their embeddedness into an organization imply that adding and selling parts of the product portfolio is a difficult process. Achtenhagen 2005, 45.

The form of the ownership of a newspaper thus has many more implications for that newspaper than simply political influence from the owner, or a "dumbing down" of content in order to make profits.

I have set out briefly some of the broad areas of concern for critical political economy. However, my question is not exactly the one asked by critical political economists: What are the impacts of commercial factors on the media's role in society? I am more interested in looking at the discursive practices of journalists and media executives, and the ways in which they negotiate these commercial imperatives of news production with journalism's public interest *raison d'etre*. Thus the focus on commercial factors in this research is not an attempt to isolate them as external forces, but as they are

understood and then operationalised within media organisations. I am also interested in how the concept of the commercial is placed in relation to other concepts, particularly notions of the public interest.

From this perspective, the commercial as a category in the public discussion of journalism is constructed in particular ways that are significantly connected to other constructs. Firstly, it seems to me that the commercial is constituted as an issue not in and of itself, but as part of the problem of the media – whether journalism is serving society (see, for example, the discourse of the ANC about the commercial media, Duncan 2009). Second, it can only be understood as a concept contextually, i.e., in relation to history and current local and global conditions. These would include the economic, politics and the configurations of corporations and the state. Thirdly, there are the ways in which it takes shape in relation to different communities that have chosen to describe it as an area of concern – critical political economists in international media studies, liberal political groupings, local policy-makers, media executives and working journalists. Thus the concept of the commercial as problem is a contested category with multiple permutations, enmeshed in a web of interlocked issues (just as the concept of the public is).

To recognise that the commercial has been constructed in a certain way in journalism is not to deny that there are factors that are part of the business of making media – such as the factors cited by media executives and critical political economists – and that these factors may be changing the work of journalism. However, understanding the commercial as a discourse takes into account that the strategies, practices and values of the moment are a particular variety of these underlying economic imperatives, and that these discourses may also change as circumstances change. For example, McManus (1994) points out that what he calls "market-driven journalism" has led to companies investing heavily in audience research, in order to address readers as consumers, rather than as citizens, forming a public. In a competitive market, media may feel obliged to make concessions to advertisers by offering advertorial products they would previously have eschewed, because this seems like good business sense (Cowling et al 2008). Commercial tactics, and the ideas of what makes good business sense, are contingent and shifting, and the case of the *Sowetan* demonstrates different versions of the commercial in operation.

3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out some key theory and literature that informs the way I have set up my research question, and the issues of the public and the commercial. The critical theory shows, firstly, that a concept or discourse is not simply ideas about reality out there, but is a way of constructing the world. This is especially so if the understandings are largely shared and acted upon in the social world, as most of the theories of structuralism, post-structuralism and ideology propose. Thus, understanding how we think about the world – collectively – is to grasp something about the way the world operates and the way we act in it. Social imaginary theory takes these ideas further in identifying collective ways of imagining and practising in order to create a certain kind of world (such as going to the polls in a democracy) or to mobilise different societal possibilities (such as the quest for democracy we have seen in 2012 in the so-called Arab Spring).

Secondly, the theory demonstrates that the public and the commercial as concepts have been part of debates about journalism since the American penny press (see Schudson 1978) and function as discourses in newsrooms and media companies, where they are invariably linked (McManus 1994). In libertarian theory, the commercial is seen as giving the media economic independence from the state, which they need in order to act as a check upon it. The commercial in socially responsible approaches is seen as potentially problematic, and oppositional to, but not incompatible with, the public interest. In critical political economy, the terms commercial and public interest have been set up as fundamentally oppositional, almost incompatible. Thus, I argue that the commercial as a concept is bound up with ideas about journalism's public role and the problems fulfilling those responsibilities. The commercial has been invoked in two ways here: as shaping what the media produces and how it is produced, or as fundamentally in conflict with the public interest functions of the media.

Looking at notions of the public in different theoretical traditions, we see a concept that seems to reach further and be more expansive than the ideas of the commercial. Firstly, it fits into an historical construct of publicness (the public sphere and publics) drawing on an Enlightenment legacy, from which it cannot be separated. It mobilises multiple modernities and identities and is tied into the discourses of many areas

(law, parliamentary democracies, government functions etc). It is associated with educated elites, but does not necessarily serve only them. The conceptual nexus of "the public" is thus a powerful and evolving imaginary that resonates throughout democratic societies, and societies where there is a quest for democracy. By contrast, the economic aspects of journalism production, which I refer to as the commercial, are less openly discussed and thus appear 'hidden'. This is possibly because the system of global capitalism and the free market is taken for granted as the only option for contemporary societies. My thesis is an attempt to bring into relief how this discourse operates.

In South Africa, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, there have historically been a number of different communities in different relations of subordination or domination in relation to each other. Habermas's unitary public sphere has never existed in South Africa; Taylor's idea of participants who act with the understanding that they are taking part in something called the public sphere is not really applicable in South Africa either. The publics that have emerged over the various eras have been separated by language, race, class and culture, and have often been in dispute, even at war, with each other. But the significance of the "public sphere" imaginary cannot be overstated in the growth and operations of these publics, as we shall see in the nation-building era of the *Sowetan*.

Despite the lower status of the commercial in discussions of journalism, if we relate the public/commercial to Taylor's social imaginaries of modernity, the commercial fits the idea of the capitalist market economy as the common enterprise of modern society. In this social imaginary, the economy is understood as a system based on the productive exchange of services, a mutation of the moral order of mutual benefit. It is also understood as one of the three major social imaginaries that constitute modernity, and is thus not incompatible with the public sphere and citizenship imaginaries.

In journalism, service to a public emerges as a foundational concept in the normative understandings of its role in society. Whether this public interest discourse exists in all media organisations, and how it takes shape in different organisations, is examined in the next chapter. But it is clear that journalists who are attached to the idea of the public interest, and holding the government accountable to the public, are imaginatively and discursively attached to something bigger than themselves, a form of collective world-making that can have an impact on society.

Notes on Chapter 3

[1] For a discussion of Kant and Bentham's ideas on publicness and the public sphere, see Splichal 2006 and Eley 1992, 291.
[2] The term comes from an older conception of society, in which feudal society was described as having three 'estates' – the nobles, the clergy, and the common folk. Assemblies of estates in European countries evolved into the first parliaments.
[3] For a detailed study of how external factors can affect television news, see McManus 1994. For studies of the use of advertorial, advertising and specially created supplements, see Cowling et al 2008.
[4] Murdoch is seen as having bought up newspapers across the world, made them more sensationalist and tabloid, and used them to support the Conservatives in Britain, in particular, Maggie Thatcher (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 165).
[5] In South Africa, Tony O'Reilly and his Independent Media group have been accused of squeezing the newspaper assets they bought from the Argus Company in the 1990s for increased profits year on year, stripping the company and cutting costs and staff in order to do it. The company was sold to local investors in 2013, and O'Reilly is reportedly bankrupt.

Chapter 4: The nature of journalism work

The previous chapter discusses the concepts of 'the public' and 'the commercial' – the issues I set out to examine in the takeover and relaunch of the *Sowetan.* This chapter deals with journalism work and organisational culture. The case study shows that the organisation's culture mediates the discourses of the public and the commercial and is mediated by them; it is the matrix through which these concepts are expressed. The question of how issues of the 'public/commercial' are negotiated in a journalism context can be answered only through understanding organisations and how they operate. In this chapter, I investigate how organisations are understood and studied in journalism scholarship, in management theory, and in organisational psychology.

First, I approach the journalism literature to explore what it says about journalism work in general. At the heart of this inquiry is a question about whether journalism practice has universal qualities (i.e. is it a global *culture*, *ideology* or *profession*) (see Hanitzsch 2007, 368 - 370; Deuze 1995; and Carpentier 2005 for an outline of the 'nodal points' of journalistic identity) or whether – and to what extent – it takes different forms in different contexts, such as nation, culture, medium or organisation. In other words, the question is whether journalism is primarily an occupational (professional) identity, an organisational identity, or a combination of both. I examine this literature in order to locate the journalism practice of the *Sowetan*, including the ideas of the public/commercial in the organisation.

Secondly, I investigate how particular contexts can shape journalism work. I examine scholarship on commercial, economic and technological influences on newsroom work, on journalism as a national construct, and the impact of global forces on local journalisms. A common thread running through these cases is the question of how journalists respond to change 'from outside' their organisations; in other words, how they adapt to the technological and commercial challenges, geopolitical shifts and changes in their industry. I also read across the research to see how commercial imperatives and the public interest may be renegotiated in changing circumstances.

Thirdly, I look at approaches to understanding organisations. I examine literature outside of the field of journalism scholarship that focuses specifically on understanding how organisations function in general. As Edgar Schein observes:

> Over the past several decades, organizational culture has drawn themes from anthropology, sociology, social psychology, and cognitive psychology. It has become a field of its own and has connected significantly with the broader cultural studies that have been spawned by the rampant globalism of recent times. (Schein 2010, 1)

In this section, I do not attempt an exhaustive overview, but lay out some broad principles to be considered when an organisation is being studied. My interest here is in cultural approaches to organisations, to leadership, and to the challenges of negotiating change.

1 Journalism as a field of study

There are multiple approaches to the study of journalism practice (Hanitzsch 2007, Zelizer 2004, Shoemaker and Reese 1996). Scholars have categorised the study of journalism/media in a variety of ways. To cite a few examples:

- James Curran divides media theory into "media-centric" approaches, which see the media primarily as organisations, and "socio-centric" approaches, which conceive of them as cultural products (2000, 11). The first approach privileges the agency of the journalist or the organisation; the second, the power of social forces to determine their roles.
- Michael Schudson (1997) identifies three approaches to what he calls "newsmaking": political economy; social organisation (occupations, professions, social construction of ideology); and cultural approaches (which emphasise the power of culture and context).
- Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese see media scholarship as divided into focuses on individual media workers (their personal qualities, attitudes and professional roles), media routines (audience orientation,

news values, gatekeeping, sources), organisational influences (economics, social control, roles etc) and ideological influences.

- Barbie Zelizer argues that "existing journalism scholarship has not produced a body of material that reflects all of journalism" (2004, 6). She categorises sociological inquiry in the U.S. into: the study of discrete journalism practices (gatekeeping, social control, and selection); occupational studies (values, ethics, roles, demographics); a focus on normative, ritual and purposive behaviour; organisational theory; newsroom ethnographies; journalistic institutions (ownership and economics); ideology and critical political economy.

These overviews of journalism scholarship offer different ways of conceptualising the field; and demonstrate that there is no broad agreement on what constitutes journalism as a field. As Zelizer puts it, "no one voice in journalism's study is better or more authoritative than others; nor is there one unitary vision of journalism to be found" (2004, 4).

A useful way to describe how journalism is studied is to locate it in its geographical context. Journalism is local and particular, in that it issues from organisations, communities, languages, technologies and histories. The idea of journalism as being about and part of the nation has been around since the Enlightenment.[1] Cook (1998) demonstrates how American media developed historically into a political institution, intertwined with various branches of the U.S. government and their governance functions.

The *study* of journalism in various regions is similarly affected by context. According to Schudson, "Media studies are genuinely linked to national political issues – they are academic meta-discourse on the daily defining of political reality" (2000, 194). Academic study, however, can be shaped by factors different to the forces influencing journalism. Media and journalism studies' location in the academy means they are constructed within contexts that have their own histories. It is thus important to ask where the study of journalism is located, and what its generative context is.

I would argue further that journalism and journalism studies cannot be fully grasped without addressing globalisation and circulation.[2] In simple terms, there is no insulation in the "local" from the global; there is a constant movement of ideas, people, products, technologies between separate regions or nation-states. Global flows wash up against local conditions, intermingle with them, and create variations of discourses, institutions, and cultures. The concept of circulation, as Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma point out, is more than just flows, but involves "interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them" (2002, 192). Certain interpretive communities may grow up around the transnational circulation of ideas in media industries and in the academy. Lee and LiPuma (2002) note that there is an inherent unevenness in globalisation, which privileges certain communities, ideas, products, people, over others.

Drawing on the work of Appadurai (2002), Gaonkar (2002), Warner (2002), and Taylor (2002), I propose that journalism is "imaginatively" transnational, by virtue of its imaginative connection to global social imaginaries, such as democracy, the public sphere, and modernity. This raises the question of whether journalism in various regions of the world shares certain universal qualities - a local variation of a basically similar *essential* set of processes and practices, or whether, like multiple modernities[3], there are multiple journalisms?

This is an important consideration for me in applying journalism theory to the *Sowetan*. There is an intellectual tension in the project if what is laid down as knowledge about journalism is drawn from a particular journalism studied in its context (an inductive approach), and that knowledge is then used as the basis to examine and explain (and in some cases evaluate) all journalism (a deductive approach). Where cases do not bear out theory (such as the *Sowetan*), it is important to consider whether the theory is defective. This is why it is crucial to understand the conditions under which certain bodies of scholarship evolved.

As discussed below, the higher education and media sectors of South Africa drew on international understandings of journalism as a practice, and on various traditions of media education, and they became entrenched in the local landscape in uneven and stratified ways. This does not make South Africa an exceptional place, however. Paddy

Scannell's (2007) account of the media scholarship of the last century shows the ways in which theory and research are shaped by time and place. Scannell recounts the relationship between Theodor Adorno and Paul Lazersfeld, German academics who worked together at Columbia University's Bureau of Applied Social Research during World War II. Adorno's commitment to "critical theory" and Lazersfeld's to social science methodologies (such as the collection of data, quantitative methods, research in the service of industry) put them at odds. Lazersfeld "is considered to this day by American sociologists as one of the key figures in the intellectual formation and history of their discipline" (Scannell 2007, 16), while Adorno is a key intellectual figure of the Frankfurt School. Scannell argues that their conflict demonstrated "important differences between American and European social thought" (2007, 20; see also Curran et al 1987; Bennett 1982; Hall 1982). He identifies two generative moments for the study of journalism and media: the growth of North American sociology from the 1930s to the 1950s, with its focus on mediated and mass communication; and emergence of Cultural Studies in Britain from 1968 to 1979 (Scannell 2007, 199).

In South Africa, approaches to the study of journalism drew heavily on both these traditions. In the 1970s, American sociology was imported into the South African academy (largely at Afrikaans universities) via degrees in Mass Communication or Communication Studies, while British Cultural Studies became the basis for Media Studies programmes (largely at English-language universities, such as Rhodes and Natal). In recent years, North American sociology and European cultural studies have been brought into conversation with each other, partly because of the internationalisation of cultural studies (see, for example, the essays in Ferguson and Golding 1997). This intermingling has taken place in South Africa too (see Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli 2007 and Steenveld 2004a).

2 Social science approaches

2.1 Early American scholarship: The journalist as individual

Shoemaker (1996), Carey (1997) and others have pointed to an American bias towards individualism. This permeates popular understandings of journalism. Tom Wolfe wrote: "… 'the journalist', a pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, a faded personality, and there

[is] no way of getting rid of the pallid little troll, short of ceasing to read" (1973, 31). Other characterisations are similarly colourful, as we can see by terms such as "hack," "muckraker", "paparazzi", "ambulance chasers", etc. Alternatively, journalists are conceived of as the heroes of warzones and dangerous investigations, risking their lives to bring important events to light. The figure of the journalist appears in the popular imagination as a rugged individualist (often white and male), bent on getting the story, operating according to his own rules and ethical codes.[4]

Early approaches to the study of journalism work similarly considered journalists to have a great deal of autonomy in the news production process. The first gatekeeping study in 1950 appeared to show a wire editor had a great deal of individual power in selecting and rejecting news items (White 1997). Editorial decision-makers were dubbed "gatekeepers", as they were seen to be able to "open the gates" to allow certain news items in, and close them against others. "From this largely psychosocial explanation, 'gatekeeper' became a household term in journalism scholarship" (Zelizer 2004, 52).

Later gatekeeping studies indicated that these decision-makers tended to select news in similar ways, due to their shared criteria and news values (see Gieber 1964). Gatekeeping has subsequently been elaborated beyond a simple model – a series of gates being opened or closed by individuals – to involve "every aspect of message selection, handling and control" (Shoemaker 1997, 57). Shoemaker identifies a range of factors at play in the gatekeeping process, from organisational forces (like deadlines and production processes) to what she calls "intraindividual variables embedded in life experiences" (1997, 61). Intraindividual variables include values and models of thinking, the conceptions journalists have about their roles, the type of job they have and organisational socialisation. The individual is conceptualised as having these qualities "inside", and broader societal and newsroom influences are described as forces acting from outside on the individual and on the "gate" they are operating. In this sense, news is "*socially* constructed, elaborated in the interaction of the news-making players with each other" (Schudson 1997, 16).

Even in the more complex versions of gatekeeping, journalists are conceived of as discrete individuals, on whom various forces act (Schudson 1997, 9). This implies that the journalist has some autonomy in relation to the organisation. This interaction, and the

potential for autonomy and resistance, is examined in Warren Breed's extensive 1955 study of U.S. newsmen. Breed describes the ways in which reporters are socialised (i.e., the processes and actions in newsrooms that cause individuals to conform) to the "policy" of a news organisation. News policy is covert, Breed argues, and cannot be openly insisted upon, because it is linked to political orientation. Explicitly stating policy contravenes the journalistic norms of independence and objectivity, and the existence of this key ethic prevents the publisher from commanding subordinates to follow policy, he argues (1997, 107). Journalistic professionalism requires at least the appearance of autonomy in the newsroom.

> When the new reporter starts work, he is not told what [the newspaper's news] policy is. Nor is he ever told. This may appear strange, but interview after interview confirmed the condition. The standard remark was "Never, in my [x] years on this paper, have I been told how to slant a story." … Yet all but the newest staffer know what policy is. On being asked, they say they learn it "by osmosis." (Breed 1997, 109)

Breed explains: "The newsroom is a friendly, first-namish place. Staffers discuss stories with editors on a give-and-take basis" (1997, 113). As long as the socialisation process does not obviously interfere with journalistic autonomy, and as long as journalists feel part of the "in-group" in the newsroom, conformity can be obtained. Failure to conform is mostly "punished" by spiking the news stories that violate the news policy, and staffers soon learn what they can and can't get through.

In certain circumstances this cosy relationship changes. Then staffers can deviate from policy, as "the newsman is responsible for a range of skills and judgments which are matched only in the professional and entrepreneurial fields" (Breed 1997, 116). The journalist can subvert policy by selecting whom to interview and what information to gather for the story; Breed calls this strategy the "squeeze". Another tactic is "the plant", where the journalist gives the story to another paper to publish, and is then able to argue that the story is too big to ignore. The seniority of a journalist in the newsroom allows him or her more leeway. Senior reporters may initiate stories, and thus "make policy" in areas that may have been ignored.[5]

Breed's study shows how resistance and conformity can take place in journalism organisations, and outlines a range of processes that link the journalist to the organisation. I would argue that the socialisation process he describes affects more than simply obtaining the conformity of journalists to policy, but also all other values and practices in the newsroom, as they cannot be extricated from the daily or weekly processes of production. The factors that bring about journalistic compliance would act equally on such things as news values, routines and rules, and the journalists' understanding of their roles. The socialisation process thus happens for all these aspects at once, and the socialisation happens through the journalist's ongoing location in a specific organisation.

Breed's analysis is a picture of ongoing tension between journalists and policy (as represented by the publisher) that is kept in balance by certain processes. Publishers must obtain compliance covertly, says Breed, because of journalists' adherence to professional norms, such as "the newsman's obligation to his readers and to his craft" and "responsibility, impartiality, accuracy, fair play, and objectivity" (Breed 1997, 108). Professionalism is described as comprising individual autonomy, professional skill, and being part of the in-group. Such professionalism must be maintained in the face of publisher influence, advertiser demands and the constraints of news production, Breed argues, and certain societal forces – professional codes, journalism schools, the Newspaper Guild, critics and readers – can support this professionalism. This implies that journalists do not construct their journalism practice entirely from what they learn in the organisation, but have professional occupational bodies and norms to draw on. Breed thus assumes that serving the public is the province of the professional journalist, in tension with the publisher and commercial factors – a version of the public/commercial dichotomy discussed in chapter 2. It also sets up a tension between the occupational and organisational identities of the journalist.

As the discussion above shows, both Breed's study and gatekeeping research take as their starting point the journalist as individual decision-maker at the centre of a range of forces. The organisation, in this conception, is a place that is separate from journalists, in which the production of media happens, and in which journalists have defined roles. One media organisation is not dissimilar to another, and socialisation and resistance is

assumed to be present in most. Breed's and gatekeeping studies thus implicitly position news organisations as largely the same – and journalism work as similar across them.

2.2 Journalism work as media routines

If Breed's study shifted the focus from the individual power of the gatekeeper to the journalist's interaction with his or her organisation, later approaches appeared to dispense with individuals altogether in favour of organisational routines and processes (Cottle 2003, 14). In these, the journalists are absorbed into the routines of production to such an extent that they lose any individual power to influence the process and the product.

> Who are the journalists who cover beats, interview sources, rewrite press releases from government bureaus, and rarely (but occasionally) take the initiative in ferreting out hidden or complex stories? If the organizational theorists are generally correct, it does not matter who they are or where they come from, they will be socialized quickly into the values and routines in the daily rituals of journalism. (Schudson 1997, 15)

Cottle argues that studies that focus on the routines of production have "collectively emphasised how news [is] an organisational accomplishment", and the journalist is absorbed like a cog in the wheel of production (Cottle 2003, 14).

Although routines theory has been criticised for determinacy, it does direct attention to an aspect of journalism that has significant power in shaping the daily lives of journalists and readers. Routines ensure that "the media system will respond in predictable ways", "form a cohesive set of rules", and are integral to being a media professional (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 106). Schlesinger (1992) describes the key ordering structure in BBC journalists' work as "the news day", which is structured by meetings, production processes and deadlines. This set of processes and roles in the production cycles is widely adhered to across broadcast newsrooms, he notes. Because media routines and constraints are similar across a range of media organisations, journalists will experience broadly similar processes (Schlesinger 1992, 107). Routines theory, though described as an organisational theory, is not really focused on the particular and idiosyncratic nature of a news organisation. A focus on the processes and

routines of media production emphasises the commonalities in journalism across various contexts.

For Timothy Cook, the similar routines, professional conceptions and news sense that span different journalism organisations means that news media are not a set of individual organisations; they should be conceived of as a single social institution (1998, 64). This institution plays a political role in society, and, in the U.S., has been subsidised and privileged in certain ways by government. Government agencies have come to rely on news media in order to communicate, not just with the people, but with each other. American journalists' adherence to objectivity as a professional norm does not make the journalism industry less of a political institution, but rather disguises its political power (Cook 1998, 4). However, assessing the "political effects on the news or the media's effect on politics" is not simple exercise, according to Cook.

> The two are so intertwined that it is preferable to study, first, the news media's interactions with political actors … and, second, the effects that those interactions and negotiations have on the kind if news that appears and the kind of policies and politics that are thereby encouraged. (Cook 1998, 13)

Cook argues that, no matter what the differences are between individual media organisations, they form part of a political force in society, because collectively they are a site for certain patterns of behaviour that are stable, recurring and extend across organisations and over time (1998, 66). What Cook describes as an institution is a more structured and formalised conception than the public sphere or social imaginary ideas of how power operates, the sliding signifiers of post-structuralism, or ideology arguments, because he points to structural aspects of the media that make them an institution in American society. The patterns of behaviour that he discerns relate in certain respects to journalism practice, through journalistic professionalism, which has a life beyond a specific organisation.

In South Africa, media do not form an institution in quite the same configuration as the American media in Cook's description, as chapter 5 shows, due to the historical positions of different communities and their media. However, Cook's focus on the

institutional nature of news media is helpful to understanding the *Sowetan's* role in South African public life; although producing a different type of journalism from other newspapers, it was still part of the 'institution of journalism', and, as such, contributed to the politics of the society. Social imaginary theory, on the other hand, proposes that the imaginaries that comprise modernity are constantly evolving, shifting and adjusting to their context, which means that there are *multiple modernities* (Gaonkar 2002). This accounts for different conceptions and practices of journalism.

2.3 Journalism as professional occupation

The notion of journalism as a profession – "a set of activities by which one qualifies as a 'journalist'" (Zelizer 2004, 32) – evolved particularly in the U.S., but has spread to other areas in the world. In considering whether journalism is a profession, scholars stress the link to public service and social obligations, as well as a body of specialised knowledge and skills and the autonomy to exercise those skills (Beam et al. 2009b, 279).

In American scholarship, objectivity has often been linked to the definition of professionalism. Schudson writes that, in the 1920s and 30s, journalists were encouraged

> … to replace a simple faith in facts with an allegiance to rules and procedures created for a world in which even facts were in question. This was "objectivity." (Schudson 1978, 7)

Schudson argues that the concept of objectivity is thought to be closer to scientific method, which is considered better able to deliver 'true' statements about the world. He argues that objectivity is a legitimating ideal that confers authority in professions; it encompasses autonomy and independence (as part of the scientific method of empiricism), as well as specialist skills and training.

A body of scholarship around journalistic professionalism first emerged in the 1960s in the U.S. (Beam et al. 2009b, 278):

> That scholarship drew on the work of sociologists who studied occupations and professions, and it reflected one of their fundamental intellectual concerns: What are characteristics of a profession, and does journalism qualify as one?

A profession was defined through the existence of certain attributes. This "traits" approach provides the basis for the McLeod-Hawley scale, a measure used to assess how professional journalists are (Beam et al. 2009b, 278). The traits approach intellectually underpins the key indicators of professionalism that are used in "American Journalist" studies – large-scale panel studies of journalists conducted at intervals in the U.S. since 1971.

The following are generally included in traits studies: a body of specialised knowledge or skills; a significant degree of autonomy; an orientation towards public service; an established professional culture including institutions; and education and training (Beam et al 2009b, 279). In these studies, attitudes to public service are often examined and assessed through looking at what the researchers call "role conception", i.e. asking journalists how they see their role in society. Over time, the American Journalist studies identified a range of beliefs about how journalists should function in society and saw them as falling broadly into four clusters: journalists as disseminators of information; as interpreters of events; adversaries of business and government; and as mobilisers of audience members (Beam et al. 2009b, 278).

For example, a 2007 study of 400 U.S. journalists identified significant support for three types of journalistic roles: "analyzing and interpreting complex problems, being an adversary of public officials, and developing the intellectual and cultural interests of the public" (Beam et al. 2009b, 286). In a related study, Beam et al showed that more than nine out of 10 journalists believed that it was important for news organisations to serve the public interest (2009a). The surveys show that American journalists imagine their role in society in normative terms. What we can see here also links to the imaginaries of the public sphere and to the self-governing people, with the journalists imagining their role as facilitators, not just participants.

Despite the many surveys of journalists, the professional conception of journalism has been widely critiqued. Zelizer argues that looking at journalists simply through the frame of a profession is an incomplete picture of journalistic work (1993, 221). The professionalisation of journalism, she argues, has involved adopting a shared frame of reference among journalists that gives them a sense of being more qualified than the

layperson (to decide on news, for example), a sense of control over work conditions, and an aura of authoritativeness. The professional frame also stresses the adherence to certain codes, such as objectivity, balance and accuracy (Zelizer 1993, 222). Some scholars describe the professionalisation of journalism as an ideological development, as it "served to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who was a 'real' journalist" and what was 'real' journalism" (Deuze 2005, 444).

The focus on professionalism is strongly supported by U.S. journalism schools. The teaching of journalism began in the U.S. in around 1900 in the Humanities (Zelizer 2004, 16). From the late 1920s, many journalism programmes began to move towards a social science orientation, eventually being absorbed into Communication Studies. This uneasy combination, Zelizer notes, led to bitter battles between journalism practitioners and academics about how journalism practice should be approached (2004, 20). By the 1990s, more than 300 American universities were granting Bachelor's degrees in journalism and mass communication (see Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 74). In 1996, Shoemaker and Reese note, "the vast majority of media professionals have communication degrees" and "the vast majority of new hires at newspapers are journalism graduates" (1996, 75). The apprenticeship model – in which the fledgling journalist learns the craft through the organisation – has thus largely been replaced by university programmes.

In the U.S., journalism education is regulated through the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication,[6] established in 1945. The council's role is to provide guidelines to universities on what journalism programmes should contain, and have a peer process of evaluation for quality assurance. The council consists of industry practitioners, journalism educators and some members of the public, although the accrediting committee has a majority of journalism educators. The council describes the role of journalism as follows:

> The mission of journalism and mass communications professions in a democratic society is to inform, to enlighten and to champion freedom of speech and press. These professions seek to enable people to fulfil their responsibilities as citizens who mean to govern themselves.[7]

And further, it describes the mission of journalism education as follows:

> Professional programs should prepare students with a body of knowledge and a system of inquiry, scholarship and training for careers in which they are accountable to:
>
> - the public interest for their knowledge, ethics, competence and service;
> - citizens, clients or consumers for their competencies and the quality of their work; and
> - employers for their performance.

The council's website lists 109 American communication programmes as accredited; all the big names of journalism education. Although the accredited schools form less than a third of the total programmes available, the influence of accreditation has spread much wider than this core group, according to journalism education scholar Professor Lee Becker.[8] He argues that schools that are not accredited usually attempt to meet some or all of the nine standards set out by the council.

The standards focus largely on skills transfer. However, the "professional and public service" standard states:

> The unit provides leadership in the development of high standards of professional practice through such activities as offering continuing education, promoting professional ethics, evaluating professional performance and addressing communication issues of public consequence and concern.[9]

A knowledge and understanding of issues related to freedom of expression and diversity also forms part of the standard.

I list these features in journalism education in the U.S. in order to demonstrate the extent to which there has been a standardising process for more than half a century, with a strong emphasis on professional conceptions of journalistic work. As the vast majority of new hires in journalism newsrooms come from journalism schools and companies prefer not to train journalists themselves, it is not surprising that American journalists demonstrate a range of similar skills, practices and values. The attachment American

journalists express to professionalism and to ideas of serving the public interest has been deliberately promoted and installed through the sites in which they first learned their journalism – their schools.

By contrast, in South Africa, journalism and journalism education has had a completely different trajectory. According to De Beer and Prince (2005), the Afrikaans-language University of Potchefstroom was the first to offer a journalism programme – in 1959 – and was followed by Rhodes University and the University of South Africa in 1969 (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli 2007, 180). A journalism programme based on the Columbia University model – postgraduate and practice-based – began in Stellenbosch in 1978 (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli 2007, 180). The English and Afrikaans language institutions diverged in their educational programmes in media and journalism from the first. Potchefstroom University relied on German media philosophers for its theoretical base, until the arrival of American social science approaches (De Beer and Prince 2005). After that, most Afrikaans universities adopted a "communication science" paradigm (based on positivism), and in 1980, set up three journals in communication and established the Southern African Communication Association (Sacomm) (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli 2007, 180).

On the other hand, Rhodes University added Media Studies in 1981, and the University of Natal set up a unit modelled on the Birmingham Centre in 1985 (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli 2007, 181). The English-language universities drew on critical theory to take a critical stance to South African society and media. Media studies affiliated to the Association for Sociology in South Africa (ASSA), which took an anti-apartheid position throughout the 1980s (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli 2007, 181). With the exception of Rhodes and Stellenbosch, university programmes that focused on journalism and media paid scant attention to teaching journalism skills. Much of this training was taken up by technical colleges or by the news companies themselves.

South Africa's legacy of journalism education is thus very different to the American case, and, as Chapter 5 will show, so is its journalism history. South African media educators drew on global understandings of journalism and journalism education; however, they operationalised a variety of paradigms from the North, which then became imbricated in the greater societal context.[10]

2.4 Comparative studies of journalism culture

Although I argue that American journalism is a product of its particular history and context, American notions of professionalism have often been used as the basis for examining journalism values and practice in other countries. Research into global media cultures and comparative studies across countries has gathered momentum in the last few years. The largest global study on journalistic practice to date is the Worlds of Journalism project, a study of more than 1 800 journalists across 22 countries (Worlds of journalism: The project in brief 2006). It set out "to map journalistic cultures onto a grid of common dimensions and explore their variation across nations, various types of news organizations and different professional milieus" (Worlds of journalism: The project in brief 2006). Research leader Thomas Hanitzsch uses the concept of journalism culture – as an arena of competing ideologies and interpretations – as the basis of the cross-cultural research (2007, 370). He articulates three aspects of journalism culture: institutional roles (how media functions in society); epistemologies (the truth claims the newswork relies on); and ethical ideologies (how journalists respond to ethical problems) (2010, 3). These aspects are further divided into traits that can be measured, and is in this way similar to the American Journalist studies discussed in the previous section.

Hanitzsch argues that cross-national research shows that there is "a convergence in journalistic orientations and practices" (2009, 112), which he ascribes to the diffusion of occupational ideologies from the West to developing nations. However, the research also demonstrates that there are substantive differences between national media systems, and consequently, journalism practice (Hanitzsch 2007, 368). For example, a study in 18 countries showed that "journalists across the globe pay high regard to the normative ideals of detachment, providing political information, and acting as a watchdog of the government" (Hanitzsch 2010, 8). Neutrality is a key value for Western journalists, but "a tendency towards interventionism can be found among journalists from developing societies and transitional democracies" (Hanitzsch et al 2010, 9).

What accounts for differences in journalism culture? Some factors seem to have little effect on journalists' ideas of their work. Research across four ethnic groups in Indonesia, for example, finds that differences in ethnicity, gender and geography do not significantly affect journalism culture (Hanitzsch 2006). Differences in the journalistic

medium – that is, print, television, radio etc – are more likely to be associated with differences in the way journalists articulate their role. The research also shows a divergence in professional culture between journalists in commercial media and those in state-owned media. Different nations are thought to produce different journalisms, as some of the research reviewed below demonstrates.

The significance of these differences is not agreed. De Bruin, in reviewing the scholarship on professionalism,[11] argues that it shows an array of contradictory ideas among journalists on role conceptions and ethical values:

> The vast difference in professional orientations makes it impossible to generalize about the actual profile of 'the professional identity'. The presence of an idea of 'a' professional identity is the most that can be said" (2000, 222).

By contrast, Deuze reads survey research as showing that journalists express largely similar characteristics across genres, media and cultures, which add up to a dominant global culture. A "dominant occupational ideology" exists, but it is "interpreted, used and applied differently among journalists across media" (Deuze 2005, 445). The occupational ideologies of journalism are thus not unequivocally the same across countries, cultures and mediums, and the extent to which they are similar or different is not agreed.

3 Cultural approaches to journalism

3.1 British Cultural Studies

By contrast to North American journalism scholarship, Media Studies arose out of critical theory, Marxism and cultural concerns. British Cultural Studies developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, under the leadership of Stuart Hall at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham (Scannell 2007, 199). Dahlgren argues that the emergence of the new Left in Britain in the 1950s and its attempts to extract a "viable analytic framework from the Marxian tradition in order to understand and confront contemporary economy and society" was a crucial factor in the birth of Cultural Studies (Dahlgren 1997, 50). Scannell writes that Hall and others combined a focus on lived experience (then part of studies of culture) with ideas drawn from structuralism and

Marxism; and installed the concept of ideology at the heart of Cultural Studies (see Hall 1996, Scannell 2007, 202-204).[12] Media were an important focus from the start (Scannell 2007, 199).[13] British Cultural Studies began migrating to other countries in the 1980s (Dahlgren 1997), reaching South Africa in the early 1980s (Louw 1992, 2), where it was associated with academic resistance to apartheid. Cultural Studies in South Africa, Sarah Nuttall argues, has been marked by "three major assumptions": "the over-determination of the political, the inflation of resistance" and the elevation of race as the ultimate signifier of identity (2006, 265).

The Cultural Studies approach to journalism assumes that it is a part of culture and reproduces certain societal ideologies. It is thus conceptually impossible to analyse journalists in organisations as separate autonomous entities – individual gatekeepers acting in relation to each other and the organisation. Cultural approaches do not examine journalists as discrete individuals within settings acting out tasks, but as inextricably part of the production of culture in society. This production relies on certain "givens," which cannot necessarily be seen in operation in the moment of production.

In a seminal text of Media Studies, Hall moves away from separating producers from consumers in media analysis (Hall 1993, 90-103). He bridges the socio-centric and the media-centric approaches with the concept of "encoding-decoding", which looks at media texts in the circuit of production, "a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments – production, circulation, distribution, consumption, reproduction" (1993, 91). Media producers use professional codes to produce content that largely falls within the dominant discourses in society, Hall argues, and the codes serve to naturalise the dominant ideological paradigms of society.

Media research in Cultural Studies is "coloured by humanities-inspired textual research", Dahlgren notes (1997, 59). Although there are ethnographic and qualitative research projects, "certain forms of social science tend to be selectively avoided" (Dahlgren 1997, 59), thus producing "a skewed body of knowledge" (Dahlgren 1997, 59). There are few studies of journalism organisations and production. Despite what Dahlgren calls its "theoretical eclecticism" (1997, 51), Cultural Studies has offered productive ways to understand how journalists operate (Zelizer 1997), and opens up critical debates about how journalism work should be conceptualised.

For example, Deuze advocates approaching journalism as an occupational *ideology* (2005, 444). He describes ideology as an active practice, not simply a collection of ideas and values, and something that evolves over time. For Deuze, journalists give meaning to their work through this ongoing practice. Thomas Hanitzsch (2007), on the other hand, argues that conceptualising journalism as a *culture* describes an arena in which ideologies live, which is a space of struggle for dominant interpretations (Hanitzsch 2007, 370). "Culture", for Hanitzsch, is "a set of ideas (values, attitudes, and beliefs), practices (of cultural production), and artefacts (cultural products, texts). Journalism culture becomes manifest in the way journalists think and act" (2007, 368). (Similar definitions of culture are used by certain organisational theorists, as discussed in the section below.)

Zelizer (1993) privileges journalistic talk in suggesting journalists are an *interpretive community*; a group that arises through informal association, has tacit conventions about how issues are discussed, and develops shared memories and interpretations of the past. The shared history of journalists is around "key incidents in the annals of journalism", such as (in the case of American journalists) Watergate, the Vietnam War, the McCarthy era and the Janet Cooke case.[14] Zelizer argues that journalists create their own history of journalism and then draw on it to inform and regulate their present practice. She emphasises that journalists make meaning through such discourse.

Cottle, following Foucault, suggests that the concept of *practice* is necessary to address the complexity and diversity of journalistic work and organisations: "It can accommodate both a sense of the 'discursive' and the 'administrative' in the enactments and regulation of social processes – including those of cultural production" (Cottle 2003, 15). He further proposes using the term "*news ecology*" to refer to what he calls "the under-theorised and ethnographically under-explored, dimension of news differentiation" (2003, 19). News ecology encompasses the wider media environment and the production environment in an organisation. Cottle argues that the flow of practices, dynamics and interactions inside and outside the newsroom can be only understood through ethnographic observation, which is necessary to ground generalising and speculative macro theories (Cottle 2003, 16).

Imagining journalism in the ways described above opens up the possibility of critical complexity. These cultural approaches do not offer a universal method and template, which can be applied to the study of journalisms across the world, as the professional model does. They move the study of journalism away from measurement against a pre-defined template, and towards qualitative and ethnographic approaches that pay close attention to particular cases in their contexts.

3.2 Two cases

The "lived experience" of particular news organisations has been explored in a few studies. Philip Schlesinger's seminal study of the BBC shows its specific character as the British public broadcaster (1987, 11). He employs a mix of interviews and periods of participant observation to discover how the organisation operates. Although the focus is on production, Schlesinger argues that, in fact, the project cannot help but be "a study of organizational style and milieu, [the BBC's] corporate ideology, and its view of the place it occupies in contemporary British society" (1987, 11).

Schlesinger looks at the history of the BBC (1987, 12) in order to locate it in its context. He maps its structures, processes and routines (much in the way of the routines theorists), examines certain key problems for BBC news (like coverage of Northern Ireland), and hones in on features of the organisation's journalistic culture. These include the ways in which editorial control is exercised, the BBC's imagined relationship with the audience, and journalists' understandings of what kind of journalistic role the BBC should take. His case thus looks at the organisation from multiple perspectives (the advantage of a case study) in order to provide a rich descriptive picture.

Schlesinger argues that "the central tenet of the ideology of the BBC's News Division" is impartiality (1987, 163). This provides both a world view and a set of practices: "What the BBC claims when it says it is impartial is that it has achieved an institutional detachment from the conflicts of British society" (Schlesinger 1987, 163). The news is therefore held to represent all interests and points of view without an evaluative commitment to any. This position resonates with liberal pluralist ideas of media as providing a space for competing interests to make their case, and the potential for society to obtain consensus on the issues.

One of the impacts of this corporate ideology on newsroom practice is that routines have developed to create "balance"; in other words, to make sure that opposing spokespeople and views are given equal time and space (particularly political parties). BBC newsmen and women are expected to internalise the neutrality of the organisation and not express controversial views or political affiliations in public. Schlesinger notes a high degree of conformity to this idea (1987, 122). He also notes that there is a degree of commitment to providing a service, an adherence to the ideal of public broadcasting.

The BBC is examined again 20 years later by Lucy Küng-Shankleman in a comparative study of the "corporate cultures" of the BBC and CNN in 1994 and 1995. "Both organisations investigated for this study claim the same mission: to serve the public. However, an identical mission was interpreted in different ways," she notes (2003, 94). In her interviews with senior managers, Küng-Shankleman (like Schlesinger) finds that the BBC culture revolves around its status as a public broadcaster; the BBC tends not to value the commercial side as staff understand themselves to be publicly funded and charged with producing quality programming in the "public good" and "for the nation" (Küng-Shankleman 2003, 78). For CNN, on the other hand, keeping viewers (and thus advertisers) is part of doing a good journalistic job. "Serving the public does not mean getting high-handed and deciding what they need – at CNN the viewers dictate, not the producers" (Küng-Shankleman 2003, 87). CNN staffers identify with the entrepreneurial history of the channel, and understand themselves as primarily producers of breaking news. The relationships of these broadcasters to the commercial aspects of broadcasting are thus very different (and depend on their legacies).

"A striking aspect of these findings is the pervasive and long-lasting influence of the founder of the organisation," Küng-Shankleman observes. "The personal beliefs of John Reith [of the BBC] and Ted Turner [CNN's founder] are perpetuated in the current-day organisations to a surprising degree" (2003, 93). The employees of each broadcaster were familiar with their founders' vision, and able to refer to his ideas. In both cases, the assumptions of staffers "drive those organisation's products, performance and strategic options" (Küng-Shankleman 2003, 87).

Küng-Shankleman's finding points to the importance of leaders in an organisation, an aspect that is explored in Schein's work on organisational culture,

discussed below. The leader in a newsroom is the editor, arguably the linchpin that holds the commercial and the editorial aspects together. Editors often have significant autonomy from proprietors, but have to take into account certain commercial aspects of the product. Editors are also important in two other aspects, as Steenveld's research shows (2007a). First, they set the vision for the newspaper and take responsibility for its public positioning.[15] Secondly, they have a role as the leaders of the editorial departments of media organisations, thus having an impact on the culture of the newsroom.[16]

Schlesinger notes that one of the ways that change is implemented in an organisation is through the appointment of a new editor, who will be charged with steering the organisation and its journalists through the transition (1987, 261). Among journalists themselves, the role of the editor is considered to be extremely important, although editors often convene a senior executive team for decision-making on editorial matters; day-to-day decision-making on aspects of news production are delegated to middle [editorial] managers, who have considerable autonomy (see, for example, Schlesinger 1987, 135 - 162; Steenveld 2007a; Cowling and Hamilton 2010; and Serino 2010).

Both these studies of broadcasters show the ways in which an organisational culture develops and expresses itself in processes and practices. In both, the role of the journalist is to be socialised into the prevailing culture, to take on its values and ideologies, and to develop a professional identity in relation to it – which chimes with Breed's study. In both, the legacy of the organisation and its founder play a significant role in constructing the culture. In each case, the journalists produce different versions of journalism practice, and express different journalistic identities. These findings resonate with the certain approaches to organisational culture, explored below, as well as features of *Sowetan* that are visible in the case study, as later chapters show.

4 External forces on the media organisation

I have argued that journalism scholarship in the U.S. overvalues professional practice as a determinant of journalism culture at the expense of the organisation and the particular conditions that may shape it. The U.S. produced the earliest studies of journalism work and an enormous mass of work, and thus has a commanding presence in global

scholarship on media organisations and journalists. But it is my contention that professionalism of the American kind is not automatically reproduced in other countries and environments, and that, although there may be patterns of similarity across journalism as an occupation, there may also be significant differences. I argue that journalism is constructed by its organisational context, which produces different versions of journalism. The forces that act on an organisation are difficult to quantify, as Handy notes (1993, 13), as there are many variables, and the degree of influence they have on the organisation is debatable. The next section focuses on two sets of determinants that are significant for journalism organisations: the economic conditions of the market; and the nation-state the news publication is located in.

4.1 Journalism and the commercial environment

This chapter has provided an overview of different scholarly approaches to journalism work, but, so far, the question of commercial impacts on journalism practice has only been touched on. As discussed in chapter 2, critical political economists argue that media economies have a significant impact on newsrooms, but how these 'big picture' forces – changes in ownership, monopolies, advertising trends and so on – specifically play out in newsrooms is rarely researched. Two significant studies of this kind are McManus's use of micro-economics to analyse the making of news (1994, xii), and Doug Underwood's examination of what he calls the "MBA" approach to newsrooms (1993). "MBA journalism" is a phenomenon in which "newsrooms are micro-managed to meet the business agenda of top management" (Underwood 1993, x).

Underwood argues that declining readerships, which started in the 1970s, pushed U.S newspapers into more "reader-friendly" products, with an emphasis on shorter stories, more design elements, less hard news and more soft features. Underwood interviewed hundreds of senior journalists and executives to assess the impact of the changes on journalists. He found a move towards marketing and managerialism in media companies, which pushed editors to become marketers and be more commercially minded (thus the stress on MBAs). (As discussed above, the editor has traditionally been the editorial leader and the representative of the newspaper's public positioning, whose primary commercial concern is to deliver readers and keep costs within the editorial budget.)

Second, there was an increasing bureaucracy of middle managers and editorial meetings to manage the production process, making sure that the reader-driven emphasis in content was adhered to. Many journalists saw this as micro management, which turned them into functionaries rather than professionals. Media company Gannet went as far as producing a formula called News 2000 (Underwood 1993, xix). This content was tailored on reader research, rather than driven by journalists' understanding of news values.

Despite Underwood's expressed alarm at "MBA journalism", his research shows that the public role of newspapers is valued by journalists and editors. He notes that, while newspapers are "catering to the marketplace", they also try to preserve the "traditional journalistic values of editorial autonomy and community service so prized by news workers" (Underwood 1993, xxii). The other point he makes is that this transition process created high levels of stress within newspaper staff as they tried to adapt to the new ways of doing things. "Job satisfaction increased to the extent that journalistic causes – serving the community, preserving editorial autonomy, and treating readers as citizens – were emphasized in their newsrooms" (1993, 123).

McManus defines "market-driven journalism" as a focus on audience ratings and market research that diminishes "the traditional role of 'professional' journalists as arbiters of which events and issues are newsworthy" (1994, 6). Other aspects are cost-cutting (in which news is not covered if it will cost the station too much) and privileging entertainment items over public enlightenment items in the bulletin (1994, 6). McManus concludes that market norms trump journalism norms in television newsrooms if they conflict. He notes that journalists and editors generally felt extremely uncomfortable when he made this observation, and justified their choice of stories in relation to the audience – what the public wants – rather than the profit motives of the organisation.

McManus and Underwood found an attachment to normative ideas of public interest in the American journalists they interviewed. A similar reframing of the normative journalistic role can be seen among Finnish journalists faced with commercial change. Jaana Hujanen (2009, 34) draws on in-depth interviews at a range of newspapers in Finland to examine how journalists imagine their role in a transforming media environment. She describes two discourses through which the concept of public service is engaged and renegotiated: market-oriented journalism; and societal (influence)

journalism. “In the discourse of market-oriented journalism, managerial principles, such as profitability and yield, were represented as guidelines for innovative journalistic practices” (Hujanen 2009, 36). The market journalists do not abandon public service discourse – they reframe it to encompass alternative ways of serving the reader. Reader research is seen as guiding news work. The role of the journalist becomes hybrid, entertaining as well as informing, addressing readers as consumers and clients as well as citizens, telling stories that are relevant to their daily lives.

In “societal discourse”, she argues, journalists tend to discount reader surveys for what they think readers need to know, which is how to operate as citizens of a democracy. Societal discourses resonate with conceptions of democracy, as informing readers of what they need to know to make decisions at the ballot box, and engaging citizens in discussion on issues of the day. According to Hujanen (2009), market discourse dominates among the editorial managers interviewed, while journalists tend towards societal discourses, reflecting the different priorities of each job. This reflects the dichotomy between the commercial and the public interest sides of journalism as represented by the separation between the commercial and editorial functions of newspapers. Her study shows that public service is an ideal that is constantly renegotiated in changing media contexts.

Another Finnish study describes such renegotiation as a proactive attempt by journalists to keep normative ideals alive in changing circumstances. Risto Kunelius and Ruusunoksa (2008) examine how mid-level editorial managers in a range of newspapers relate to the demands of technological and commercial change. They note:

> ... the managing editors are not blind to the dangers that these pressures exert on journalism: most of them would not totally agree that journalism is a business just like any other. Rather, there is a sense of struggle: business is journalism’s second nature, and has to be dealt with, with skill. (2008, 667)

Economic factors and technological factors are described as coming from outside journalism, external to its core values and practices, a force to be faced and managed. The study notes that print journalism in Finland has met the perceived challenges of the

changes "outside" by developing a culture of projects, with managing editors in a continuous process of project management (Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008, 670).

The study concludes that journalism is highly adaptable to outside pressures, specifically economic and technological factors that are seen as unavoidable. However, in the authors' view, the journalistic professional imagination actively works to keep some professional ideals by negotiating the changes in organisational culture. Newsroom leaders charged with negotiating commercial demands engage in "serious soul-searching" about the potential impacts on journalism. "For journalists, there seems to be a core of journalism that is independent of form, technology or subject matter," Kunelius and Ruusunoksa observe (2008, 670), arguing that this attachment to an "untouchable core" can be an obstacle to effectively re-imagining journalism. However, they point out that the attachment motivates journalists to keep media connected to broad political processes in a time of irresistible change.

Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, they locate journalism in a wider symbolic landscape, in which various discourses operate. They propose a dynamic relationship between the inner order of the field and outside pressures. In this relationship between field and context, they contend, the professional imagination of journalists can play an active role in constructing a future for journalism. They point out that journalism is connected to discourses that cut across fields:

> … professionalism has always been strongly connected to the idea of serving the public and thus explicitly linked to broader discourses about democracy. Hence, its professional culture is connected to rhetorical sources of power that are situated "outside" the field itself. (2008, 662)

Drawing on Charles Taylor, Kunelius and Ruusunoksa use the concept of the social imaginary to further theorise the relationship of journalists to the world "outside" the field. Social imaginaries, they argue, are powerful in any culture because they are widely shared by members of society, make possible common practices, and confer legitimacy on them (2008, 666). Journalists' professional imagination, they argue, links them to social imaginaries such as the public sphere, democracy, the nation, and thus to

other members of society. This professional imagination can be a powerful and creative force in defining the future of newspapers, or "more importantly the future of the democratically useful practices that newspaper journalism has cultivated" (Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008, 663).

In the cases discussed above, media managers and journalists hold on to the notion that journalism has a special role to play in society and that it should serve its readers. Where journalists come to see a need to treat their audiences as consumers, rather than citizens, they reframe their work as meeting the needs of their readers. Interpretation of what is in the public interest shifts, but the attachment to journalism as a positive force in society – a public good – remains. This resonates with organisational theories of change, discussed in the section below, which argue that change in organisations that require change in individual roles can cause great discomfort – even distress – for those individuals.

The other observation that can be drawn from these cases is that journalistic identity is contingent, subject to contestation and change. In these circumstances, journalists may play an active role in reconstituting their professional identities and their normative attachments to the public interest, using their inherited discourses of journalism in order to reframe their work. Transformation in a newsroom is therefore dependant on the ways in which the values and practices of journalists can be re-imagining and re-negotiated from within the ideologies of journalism work, and the redeployment of the notion of the public interest is an important element of this process.

4.2 Journalism in the context of nation

Journalism is often imagined as national in character. The emergence of journalism through the vehicle of print media is associated with the emergence of democracies and nation-states (see Anderson 1983 and Habermas 1989). Preston argues that the emergence of "modern" Anglo-US journalism at the turn of the 20th century was from the outset "deeply embedded or framed within various forms of nationalism" (2009, 118). He draws on Raymond Williams's idea of a "long revolution" in culture to argue that there were "long and complex processes involved in the construction of the socio-cultural and media spaces". These were "primarily centred on the modern network of national/territorial states" (2009, 127).

A study of senior journalists in 11 European Union (EU) states shows that they mostly agree that there is no common EU journalism culture, and that journalistic national cultures remain distinctive (2009, 173). Another study, surveying 290 journalists across 11 countries, found that "EU journalisms are clearly dominated by nationalism" (Heikkilä and Kunelius 2008, 393). The studies show that "news cultures and the journalistic imagination in Europe remain primarily and stubbornly embedded in the national" (Preston 2009, 127). They also show that the public interest in European media is implicitly associated with the nation, with the public imagined as the citizens of the nation who take part in the affairs of that country, rather than citizens of Europe. This is despite the growth of the EU as a common transnational structure. This is not surprising, Heikkilä and Kunelius argue, if "the link between journalism and the nation-state is part of the broader connection formed historically between national identities and democracy" (2008, 390). The legacy of the nation-state and its journalism persists into changing circumstances.

Resistance to change can also be seen in more recent European democracies, where media have not made the shift from state information providers to independent news providers in the professional mode. For example, ten former communist bloc countries of Europe, which have joined the EU and made a successful transition to democracy, have not seen a corresponding transformation of their news media (Lauk 2009, 79). Conditions seemed favourable for replacing the old Soviet model of journalism with a new Western model, as media were given new and unprecedented freedom to publish (Lauk 2009, 79). Many of the media organisations in these countries are owned by Western European media companies, where there are long-established journalistic cultures of professionalism. However, Lauk notes, "a high ranking for press freedom is not necessarily accompanied with high-quality journalism and responsible performance" (2009, 72). Journalists may know and approve of normative ideas of journalism, but in practice they are not ingrained (2009, 75).

Lauk asks: "Why was it not possible to change journalism's professional philosophy and practice simply by replacing the old 'Soviet Communist' model with the Western 'liberal' model" (2009, 73)? In answer, he identifies the following factors: foreign owners have not invested in better resources for newsrooms; commercial factors,

like the need for advertising-friendly content, come up against weak or non-existent professional cultures in newsrooms; and the weakness of civil society and public regulatory bodies means media need not account for their actions (Lauk 2009, 81). Lauk also notes an enormous gulf between the journalistic cultures of the Nordic media who own the Baltic media and the Baltic journalists themselves, which training has not managed to bridge.

Rao (2009) uses the idea of "glocalisation" to think about the ways in which local journalisms interact with transnational developments. In participant observation research in newsrooms in India, Rao examines the ways in which journalists work under the impact of globalising and commercialising trends in the Indian media. Her study shows that although Indian journalists have moved away from an older, developmental model of journalism, they have a sense of doing the journalism of *janapakshi* (pro-people), and the public interest surfaces as a strong value:

> I heard several journalists, editors and news-directors ask their colleagues: "What do people want?"; "What is in the best interest of the people?"; "What is best for democracy?" and "What is the public interest?" in order to determine news content. (Rao 2009, 482)

Rao's study demonstrates the flexibility of journalistic understandings and practice around a core value of public service. She concludes that global impacts on news are not a one-way process, but "a set of practices where the local media have absorbed the global (or, at times, rejected them), rejuvenated the local, and given audiences possibilities of strengthening democratic discourses" (2009, 475). Globalisation may broaden people's horizons, but it can also strengthen existing local identities and cultures, she argues.

The studies I have discussed in this section show that journalism cannot be reduced to national culture. Kunelius and Ruusunoksa's combination of field theory and social imaginaries is a potentially useful way to think about the relationship between journalism and its context. Drawing on the concept of imaginative world-making (see Gaonkar 2002, 1-19), they use the idea of "professional imagination" to describe the "collective potential of agency inherent in the professional culture of journalists"

(Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008, 663). Journalists' professional imagination is what links them to larger social imaginaries such as the nation and democracy.

In the cases of successful adaptation, journalists responded actively to change by negotiating external demands by reference to their imaginings of journalism's democratic functions. Thus newsroom values and practices are actively adapted from the legacy cultures that implicitly run the routines and processes of the organisation. In cases where such proactive change did not occur, the attachment to legacy cultures was not successfully renegotiated in the organisations. If it is the imaginings of journalists and the practices and routines of their media organisation that produce a particular version of journalism, these cases demonstrate that journalism practice does not simply change in response to big societal transformations or commercial demands. Journalism cultures, like other organisational cultures, are laid down at a particular time and in response to the conditions of that moment, and persist into changed circumstances. The importance of change – and how to manage it – is a key problem for organisational and management theorists.

5 Understanding organisations

Much organisational theory aims to understand organisations in order to manage them. An early writer on the subject, Charles Handy, notes that between the first edition of his "Understanding Organizations" in 1976 and a more recent edition of 1993, there has been a proliferation of theories and approaches. The 1990s spawned an explosion of trends and fads, often promoted by management "gurus", who plied the conference circuits and sold best-selling guides (Kennedy 2007, xi). However, despite the multiplicity of books and theories now available, there is no "silver bullet" approach, which guarantees successful organisations (Kennedy 2007, xi). Handy points out that the multiplicity of variables involved in any one organisation is so great [Handy lists 60] that it is almost impossible to predict what outcomes these factors will produce. Organisations, he argues, "should [therefore] be explained by the kind of contextual interpretation used by an historian" (Handy 1993, 13).

Still, understanding an organisation requires theory, Handy argues, otherwise our ideas of organisation will be based on collections of assumptions and "common sense",

which "has not been found to be very common".[17] How to choose an approach? There are a number of ways to conceptualise organisations, as Gareth Morgan (2006, xi) points out, and the metaphors used to describe organisations invariably tend to privilege certain aspects over others. Approaching an organisation as a machine delivers different insights to imagining it as an organism, for example. Drawing on Morgan, Handy notes that there is more than one way of thinking about an organisation, and there is no one right answer. He recommends being selective; Handy's preference is to see organisations as collections of people, as communities, and his book puts together a range of approaches that address that interest (1993, 291).[18]

For the purposes of this project, I draw on theories of organisational ***culture***. My initial question, a focus on concepts in journalism work, is a qualitative approach that pays attention to the values and practices of journalists in their day-to-day working lives. My interviews collected many references to the "culture of the *Sowetan*" and to its legacy as an institution of black public life under apartheid, as I discuss in chapters 7 and 8. When the workings of an organisation appear to have no explanation other than "it's the culture", we need to employ an anthropological gaze.

Edgar Schein notes that, while there are many definitions of culture, what they have in common is that they point to "phenomena that are below the surface, that are powerful in their impact, but are invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious" (2010, 14). This concept of organisational culture helps to explain why one organisation, profession, or even department may operate in completely different ways, be resistant to change "at a level that seems beyond reason", why people spend more time fighting each other than getting the job done, and why they may cling to outmoded and inefficient ways of doing things (Schein 2010, 7).

In order to understand situations such as the Eastern European journalists' inability to adapt or the *Sowetan* journalists' resistance to new ideas, we need to draw on theories of organisational change. Handy notes that organisations that "do not change their culture when the environment changes will cease to be successful" (Handy 1993, 208). How organisations adapt is a complex challenge that has implications for its people. Change in an organisation often means a change in the "psychological contract" between employer and employee – the expectations on both sides – and this may not be welcomed

by everyone (Handy 1993, 45). A changing psychological contract (as well as a changing role in the organisation) may bring about a need to alter a self-concept. Over time, the required role behaviour of an occupation (such as journalism) becomes internalised as part of an individual's personality. Changes in role are more than simply behaviour change, but changes in self-concept (see Handy 1993, 53). This can cause emotional distress for many individuals. It follows that, given the normative attachment many journalists have to the public interest, changes in the positioning of a newspaper may cause uneasiness that is not just thought, but painfully felt.

Change brings a lot of uncertainty about the direction of an organisation. "To 'manage change' is wishful thinking, implying as it does that one not only knows where to go and how to get there but can persuade everyone else to travel there" (Handy 1993, 292). Successful companies often do not see the need for change when they begin to decline; Richard Pascale argues that they are blinded by the paradigms that dominated in the good times, and do not know how to operate with different paradigms (Kennedy 2007, 213). However, Pascale argues that the equilibrium of an organisation should continually be disrupted and old paradigms broken in order for it to change. The breaking down of old paradigms should be the role of management (see Pascale 1991). Similarly, Schein argues: "It is the unique function of leadership to perceive the functional and dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and to manage cultural evolution and change in such a way that the group can survive in a changing environment" (2010, 22).

What constitutes leadership in a journalism organisation? The case studies discussed in the previous section (on the BBC and CNN) point to the importance of the "founder" in the discourse of journalists at those organisations. In his work on entrepreneurial companies, Schein similarly shows that the founder plays an important role in creating culture. Schein argues that:

> (1) leaders as entrepreneurs are the main architects of culture, (2) that after cultures are formed, they influence what kind of leadership is possible, and (3) that if elements of the culture become dysfunctional, leadership can and must do something to speed up culture change. (2010, xi)

In other types of organisation, the leadership may be taken by a group (Handy 1993, 113). Whatever the type of leadership, Handy notes, it can only work with the co-operation of the group. What qualities are required in a leader vary according to the type of organisation, but the literature highlights the ability to articulate a vision as a key factor (Handy 1993, 116). This is especially important in print media, where the editor is specifically charged with the editorial content and public positioning of the newspaper; for example, three different editorships at the *Mail & Guardian* had traceable consequences in the newsroom, as Steenveld shows (2007). My research shows that Aggrey Klaaste is continually referenced as the father of "nation building" and the architect of a newspaper engaged with its community. However, there are indications in the history of the newspaper that the leadership extended back through previous editorships, as I discuss in the next chapter, and that leadership may have been constituted in the 1980s through activist groupings. The type of leadership is significant in shaping an organisation's culture.

Further, Schein recommends the study of an organisation's origins in order to understand its culture. "Culture is both a 'here and now' dynamic and a coercive background structure that influences us in multiple ways" (Schein 2010, 3). The early days of an organisation develop its culture; once these norms have been laid down and appear to be successful, newcomers will be socialised into the culture (Schein 2010, 21). The culture will persist until such time as the environment changes sufficiently to demand change in the organisation.

Schein describes an organisation as sitting in a cultural landscape, in which many cultural elements play a role. He identifies ethnic and national cultures as macrocultures (2010, 2). Occupations that transcend organisations [such as journalism] can also be defined as macrocultures, while the ways in which these occupations create groups in an organisation could be seen as subcultures (for example, journalists, printers or advertising salespeople in a newspaper). Smaller groups in an organisation – specialist teams of surgeons at a hospital, for example – he calls microcultures. To understand an organisation, he argues, it is necessary to understand the ways in which all these cultures interact (2010, 2).

Schein argues that much of what can be observed of a culture is actually a manifestation of the culture, rather than its deep roots. He identifies three levels of analysis – artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions. Artefacts are evident when you enter the culture, and can include the dress code, work environment, stories and myths about the organisation and so on. Espoused values are what the group publicly stand for. Basic assumptions are what is taken for granted; the non-negotiable but hidden values that regulate behaviour and operations in the culture (2010, 22 -32).

Schein notes that espoused beliefs are not always aligned with basic assumptions; as an example, he refers to a common contradiction in U.S. companies between espousing the value of team work, and rewarding individual performance. This sets up contradictory elements in the organisation, which become part of its culture. "Espoused beliefs and values often leave large areas of behaviour unexplained, leaving us with a feeling that we understand a piece of the culture but still do not have the culture as such in hand" (Schein 2010, 27). Given the normative aspects of journalism cultures, it is important to note that interviews and surveys with journalists may elicit espoused beliefs rather than the underlying assumptions. The assumptions that underlie a culture are the hardest to get at, and may even be difficult for members of the culture to articulate. For this reason, Schein recommends using more than one method in attempting to understand a culture. However, whatever approach is used, understanding organisations involves deciphering clues and trying to make sense of them, an interpretative process.

6 Conclusions

I began this chapter with the question of whether journalism is largely an occupational culture or an organisational one. A third possibility can be added: whether journalism is institutional, in other words, whether its culture comes from its particular position in a particular society (following Cook). A review of the North American journalism scholarship on journalism work shows that it is conceptualised as broadly similar across organisations, with much survey research seeking to measure it against a set of traits that make up "professionalism". Even participant observation of newsrooms and studies of commercial impacts tend to operate on the assumption that journalism is an occupational culture. However, I argue that professional culture in the U.S. is entrenched through the

standardisation of journalism programmes and the practice of hiring journalism graduates from such programmes.

Drawing on Cultural Studies and organisational theories, I prefer to approach journalism as a specific culture, which can only be understood by being examined in its lived context. The culture of a media organisation is created by internal and external factors; the national (or institutional) context and changing economic conditions are two defining contexts for journalism, which often produce a proactive process of reframing within the organisation. Some studies of commercial change show that journalists can change if they (and their media executives) actively renegotiate their ideas of the public interest to fit the new editorial vision. However, there are also organisations which fail to negotiate change successfully.

This resonates with certain theorists of organisational culture, like Schein and Kotter, who argue that organisations have legacies of practice; they like to do what they have always done and to resist change. To effect change, deep cultural assumptions (or paradigms) must be adjusted or broken. In journalism organisations, notions of the public interest form part of a key paradigm, as do news values, which Stuart Hall has called a "deep structure" in journalism (1973, 181). Any change in the political and public positioning and news content of a news organisation would thus need to be renegotiated in the organisation.

Another paradigm in journalism is the 'Chinese wall' between the commercial and editorial functions of a newspaper, which grows from ideas of the commercial as a necessary pre-condition for media, but not their *raison d'etre*. Commercial concerns thus appear to journalists as a pressure from the outside, to be negotiated and managed. Although media's commercial status is presented normatively in liberal pluralist ideas in that it makes them independent of government, for journalists, business operations are a necessity for the organisation, but they do not have to deal with them. Changes in the *status quo* – such as those described by McManus and Underwood - are often resisted as the encroachment of 'the commercial' into the domain of the public interest. However, I would argue (following Taylor 2002) that the market is an underlying social imaginary for journalism because it is seen to make journalism possible in a democracy. Nobody has yet managed to advance a viable alternative to the media-as-institution operating

(largely) commercially. In other words, although there may be elements of a country's media that are public service-oriented, such as public broadcasting, the media sector as a whole is generally accepted as largely commercial.

It follows, then, that ideas of the commercial and the public interest are linked to the imaginaries of the market, democracies and the public sphere, the three social imaginaries that underpin modernity, in Taylor's conception. Journalists' values and practice link them to these greater shared values and practices in society, as Kunelius and Ruusunoksa (2008) contend. Commercial imperatives and the public interest are interpreted through the macro cultures of media-as-institution and journalism-as-occupation, and through organisational culture. They form the key concepts in the paradigms of journalism organisations, where they may be enacted in ways that vary significantly from other organisations. The particular version of journalism that is entrenched in a newspaper culture, or even the national institution of journalism that news media participate in, is established over time, from its inception. As Handy (1993) argues, in order to understand organisations, we need to understand them historically.

Notes on Chapter 4

[1] Anderson argues that print capitalism allowed people to relate themselves to others in very different ways, which made the imagining of the nation possible, while Habermas's account of the rise of the public sphere demonstrates the role of journals, leaflets, newspapers and books in its creation (see Calhoun 1992; Eley 1992; Habermas 1989; Anderson 1983).

[2] Globalisation is defined by Robert McChesney as "the process whereby capitalism is increasingly constituted on a transnational basis, not only in the trade of goods and services, but, even more important, in the flow of capital and the trade in currencies and financial instruments" (1998, 1). In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai gives globalisation a more cultural inflection, looking at ways in which it intersects with media and migration (see Appadurai 1996). Warner (2002) introduces ideas of circulation into understandings of publicness.

[3] Gaonkar writes that "each nation or region produces its own distinctive modernity in its encounter with the allegedly culture-neutral forms and processes (science and technology, industrialization, secularization, bureaucratization, and so on) characteristic of societal modernization" and further "the encounter with modernity does not take place in isolation but is invariably mediated by colonialism and imperialism in the past and today by the implacable forces of global media, migration, and capital. In fact, this aspect of contemporary globalization might be characterized as the struggle over the means of production of multiple modernities" ... (2002, 4)

[4] See, for example, the film, The Bang Bang Club, which tells the story of Johannesburg photographers at work in the townships during the insurgencies and conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s. It is based on the book of the same title. Three of the photographers depicted in the movie were my colleagues at various times at the *Star* or the *Mail & Guardian*. For similar filmic representations of journalists in other countries, see also All the President's Men (U.S.), and State of Play (U.K television series, also U.S. film version starring Russell Crowe) and The Hour, BBC series based loosely on the first television current affairs programme in the U.K.

[5] These behaviours of resistance, autonomy and conformity, listed by Breed, I observed (and participated in) during my four years as a reporter at the *Star* newspaper in the 1980s.
[6] Interview with Professor Lee Becker, at IAMCR in Durban, July 2012. Becker is director of the James M. Cox Jr. Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research (see http://www.grady.uga.edu/annualsurveys/Enrollment_Survey/History_Enrollment.php).
[7] This information was taken from the council's official website: http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/index.html on August 20, 2012.
[8] Interview with Becker, 2012.
[9] From ACEJMC Accrediting Standards, downloaded on August 20, 2012, from http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/STANDARDS.SHTML#std1
[10] Tomaselli (2010) offers an entertaining account of the differences between academics from Cultural Studies approaches and Communication Sciences in South Africa, and how they were negotiated during and after the Apartheid era. See also Steenveld 2004a.
[11] De Bruin cites, amongst others, McLeod and Hawley 1964; Johnstone et al 1972/1973; McLeod and Rush 1969; Menanteau-Horta,1967; and Weaver 1998.
[12] Chapter 2, section 1, briefly sets out critical approaches around representation and ideology.
[13] It should be noted that Jeremy Tunstall has also been cited as a founding father, whose efforts put the academic study of journalism at the core of Media Studies, according to Zelizer 2004, 18-19.
[14] Janet Cooke was a journalist who won the Pulitzer Prize for an article that was found to be partially fictionalized; one of her main characters was a "composite" of a number of individuals she had interviewed.
[15] For this point, I draw on a presentation by Lynette Steenveld at the 2012 IAMCR conference in Durban.
[16] See Lynette Steenveld's PhD on the role of the editor at the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper (2007) for discussion on how the organisational culture responded to three different editors.
[17] This quote is taken from the new preface to the 1999 edition of "Understanding Organizations", kindle location number 150.
[18] Handy sets out a range of approaches that he considers useful to students of organisations. These include: motivation theory, which is concerned with motivates individuals to be productive (see Vroom and Deci 1970 for an overview of motivation theory, Porter and Lawler 1968 for an overview of satisfaction theory, and the work of Chris Argyris on personality, identity and psychological growth); role theory, which examines the ways in which a individual's role at work leads to certain kinds of interactions in the workplace (see Kahn et al 1964, Cooper et al 2001, and Argyle et al 1981); and leadership (see Handy 1993, 389 – 393 for an overview of influential writers on leadership).

Chapter 5: The black press in South Africa

In a commemorative book on its 25th anniversary, *Sowetan* explicitly locates itself in the earliest traditions of the black press in Southern Africa, and its pioneers, John Tengo Jabavu, John Dube, Sol Plaatje and R.V. Selope Thema (Maseko 2006, 6-10). The newspaper also links itself to the first commercial black newspaper, the *Bantu World*, and its successor titles, the *World*, and the *Post*, both banned for opposition to the apartheid state (Maseko 2006, 1). This chapter focuses on the historical legacy of the *Sowetan* as an outgrowth of the black press, as well as the political circumstances into which it was born and which shaped it as an institution of black public life in apartheid South Africa. I argue that the newspaper's position as part of the colonised African majority, and its relationship to the struggle for self-determination in the colonial and apartheid eras, is a defining context for its journalism.

The *Sowetan* book implies its history is a seamless continuity from the early independent black press, which originated in the late 1800s. However, the entry of white capital into black media in the 1930s was a dramatic intervention into the sector, even "cataclysmic" (Johnson 1991, 20). White-owned companies took over most independent black publications, making the black press a 'captive press' (see Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 12). The white owners placed political restrictions on their black newspapers (Couzens 1976, 12; Switzer and Switzer 1979, 10) and the economic conditions of the period shaped the type of journalism that black papers produced in particular ways (Manoim 1983, 5). However, commercialisation also expanded the reach of the publications; "white chain ownership and corporate control transformed the black press into a mass medium of communication" (Switzer and Switzer 1997, 8). Black commercial newspapers became relatively sophisticated business enterprises, with specific departments for advertising, editorial and other aspects of media business (Switzer and Switzer 1997, 8). This era also saw the increased monopolisation of the sector by a few companies. As the *Sowetan* case will show, many of these features persist in the media sector to this day.

The apartheid system, the struggle for liberation and the contestation between different political groupings was also a significant context for South African journalism from 1948 to the transition period of the 1990s. It was the era into which the *Sowetan* was born and in which it established its nation-building project. It was a time of increased political repression and violence, with attendant restrictions on newspapers, but also a time of burgeoning civil society activism and anti-apartheid media. The economic base of the apartheid state was changing, bringing a need for a "profound restructuring" of the country (Marais 2010, 33). The legacy of the black press, South Africa's economic conditions, and political upheaval intersected in the formation of the *Sowetan*.

1 The ethnic divisions of apartheid

In South Africa, specific local conditions arose from the apartheid system, an economy and society stratified by racial hierarchies, in which relationships to citizenship and access to the commercial and cultural life of the society were assigned according to markers of race (see Wolpe 1988, 1-4, for a discussion of various conceptualisations of the apartheid state). The apartheid system was itself overlaid on prior colonial arrangements that structured the society in particular ways.

The apartheid system produced different worlds – for whites, a simulacrum of democracy, with structures such as a parliament, judiciary, and media, along with democratic-like processes (such as elections and public sphere activity) limited to a white minority imagined as *the* public. Out on the borders, both spatially and symbolically, were the black worlds: 'tribal' homelands (a reified version of rural culture) or townships, with separate but unequal urban structures, councillors and services (see, for example, Phelan 1987; Tomaselli 2002; and Hamilton 2009). Wolpe argues that "race and class and the capitalist economy and the system of white domination stand in a contingent relationship to one another" (1988, 1). The economy was dominated by white (mostly English-speaking) capital, in particular, by mining companies, while the National Party government developed a strong state sector in order to provide for Afrikaner-dominated enterprises (Marais 2010, 18). Black South Africans were confined to an underprivileged working class, obliged to sell their labour cheap in order to survive (Marais 2010, 16).

The media were similarly segmented. The state broadcaster divided its radio stations and television programming along language and racial lines. The commercial press, under apartheid, was dominated by four companies (two English-language companies, two Afrikaans) (Harber 2004d). The Afrikaans newspapers were closely aligned with the National Party, while English titles were owned by mining corporations (Berger 2004, 53; Tomaselli 1997, 67). Black readership publications were largely owned and managed by white capital (Manoim 1983). The four big newspaper companies, Nasionale Pers and Perskor (Afrikaans), and the Argus Company and South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN), have since evolved. SAAN became Times Media Limited, Johnnic Communications (Johncom), Avusa, and, most recently, Times Media again, the company that currently owns the *Sowetan*. Nasionale Pers has grown into Media24, "a multi-billion rand, global media empire conducting business in several languages (including English) in more than 50 countries" (Hadland 2007, 4). The Argus Company was acquired in phases by the Irish media company, Independent Newspapers, which recently sold to local company Sekunjalo after running into financial difficulties.

Hadland notes:

> Scholars have identified three traditions that have evolved semi-autonomously of one another in the South African media. These traditions have been named the English-language press, the Afrikaans press and the black press. (Hadland 2007, 3)

However, Hadland categorises the presses according to a different measure, arguing that there were only two traditions in South Africa before 1994: on the one hand, the English-language press, which "embraced the principles and history of the Liberal tradition"; on the other, journalism that had "specific ideological, political and cultural objectives (mostly Afrikaans press and black press)" (2007, 4; see also Tomaselli 1997). In making this point, he is concerned with the journalism cultures of the different media organisations, rather than their particular readership. In other words, he classifies by journalistic professional practice, rather than by the demographics of the audience. By his criteria, only the English-language press fall into the professional version of journalism

(which I argue in chapter 4 derives largely from the American model). According to Hadland, the other two presses did not embrace neutrality and objectivity by virtue of their support of their communities; indeed, the Afrikaans newspapers were closely tied to political parties (Tomaselli 1997). However, it could be argued that the English press also took an ideological stance – that of liberalism (Tomaselli 1997).

Steenveld, for instance, argues that the "'ethnic presses' each started as partisan presses to develop the political voice of the groups they represented" (2007b, 109). She argues that although the different presses were commercial and adopted a professional journalistic culture, they had separate political identities: "What is evident from this history are the different ways in which South African journalists have negotiated a professional ideology rooted in independence and autonomy with their own political views and associations" (2007b, 109). Thus South African journalists constructed a journalistic identity that negotiated their loyalties to a particular imagined community. For black journalists, such negotiation included the element of their outsider status to societal power and their subaltern role in white-owned media organisations. The construction of a journalistic identity for black reporters was also informed by historical and commercial legacies of the black press, and by black political movements. The roots of South African journalism were quite unlike the history of the American media, and thus the ways in which these journalisms developed and functioned cannot be understood against U.S. professional conceptions of media. Ethnic communities, and their political positioning in relation to the state, were significant for journalistic identities, rather than the imaginary of the unitary nation. As Tomaselli notes "apartheid prevented the development of an even minimally homogenous public sphere or 'national culture' … in terms of media consumption" (1997, 67).

2 The early black press

Tim Couzens identifies three historical phases in black journalism: the early mission press (which is beyond the scope of this thesis); independent, black-owned publications; and the white-controlled commercial press (1976, 2). At the turn of the 20th century, the black press was a collection of small struggling publications, produced for African

educated elites. Couzens notes that it was "the school people" – educated black men – who founded the black press, and, by doing so

> … initiated a significant change in black response to white power. Perceiving the powerlessness of their people on the battlefield, they resorted to the attempt to bring about change through political and other means. (Couzens 1976, 4)

The "fathers" of the independent black press – John Tengo Jabavu, John Dube, Sol Plaatje – were not simply publishers and editors, but influential political figures (Couzens 1976, 4). Dube and Plaatje became office-bearers in the ANC when it was established in 1912. It should be noted that all the publications Couzens refers to as "black press" are associated with African ethnic groups, i.e., the Xhosa, Zulu or Tswana people, and were produced in the geographic areas where they resided. A number of publications appeared in the same era that focused on "Coloured" readers (Couzens 1976, 14). The early black press was thus tied to the political aspirations of indigenous African elites, and connected through its key figures to the ANC.

In 1930, 19 African newspapers were registered in South Africa (Switzer and Switzer 1979, 6). At this time, white-owned enterprises began to see potential in black-readership media. Manoim argues that this interest was driven by marketers, who believed that an explosion of the black market was inevitable, and anticipated a wave of profitable black media (1983, 14-18). A white advertising salesman called Bertram Paver set out to create a commercial black press, reasoning that advertising to black readers would make such a venture profitable (see Manoim 1983, 40-62; Couzens 1976, 7-10). Paver established a company called The Bantu Press in Johannesburg. Initially, Paver attracted black investors, and, by the end of 1932, half the board of 38 was black, and included the first editor of the *World*, R.V. Selope Thema (Switzer and Switzer 1979, 7).

In 1932, Bantu Press produced its first paper, *Bantu World*. It went on to buy a number of existing black papers: *Mochochonono* in 1934 (founded in 1919), *Imvo Zabantsundu* in 1935 (founded 1884), *Ilanga Lase Natal* (founded by John Dube in 1903), and *Native Mirror* in 1936. Paver also made an arrangement with *Um-Afrika* and

Umthunywa to run their advertising. In 1936, Selope Thema was ousted from the board of Bantu Press. By 1939, according to Manoim, "the independent, black-owned press in South Africa was effectively dead" (1983, 47).

During the war years and after, Paver relied on government grants, given in return for editorial space for the Department of Native Affairs. Paver's grants came to an end when Hendrik Verwoed, then Minister of Native Affairs, demanded that the Bantu Press papers support the policy of apartheid. Paver refused (see Manoim 1983, 50). "A variety of white liberal organisations and government agencies … began to supply Bantu Press with news deemed suitable for a black audience" (Switzer and Switzer 1979, 9). This indicates that the press was already a conduit for state communication with black communities, and thus occupying an "institutional role" in South Africa, in the sense of media as an institution in society (as described by Cook 1998),

Manoim argues that an ambivalence in South Africa about the so-called 'African market' shaped the black press from the 1940s to the 1960s (1983, iv). A post-war boom meant that heavy industry was producing more goods and needed to reach more consumers. The black residents of the growing urban townships appeared to offer a potential market. One of the few ways to reach this market was through the media, and the promise of increased advertising made black media a seemingly good venture for media entrepreneurs. Manoim argues, however, that there was a contradiction in manufacturing and other industries in that the need for cheap labour worked against the growth of a black middle class with sufficient income to buy goods in great amounts (1983, 16). The optimism of marketers after the war far outstripped the actual buying power of these consumers, so the commercial black press struggled to remain profitable.

Paver never managed to make more than a modest profit in the early years, despite trying commercial strategies such as offering joint rates to advertisers across all his titles, and consolidating operations to reduce costs (Manoim 1983, 16). During the 1940s and 1950s, Paver turned to the Argus Company to bail him out. The Bantu Press eventually made the Argus company a shareholder, along with the Maggs family business, and later the mining corporation Anglo-American. Although revenue from advertising aimed at the black consumer continued to grow in the country, the Press continued to alternate

between profit and loss year after year (Manoim 1983, 52-62). Eventually, Argus became the majority shareholder. In the end, Manoim argues, what Paver achieved in his long battle for a commercial press was to help build an Argus Company monopoly over the black press (Manoim 1983, 94).

In the 1950s, the commercial problems of the Bantu Press and its main newspaper, the *Bantu World*, were exacerbated by competition from new publications like *Zonk*, *Drum*, *Bona* (magazines) and *Golden City Post* (a newspaper), which attracted black readers and advertising with a mix of entertainment, sport and crime. Manoim's unpublished research shows that these publications succeeded in attracting significant readership and ad revenue. *Zonk*, brought out by a white musical show director called Ike Brooks, was the first black readership publication to make consistent profits over an extended period (Manoim 1983, 72) and the "first successful mass-circulation black magazine aimed at urban audiences" (Manoim 1983, 63). *Bona*, on the other hand, was brought out by a pro-government Afrikaans printing house,[1] and produced in three vernacular languages (Manoim 1983, 73).

Drum and *Golden City Post* were owned by Jim Bailey, heir to a mining empire turned publisher. *Drum* focused on urban black life, writing on music, sport, and local, African and black American celebrities. It soon began to include some political content and hard-hitting investigative journalism about life under apartheid among its offerings (see Nicol 1991; Stein 1999; Sampson 1983). The black *Drum* writers of the 1950s became well-known personalities in the black townships.

Hadland suggests that a truly mass press did not develop in South Africa until the arrival of the tabloid *Son* in 2002, followed by the mass circulation *Sun* (2007, 11). But Manoim sees the first successful mass publication as occurring with Bailey's *Golden City Post*, a tabloid described by one of its former journalists as "the most scurrilous paper on any bloody continent" (Barton quoted in Manoim 1983, 88). *Golden City Post* was the first black publication to break the 100 000 mark, which it did in the 1950s. It reached 200 000 in the 1960s, and had a circulation of 235 000 in 1971, second only to the *Sunday Times* (Manoim 1983, 91, see also Johnson 1991, 23).

Bailey complained to Manoim that the Argus Company's control of newspaper distribution and its monopolistic practices forced the *Post* out of business, because it was the *World*'s most dangerous competitor (Manoim 1983, 93). Eventually, the Argus Company bought it and turned into a small Natal newspaper, removing it as competition (Manoim 1983, 94). Manoim's account tends to support Hadland's argument that the dominance of the market by the four white-owned big media companies prevented black media from becoming a vibrant sector (2007, 11). These companies made it difficult for smaller publications by controlling printing and distribution, and using their resources to discount advertising and copy price in order to undercut the competition. Independently owned newspapers or magazines found it impossible to compete and eventually died, or were absorbed by the bigger companies.

Having a number of titles competing in the same market meant that advertising revenue and readership had to be shared between them, and that could make such publications unprofitable, given the limited adspend set aside for black consumers. Berger, drawing on McCombs' (1997) theory that that the proportion of spend on media by advertisers and consumers remains relatively constant in a national economy, argues that "unless there is an expansion of the economy, the survival of any new media outlets requires the contraction of existing ones" (2004, 51). In South Africa, therefore, the size of the market is a greater limit to a diversity of products than media concentration, and having some larger players who can leverage economies of scale and scope may enable the introduction of new products to more segmented markets (Berger 2004, 50).

Another key issue restricting the growth of the black press post-war, according to Manoim, was the limited extent of the so-called black middle class (1983, 32). The notion of a black middle class that was employed by marketers in the 1940s was not simply a collection of consumers – it was implied that this group would eventually form a public, and thus engage constructively in society. A booklet produced by the Bantu Press in 1948 states: "The buying habits and evolution of the Bantu have a direct bearing on the permanency of our civilisation in South Africa" (quoted in Manoim 1983, 7). The discourse of marketers – that a black middle class was needed as a market for goods –

was thus interchangeable with the idea that such a class needed to be created to ensure stability in the society.

But the middle class of the period – 1945 to 1960 – was largely a marketing myth, Manoim argues, despite the rapid growth of urban black communities [2] (1983, 32; see also Marais 2010, 27). It consisted of small store owners and messengers, as well as teachers and nurses – anyone who was not employed as unskilled or domestic labour (Manoim 1983, 35). This group of people would not have had comparable income to the white middle class, although they may have formed a kind of elite in the impoverished communities of the Witwatersrand. As Charney notes:

> Newspaper readership in black communities in South Africa was quite limited until the 1960s. The 1962 National Readership Survey showed that only 7% of African adults read an English language daily paper. More than eight out of ten read no newspapers at all, either daily or weekly, English or African language. Of those who read dailies, the overwhelming majority lived in cities, especially Johannesburg, drawn largely from the narrow stratum of relatively better-off and better-educated men. (1993, 3)

Manoim observes, "the small size of this 'middle class' did nothing to dampen the myths about it. Its importance derived less from its wealth or power than its social status" (1983, 35). Despite the hype, advertising directed at the black middle class was never enough to make black publications more than marginally profitable.

Political considerations were another constraint on profitability. Although white investors may have been drawn to black media to make money, many brought ideological considerations to the business. Manoim recounts that, during World War 2, Paver was concerned to run stories that promoted unity and did not "inflame" black South Africans against the war effort. In the beginning, according to Manoim, *Bantu World* was sober, cautious, and somewhat didactic, with commentary that did not seek to rock the White establishment and a stated purpose to produce "a balanced newspaper", "world news from reliable sources", local news "without bias", "sane and constructive editorials" (1983, 35). All these components suggest a desire to produce a socially responsible journalism in

the professional mode, and also not to rock the *status quo*. However, once the *World* had to compete with the tabloid *Golden City Post*, Argus management turned it into a much more sensational newspaper. Manoim's research thus demonstrates that content such as crime, sex, celebrity and sensation has long been a part of South African journalism, but this has also been accompanied by conservatism, particularly in the Argus Company.

Manoim's critical political economy perspective puts the emphasis on the commercial factors that shaped the sector, and, by extension, the operations and the content of the black press (1983, 5). What he argues is that what is considered to be commercially viable is not necessarily borne out in practice, demonstrating that so-called commercial realities can be mythological – as in the belief in a burgeoning black middle class and its usefulness to creating social stability. Also, his study demonstrates that commercial strategies and political ideologies were intertwined in the post-war period, and that they played a significant role in constructing the sector.

What Manoim does not address, however, is the ways in which the commercial and political interests of the white companies were mediated through the work of the editors and journalists who actually brought out the papers, in particular black journalists. In order for white owners to attract black readers, they needed to employ journalists from the townships who were in touch with the community and could report on it. This should have given journalists a certain amount of autonomy and leverage, of the kind noted by Breed in his account of newsroom resistance (1997). Anecdotal accounts from the 1950s (see Nicol 1991; Sampson 1983; Stein 1999) seem to indicate that the *Drum* writers (in particular) were actively engaged in shaping the product, and that there was an attempt to envisage what urban readers wanted, rather than resorting either to didacticism or sensationalism. Part of this approach was to describe the life of the urban black townships in detail, for good or ill. But, as Craig Charney (1993) notes, increasing repression in the 1960s by the apartheid state destroyed the small corps of black journalists of the "Drum school". By the mid-60s, "dashing figures" such as Henry Nxumalo, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, and Can Themba, had disappeared due to death, exile, or alcohol (1993, 6). Their writings were banned, and *Drum* stopped publishing for four years (Charney 1993, 6).

White control over black journalists was pervasive until the 1970s. This comprised an editorial director overseeing the editorial departments and a white subs desk that was the gatekeeper of the content (Charney 1993, 6). The journalists of that era, according to Charney, "were a dispirited lot" (1993, 6), working in an oppressive political climate, for low wages, and no prospect for advancement under white control. Change came in the 1970s, when Percy Qoboza became editor of the *World*; he managed to wrest control of the paper from the Argus Company's white editorial director and focus it on more serious political content (Maseko 2006, 21). "Under his guidance, the *World* launched fierce attacks on the government's race-based policies" (Kudlak 2007, 152). The *World* and *Weekend World* also gave space to Black Consciousness ideas and movements that were on the rise in the mid-1970s (Berger 2000, 74). The commercial departments remained firmly under the control of the Argus Company, however. As Louw and Tomaselli note, white-owned black newspapers "created a tension between the interests of the owners and the 'demands' of the 'market'" (1991, 6); in other words, there was a conflict between reflecting the political aspirations of black readers who opposed the system, and the need to support the status quo.

All through this period, leaders in the black community made attempts to produce their own publications. As the *Financial Mail* noted in 1981:

> The wish to establish an independent black press runs through the black community. In the early Seventies black consciousness activists and community leaders, such as Dr Nthato Motlana[3] on the one hand, and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, collectively registered The Black Press organisation with this objective. The offshoot was *The Nation*, now an Inkatha mouthpiece, which started out in Johannesburg and was later moved to Durban; and *The Voice*, a Johannesburg church-sponsored weekly. (The press: Starting over 1981, 693)

However, there were to be no black-owned mass newspapers until after the first democratic elections in 1994. As we shall see, in the case of the *Sowetan*, black ownership did not resolve the newspaper's problems with management.

The commercialisation of the black press in the 1930s led to the death of independent black-owned publications and to a 'captive press', i.e., a black readership press owned, managed and politically restricted by white capital. However, it also expanded the reach of the black press, and made it a media institution of South Africa. The black commercial press was shaped by greater economic forces. For example, the contradiction in South African capitalism between a need for cheap labour and a need to grow consumer markets meant a small black middle class, and thus limited advertising revenue for black readership newspapers (as Manoim 1983 argues). Another conflict was between political control and commercial success: constraining political activism and sensational tabloid content that could have translated into bigger circulations (and more advertising revenue) for black newspapers. Conversely, black newspapers sometimes veered towards more tabloid, apolitical content, driven there by competition or the need to grow circulation. By the 1970s, however, Black Consciousness movements were on the rise, and a new form of political struggle moved to the forefront of South African society, with significant implications for black newspapers, in particular, for the *World.*

3 Political struggle

3.1 Black Consciousness movements of the 1970s

The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), according to Fatton, "emerged during the late 1960s with the formation of the South African Student's Organization (SASO) and crystallised in the Black People's Convention (BPC)" (1986, 2). SASO was created under the leadership of Steve Biko, a medical student from Natal University, as an all-black organisation.

> We have in our policy manifesto defined blacks as those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group in the South African society and identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realisation of their aspirations. (Biko 1987, 48)

According to Gerhart, in a remarkably short period SASO became the most politically significant black organisation in the country, reaching black university students with a "level of political education and ideological diffusion never before achieved by any black political organization in the country" (1979, 270).

Central to the philosophy of the movement was the need to bring to the black masses the knowledge of the system that oppressed them and the understanding that this condition could be transformed (see Biko 1987, 49; Fatton 1986, 79). The people also needed to understand the ways in which their own ideas and actions contributed to their oppression (Biko 1987, 29). The Black Community Programme was created in 1972 and aimed to create self-reliance and self-determination through community projects (Fatton 1986, 98), with a militant rather than a reformist approach to black empowerment. Also in 1972, Soweto high school students formed the South African Student Movement (SASM), which was committed to black consciousness (Fatton 1986, 100), and played an influential role in the Soweto student uprisings of 1976. Charney argues that

> … changes in social reproduction — urbanization and education — created political opportunities which the Black Consciousness Movement seized and, in turn, used to form new audiences for mass political and social mobilization" (1993, 1).

Black consciousness was disseminated through a variety of media in the 1970s (Berger 2000, 74). By 1972, SASO's newsletter had a circulation of 4 000 (Gerhart 1979, 270). Berger notes:

> Despite having conservative white owners and managers, the daily *World* and its Sunday edition, *Weekend World*, was steeped in BC. They played a major role in giving national prominence to the Soweto Students Representative Council [a student committee connected to SASM] and its leaders. (2000, 74)

Charney's work on Black Consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates convincingly the links between the liberation movements and black journalists. He shows

that black journalists rallied behind the cause of liberation and formed strong bonds with BC activists through social and political events.

> … from 1970 on SASO's leaders (particularly Biko) courted press coverage of their conferences and activities and befriended journalists. As SASO and the other BC groups became more active, black journalists spent an increasing amount of time covering them, especially on the black-oriented papers. (Charney 1993, 11)

The banned ANC and PAC also courted black journalists, and made sure that they received political material. Some were recruited into the underground movements (Charney 1993, 11).

Black journalists were marginalised in the workplace by the lack of representation by the white-dominated journalists' organisation, the South African Society of Journalists (SASJ). A non-racial journalists' association of white liberals and black journalists also collapsed, leading to the establishment of an exclusively black journalists' organisation, the Union of Black Journalists (UBJ) in 1971. "The BC men argued that black journalists should promote resistance to apartheid and [support] the BCM, and urged them to reconstitute the organization without whites" (Charney 1993, 11). Despite opposition from some journalists, the UBJ was constituted as an exclusively black organisation. Its closeness to the BC movement was demonstrated when "the UBJ adopted, almost word for word, the SASO constitution and substituted the word 'journalists' for 'students' where necessary" (Raubenheimer 1991, 95). Most its members were employed at the *World*, and this branch soon negotiated an increase from R15 to R25 a week (Raubenheimer 1991, 95).

Charney argues that the UBJ played an important role in connecting journalists with each other across different communities (black/African, coloured, Indian), different regions, generational and educational divides, and across the rivalries of competing newspapers. It developed and fostered professional and personal ties. The UBJ defined "blacks" as "people of colour" (Raubenheimer 1991, 95) and this meant that the UBJ connected all those journalistic communities, even if their newspapers did not.

The UBJ had debates that included SASO and BPC members. Charney notes:

> The most important turned around the political commitment of journalists, expressed as a challenge to the traditional professional concept of objectivity: "Are you a journalist first, or are you black first?" The BC activists were not principally advocating the distortion or suppression of news, but rather questioned the priorities of coverage, and the slant and wording of stories and headlines. In particular, they argued that in South Africa's peculiar authoritarian context, the mechanical application of the traditional canons of objectivity by the liberal English press gave the views of government officials or government-connected black figures greater space than that given opposition figures expressing more popular views. (1993, 14)

In June 1976, a protest organised by the SSRC and SASM against the imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in schools turned into violent insurrection when police fired on the students, killing a schoolboy. The riots spread to other black townships, and many people died in the ensuing violence (see Gerhart 1979, 2). The government cracked down on opposition and many were arrested and detained indefinitely without being charged (Maseko 2006, 12). Gerhart writes:

> Awakening late to the connection between the defiant mood of the townships and the so-called black consciousness movement which had become entrenched in black schools and universities over the preceding few years, the Vorster regime began a concerted drive in late July to detain known leaders of Black Consciousness organizations. (1979, 2)

In 1977, Steve Biko was detained and died in police custody (Kudlak 2007, 152). A month later, 17 BC organizations were declared illegal (Gibson 1988, 11), including the UBJ. Thousands of young militants left the country to join the armed struggle, finding their way into the PAC and ANC. Gibson argues that the ANC was reinvigorated by these BC militants (1988, 12).

The state used two key strategies at this time to restrict media coverage: banning journalists from reporting in unrest or related areas, and banning open air meetings (Bird and Garda 1996, 5). When the *World* condemned the suppression of the demonstrations and the killing of Biko by the security police, the state banned the paper, and detained the editor, Qoboza, and other journalists (Maseko 2006, 12). The Argus Company made use of its other title, the *Post*, and moved the journalists of the *World* into producing that paper – in effect, producing the *World* under a different name. Once released from detention, Qoboza became editor of the *Post* (Maseko 2006, 22).

In 1980, *Sowetan* was introduced as a free community newspaper for households in Soweto, and operated out of the same newsroom as the *Post*, as chapter 6 discusses. When the *Post* was banned later that year, *Sowetan* took its place. *Sowetan* thus became the carrier of the culture of the *World* and its BC legacy. It was born at a time when the BC movement was in decline, its organisations destroyed, its leaders detained, killed or exiled. Gibson argues: "By the early 1980s Black Consciousness (BC) began to be dismissed as little more than a 'passing stage,' no more than a psychological necessity" (2007, 1), as anti-apartheid organisations and unions connected to the Charterist movement and the ANC and its allies dominated the struggle. However, the UBJ had reconstituted itself into the Writers' Association of South Africa (Wasa), which maintained a strong commitment to BC, and managed to survive (Raubenheimer 1991, 102). The next sections discuss the political context contemporaneous with the *Sowetan's* founding period, in order to contextualise the discussion of its founding period in the next chapter.

3.2 The broad democratic movement against apartheid

From the 1970s onwards, opposition to apartheid was increasingly dominated by workers' unions, many of which eventually banded together in the 1980s to create a broad-based labour organisation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) (Switzer and Adhikari 2000, 13). Civil society organisations grouped together in 1983 to launch the United Democratic Front (UDF), which had as its aim non-violent protest and civil disobedience. Louw writes:

> The UDF attracted many of the country's social democrats; and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) provided a home for the workerists. By the end of the 1980s, the ANC, UDF, Cosatu and SACP collectively constituted the components of the left-wing Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). (1992, 5)

The ANC and the UDF were "multi-class, multi-party, multi-ethnic, multi-religious 'movements' or 'alliances'" (Louw 1992, 5). Groups aligned to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), Louw argues, because of their mobilisation of "exclusivist (racial) signs, … ruled themselves out as a widely-based counter-hegemonic force" (Louw 1992, 10). But the crackdown had also marginalised the BC organisations, left Biko dead, and sent many thousands of young adherents into exile.

The UDF and the organisations aligned to it, including the union federation, Cosatu, were dubbed "charterists" because of their adherence to the Freedom Charter. Adopted by the Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955, the charter with its list of demands for universal human rights was a "unifying sign" (Louw 1992, 10) for the broad democratic movement and played a central role in South African politics. Writing in 1985, Peter Hudson noted:

> ... the 30th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, saw an impressive regrouping, through the United Democratic Front, of political forces which identify with the Congress Alliance of the 1950s and with the Freedom Charter itself to which this movement gave birth. (Hudson 1985, 6)

By 1985, "the spirit of defiance had taken hold across the country", and "the locus of political attention had changed ... the future was being determined on the township streets and factory floors, where rebellion was in the air ..." (Harber 2010, 47). The rebellion burst into violent insurrection in many townships across the country, in an effort to "make the country ungovernable" (Marais 1985, 4).

3.3 The growth of Azapo and Mwasa

By 1988, Gibson argues, Black Consciousness was "generally considered completely overshadowed by the ANC and UDF, which now include[d] many of its former adherents" (2007, 7). After the banning of BC organisations in 1977, Wasa "was for a while the pre-eminent Black Consciousness organisation" (Thomas Karis in Sisulu 1987, 18). The Azanian Peoples' Organisation (Azapo) was also formed in 1978, and sought to incorporate a class analysis into BC ideology (Gibson 2007, 7).

In October 1980, Wasa changed its name to the Media Workers' Association of South Africa (Mwasa), expanding its membership to include all black workers at newspapers (including printers, drivers and messengers), and becoming a trade union. The *Argus* reported that the meeting noted "an urgent need for more national publications for and by blacks" (New name for black writers association 1980, 2).

Zwelakhe Sisulu, a *Post* journalist and son of ANC leader, Walter Sisulu, was Mwasa's first president. Thomas Karis writes:

> Thloloe, [Sisulu's] close colleague, had been inspired by Robert Sobukwe, the leader of the Pan-Africanist Congress, the 1959 offshoot of the ANC. Sisulu, on the other hand, saw Black Consciousness as performing a necessary but transitional psychological function and apparently assumed that his friends and colleagues would in due course align themselves with the ANC. (1987, 18)

After Mwasa's inauguration in October 1980, the union moved to organise black workers in newspaper companies across the country, recruiting members on white readership newspapers (New name for black writers association 1980, 2; SAAN bans Mwasa meeting 1980, 2), as well as papers aimed at coloured and African townships. On October 25, workers at the *Cape Herald* in Cape Town, a coloured readership paper owned by the Argus Company, went on strike for higher wages and better working conditions (Staff reporter 1980, 1; Raubenheimer 1991, 110). In November, Mwasa members voted for a nationwide strike in support of the *Herald*, and workers from the *Post* and the *Star*'s Africa edition in Johannesburg and the *Daily News* and the *Sunday Tribune* downed tools (Strike: Call for pressure on Argus 1980, 5; Qwelane 1981, 16). The state intervened by

banning Mwasa members, including president Zwelakhe Sisulu, who was banned for three years in December 1980 (Utting 1981, 2).

However, after the launch of the UDF, disagreements emerged between Mwasa branches, when elements (mostly in the Western Cape) wanted to align to the Congress movement. The differences led to a split in 1984, and to the resignation of Sisulu, who then joined the UDF. The different factions of Mwasa eventually reunited (Sisulu 1987, 18). According to Mathatha Tsedu,[4] who was a member of Mwasa at the time, the union included members of three political streams: those aligned to the PAC, BC adherents (largely members of Azapo), and the supporters of the UDF and ANC. He says members were opposed to joining the UDF because that would have led to the alienation of those in their ranks who were not aligned to the broad democratic movement. Aggrey Klaaste wrote at the time of the Steyn Commission that Mwasa was not a homogenous organisation, whose members were all BC (see Jack 1982, 32). However, commentary in the *Star* in the early days of Mwasa specifically designated it as a BC organisation (The future of the black press 1981, 4), and the Steyn Commission dubbed it a black radical union (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 13).

Whatever Mwasa's position in relation to BC and Congress movements, there is no doubt that Black Consciousness had an enormous impact on black journalists. The crackdown on BC organisations in 1977 included the detention of many journalists, in particular, Percy Qoboza, editor of the *World*, and Aggrey Klaaste, news editor of the *Weekend World* (Hachten and Gifford 1984, 6). The reason for such action against black journalists, according to Hachten and Gifford, lay in the National Party government's need to suppress any political discussion and opinion in the black communities of South African (1984, 130). "Even the most routine reporting in black newspapers such as the World and Post of ordinary political expression and activity … has been viewed as seditious" (Hachten and Gifford 1984, 134). Black journalists were harassed, detained, beaten and banned, because of their role as 'tellers' of black experience (Hachten and Gifford 1984, 135).

The banning of the *World* and the detention of its senior journalists did not halt the project of reporting. "The Argus Company brought its weekly, the *Natal Post*, up

from Durban to Johannesburg and began publishing it daily as the *Post* (Transvaal)" (Hachten and Gifford 1984, 137). The same newsroom of the *World* and its editorial leadership – Qoboza, Klaaste and others – were back in business. The lineage that the *Sowetan* claims to have from the *World* and its traditions can be directly traced in the actual structures and people across all the changes in masthead. Indeed, Aggrey Klaaste wrote that *Sowetan* was "fathered by *The World* and mothered by a paper called *Post*" and that its senior journalists had the "unhappy distinction" of having been to prison (quoted in Maseko 2006, 46).

Raubenheimer (1992) shows that black journalists in the 1970s were politicised by their contacts with BC activists, who facilitated a rethinking of the role of black journalists in the apartheid system. Some were also radicalised by the attacks on them by apartheid's security forces. The *World* (and its successor, the *Post)* and the unions their journalists belonged to – the UBJ and Wasa – provided a place in which they could debate their role and plan changes to it. Black journalists were thus socialised not through journalism degree or diploma programmes, or newsrooms orientated towards politically neutral professionalism, but in politicised BC-oriented spaces. The continuity from the *World* to the *Post* also meant that the *World's* BC culture was passed on.

4 The media and the apartheid state

The culture of *Sowetan* was not only shaped by its legacy, but also by political struggle in South Africa in the 1980s, and by the developments in the broader media sector, increasingly in conflict with the state and its new regimes of control and censorship. The operations of the press in South Africa were shaped by ambivalence in the apartheid system between freedom to publish and state restrictions. In other words, the apartheid government did not implement total censorship; rather, it sought to justify its restrictions on the press, depicting itself as operating in the interests of South Africans and within the law.

The English-language press interpreted the press restrictions as confronting it with the necessity to regulate and censor itself, in order to avoid state action against it (see Tyson 1992; Hatchen and Gifford 1984, 50-75). The plethora of regulations, threats and action against the media increased during the 1970s and 1980s, culminating in two

states of emergency in the 1980s (Berger 2000, 84), which imposed greater media regulations and stepped up the detention and banning of individuals.

The commercial English-language newspapers generally advocated press freedom, and espoused libertarian values, such as democracy, civil liberties and justice. However, critiques from the left argued that the English-language press "did not venture beyond attacking the 'irrationality' of apartheid" and had "vested interests in the dominant capitalist hegemony" (Jack 1982, 30). The apartheid narrative, on the other hand, relied on the idea that opposition to apartheid was the result of Soviet expansionism, with South Africa a key strategic target, and that media and civil society organisations could become unwitting pawns of communist stratagems (Lodge 1982, 23; Hatchen and Gifford 1984, 8). Increased opposition to apartheid was read as an increased onslaught on the South African state.

In this climate, the apartheid government made use of commissions of inquiry – such as the Steyn Commissions into the media – to address certain issues and to "secure their political objectives" (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 1). One of the purposes of the commissions, the Tomasellis argue, was "to create an ideological climate and offer rationalisations for repressive or adaptive measures contemplated by the state" (1982, 2). The first Steyn commission, in 1979, was set up with the stated aim to evaluate how the public's right to be informed could be balanced with the security interests of the state (New commission to 'balance interests' 1979, 27). It recommended that the press retain its "watchdog" oversight role in reporting on national security and the military, and advocated co-operation between media and government, rather than repressive legislation (Press role 'must stay' 1980, 2). However, the second commission, appointed in 1980, drew heavily on the "total onslaught"[5] argument, drawing on the testimony of "experts" to argue that the the ANC and the PAC were infiltrated by communists (Lodge 1982, 24). As Lodge points out, "the Commissioners' view of South African history is not one which allows for the existence of independent African initiative and thought" (1982, 27).

The report called the leaders of Azapo, Mwasa, BC, radical Black Theology and certain members of the SACC "organic intellectuals", "directly 'concerned in the formulation and development of a Black counter-hegemonic radical culture in South

Africa'" (quoted in Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 8), and saw the *World* as having fuelled the Soweto uprisings in 1976. Tomaselli and Tomaselli note that the commission report displays ambivalence in relation to the black press. "The Commission complains that there is no 'truly independent black press' in South Africa" (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 12), and that the Afrikaans press and the SABC had failed to report on black aspirations. The commission argued that an authentic black press was necessary in order for "moderate black opinion" to be expressed. It had been left to the English-language press to inform the South African community of black opinion, and although they should be congratulated for meeting this responsibility, the black press was a "captive press" of white owners, according to the Commission (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 12).

In the wake of the Steyn Commission, three acts were passed: the Internal Security Act, the Protection of Information Act, and the Registration of Newspapers Amendment Act. Tomaselli and Tomaselli note:

> An analysis of these three Acts, all passed in 1982, suggests that this year represents the watershed for the newspaper industry. The government now has just about every possible law with which to curtail the press in a manner never before experienced in this country. (1982, 20)

However, a few years later, restrictions on the press became even more draconian when the state declared a state of emergency in July 1985, in response to increasing violent insurrection in the townships. This state of emergency was lifted in March 1986, but the state kept troops patrolling the townships (Sisulu 1987, 19). Another state of emergency was declared in June 1986, which lasted until the end of the decade. The states of emergency gave increased powers to the police and to ministers to limit publication of material considered subversive and to detain and ban individuals and shut down organisations (Berger 2000, 84).

The response of the commercial press was to tread an uneasy line between being critical and reporting on the insurrection, and staying within the bounds of what was legally permitted (see Tyson 1992). But Berger writes that establishment newspapers were seen as "villains rather than victims:"

> They stood accused of actively sheltering whites from knowing the full human cost of apartheid, and – worse – charged with disorganising and disinforming members of the oppressed who read them … in the early 1980s it seemed there was – just waiting to be tapped – both a need and a natural market for an alternative press – and indeed a political imperative to attract black readers to such publications. (2000, 78)

Charney argues that

> the opposition role of the liberal English-language press was tempered by its role as part of the white Establishment, business and political. Supporting the moderate white opposition parties, the United and Progressive Parties, it was tied to the same interests to which they were connected. (1993, 9)

Berger describes two kinds of media as "alternative" to the mainstream: community-based media designed to support anti-apartheid initiatives, and media produced by progressive journalists, who felt hamstrung by the establishment papers they were working in (2000, 79-84). Several alternative "journalistic" newspapers were born at this time, including the *Weekly Mail, New Nation* (edited by Zwelakhe Sisulu), and *Vrye Weekblad*, an Afrikaans-language paper (Switzer and Adhikari 2000, 45). Even though the approach of these journalists may have differed from their mainstream peers, these were, in Berger's words, "people who saw themselves as journalists seeking simple truth (and called upon by circumstances to temporarily become activists)" (2000, 82).

The alternative press, and the black readership press – in particular, the *Sowetan* – became prime targets of the state for their insistence on publishing issues and events the state wanted to keep out of the (white) public domain, and for their ongoing opposition to apartheid. The publications were small in circulation: Louw (1992, 9) notes that, in 1989, weekly sales of the 'alternative media' (in which he includes *New Nation, UmAfrika, Weekly Mail, Vrye Weekblad, South, and New African)* were only 206 000 per week. However, they pushed the boundaries of what was permissible in publishing, and

reinterpreted journalistic professionalism for the societal context of the 1980s (Switzer and Adhikari 2000, 38).

> This marginalised press had an impact on its audience that cannot be measured in terms of the small number of issues sold, the limited number of advertising revenue raised, or the relative absence of effective marketing and distribution strategies. These journalists rendered personalities, events, and issues visible that were too often invisible and provided a voice to alienated communities that were too often voiceless. (2000, 38)

The importance of the alternative media from the perspective of journalism cultures is that individual journalists were exposed to different versions of journalism, no matter what kind of news media they were located in. Coverage of certain stories and issues by one newspaper allow such issues to enter into the public domain. Other news services then pick them up and they become part of the general news agenda. The existence of anti-apartheid newspapers, however small, caused an expansion in what entered into publicness, and in journalistic imaginings of what journalism could (and should) be.

5 Conclusion

This chapter shows that, in South Africa, historical legacies of struggle are deeply embedded in understandings of journalism work in certain sectors of the media. The different ethnic presses evolved to express the political aspirations of their communities. The legacy of ethnic representation inclined black-readership publications to become institutions of black public life, even when they were taken over by white commercial interests. The commercialisation of black publications both entrenched them in black communities and constrained them: entrenched by greater distribution and product quality; constrained by a lack of autonomy over editorial content.

Certain commercial conditions applied to any publication that attempted to enter the black media market. Such publications were driven by advertisers, who wanted to reach black readers, but the limited adspend available in that market constrained the

press's development and made it difficult for individual publishers to survive. This saw the emergence of monopolistic control over the black press by big white companies, in particular the Argus Company. The contestation between journalists and management or owners that can be a feature of news organisations became embroiled in race issues and political struggle.

In the 1970s, newspapers like the *World* and the *Post*, though limited by and "captive" to white capital, were politicised through an engagement with Black Consciousness and the ensuing protest and clampdown by the authorities. They served as forum in which the views and experiences of black South Africans could be expressed. Across the media, black journalists came together to form associations and unions, such as Mwasa, and through them to protest their workplace conditions. *Sowetan* grew out of this history, as successor to these banned publications.

These histories show that journalists in different ethnic presses had different experiences of journalism work, and thus produced different versions of journalism practice. This is not to say that journalists from different presses were hermetically sealed off from one another, but they tended to work in media that were broadly similar in approach and readership, while different from the other ethnic presses. They identified, and were identified, as "the black press", or "the Afrikaans press" and so on.

As Cook (1998) has shown in relation to the U.S., journalism forms a political institution despite the variations in different news media, partly due to commonalities such as the routines, processes and structures of media production. There may also be a broadly similar imaginative connection by journalists to global ideas of the public interest and its connection to serving citizenship and democracy, even though they are located in a particular region. However, where the social context is riven with competing imaginaries and historical legacies, the concept of the public interest may be so differently interpreted that consensus on its meaning and terms of operation may not be possible. In South Africa, prior to the *Sowetan's* birth, the society was fractured by colonialism and segregated by the apartheid system. A national public sphere, news media that form a socially cohesive and unitary institution in society, and a broadly similar South African journalistic culture, could not develop under such conditions (see Tomaselli 1997).

Notes on Chapter 5

[1] The company was called *Dagbreekpers* (Manoim 1983, 73).
[2] Marais notes: "Class formation in African communities was curbed. Some segmentation did occur within the African working classes, as a semi-skilled urban layer emerged, but an African middle class remained a distant prospect" (2011, 27).
[3] Nthato Motlana was a medical doctor and political activist, who always played a role in community upliftment. "What always differentiated him from other activists was his endorsement of the free market". He built his early businesses – a medical clinic and a medical scheme for black members – in black communities during the apartheid era, despite the obstacles put in the way of black entrepreneurship, and was widely considered to be an important community leader in Soweto (Rumney and Wilhelm 1999).
[4] Personal communication, May 2011.
[5] A catchword used to describe what Prime Minister P.W. Botha considered an all-out attack on South Africa by foreign agencies interested in the country's mineral resources and strategic geopolitical position. "South Africa, Botha has asserted, is in peril from a 'total onslaught' by its enemies foreign and domestic; to survive, the nation must adopt a counterattacking 'total strategy'" (Hachten and Gifford 1984, 3). "General Malan [Botha's minister of defence] had earlier interpreted the rolling tide of black nationalism and decolonization in Southern Africa as a Soviet-inspired "total onslaught" seeking by all means to spread Marxist influence through the neighbouring black countries" (Hachten and Gifford 1984, 8).

Chapter 6: The *Sowetan* and the creation of a black public

In this chapter, I examine the emergence of the *Sowetan* into public life and discuss the nature of its role in South African society. The newspaper's legacy, especially the nation-building project introduced by editor Aggrey Klaaste in 1988, was continually invoked in the *Sowetan* of 2004, usually in opposition to proposed changes, as Chapter 8 will show. From an organisational theory perspective, this is not unusual, as the culture of an organisation and its underlying assumptions are laid down in its founding period (Schein 2010, 3). The establishment of the *Sowetan* in apartheid South Africa of the 1980s was thus a significant time for the newspaper. Charting the legacy of nation-building and Aggrey Klaaste's leadership is crucial to understanding *Sowetan's* journalistic culture, and the status of the public interest and commercial imperatives within it. A subsidiary focus in the research is a reconstruction of *Sowetan's* role as an institution of black public life.

As Warner has argued, publics come into being in relation to texts and their circulation (Warner 2002). The text of a newspaper forms a crucial link between its journalists and the wider world.[1] It is the text that speaks to the reader and, in speaking, shows how the reader is imagined. I make use of newspaper articles from the time of *Sowetan's* first decade to track the ways in which it imagined black publics at different historical moments, culminating in an orchestrated public imagined as the nation. The texts also demonstrate how the *Sowetan's* public role was imagined from "outside" black public life in the pages of white readership newspapers.

Newspaper reports and opinion pieces from the 1980s show that the newspaper drew on the legacy of its forerunners, the *World* and the *Post*, to articulate a role for itself in society. In this chapter, I argue that *Sowetan* was not simply oppositional to apartheid, but conducted an ongoing process of social re-imagining through the project of nation-building. It did this partly through editorial columns, and partly through initiating community projects and reporting on them. *Sowetan* thus allowed a collective re-imagining of black public life that formed a counterweight to Apartheid representations of black Africans as rural and tribal migrants from ethnic "homelands", and facilitated public engagement with questions of citizenship and nationhood long before the first democratic elections of 1994.

This chapter identifies three "moments" of the *Sowetan*'s public positioning in the 1980s, which I argue show the evolution of its imagined relationship with its readers at particular times: the black press legacy of representation; modelling citizenship; and nation-building. Although I separate the *Sowetan*'s public engagement into "moments" for the purpose of discussion, in practice, strands of different political discourse and media positioning always co-existed, and there was contestation between them throughout this period. But I argue that the *Sowetan's* nation-building approach, which encouraged discussion on issues important to its readers and represented a range of political positions, created a discursive space that modelled democratic diversity rather than loyalty to any political organisations. In that way, it drew on social imaginaries such as nation, democracy, and the public sphere, fusing them with local elements to create a particular version of black citizenship.

Less evident in media discussions (although not entirely ignored) are the *Sowetan's* commercial features. Although the business side of the newspaper is overshadowed by political issues in 1980s media coverage, in South Africa, business is always intertwined with politics. Chapter 5 shows how white-owned media companies invested in black readership newspapers expecting to profit from advertising to black markets, while simultaneously controlling editorial. The power inherent in the black press's position as a widely circulated commercial product, enabled such newspapers to achieve a commanding position in black public life. Further, I contend that the *Sowetan* journalists' values and practice were shaped in certain key respects by the newspaper's commercial underpinnings in the 1980s, even as the business side of the newspaper was overshadowed by political issues. Commercial considerations thus played a crucial role in the establishment of *Sowetan,* and the constitution of its organisational culture.

1 Commercial underpinnings

Sowetan started life as a weekly community paper in March 1980 in the growing townships of Soweto, distributed free to all households (Fenton 1981, 31). The new free-sheet was an initiative of the Argus Company, one of the big four white-owned media companies (Hachten and Gifford 1984, x). It owned newspapers across the country, including the *Star* in Johannesburg, the *Argus* in Cape Town, the *Friend* in Bloemfontein and the *Daily News* in Durban (Hachten and Gifford 1984, x), all aimed

at an English-speaking white readership. The company also published a number of newspapers aimed at urban black readers, including *Post (Transvaal)*, *Post (Natal)*, and *Weekend Post* (Fenton 1981, 31; Duff 1981, 21), and was the dominant publisher of black commercial papers in the media industry.

The new paper had competition in its early incarnation as a community paper, because of the rapid growth of newspapers for black readers all over the greater Johannesburg area. "The mushrooming Black Press is spawning a series of free, local newspapers aimed at specific geographical areas or sectors of the Black market," the *Sunday Express* noted in its media pages in 1981 (Fenton 1981, 31). These "knock-and-drops" or "freebies" were distributed to residents of townships and drew their revenue from advertising rather than cover price. A number of companies – including the South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN) (the forerunner to Johncom) and a small publisher called Chain Publications – competed to roll out knock-and-drops to township areas, with at least eight in the pipeline. The largest of these was the *Soweto News*, owned by SAAN. Even a few non-media organisations, such as taxi associations, soccer leagues, retail chains, and liquor store and shebeen associations, began producing free publications (Fenton 1981, 31).

The *Financial Mail*, commenting on the launch of *Soweto News* and *Sowetan*, said that they offered advertisers "a captive audience", and that the objective was "100% coverage of all Soweto [126 000] dwellings" (The press: Freebie free-for-all 1980, 355). The *FM* quoted research by the advertising agency J Walter Thompson that appeared to show that free-sheet readers were largely female, and preferred the free-sheets to black editions of white newspapers,[2] because they seemed to have more local news, rather than being variations of "white news" (The press: Freebie free-for-all 1980, 355).

The aim of these media ventures, according to the articles written at the time, was to reach potential consumers and attract local advertisers. The *Express* argues that, with the introduction of more television channels by the SABC, national advertisers might move to broadcast, but smaller advertisers would need to reach their markets through local print media (Fenton 1981, 31). To illustrate the shortage of black consumer media, the *Express* quotes an advertising agency's media manager saying: "We are grateful for all the Black media we can get" (Fenton 1981, 31). This echoes the sentiment in the *FM*'s article that free-sheets give retail advertisers a way

to reach consumers in the township who might not have access to the newspapers that are distributed in the city centre.

These early reports demonstrate the economic rationale for the establishment of *Sowetan*, and the Argus's business strategy: free distribution with income from advertising revenue, and a move to establish itself in a growing urban black market (Fenton 1981, 31). It is interesting to note that the commercial discourses that surface in the media reports in the early 1980s on the *Sowetan* resonate with ideas about black newspapers in the post-war media industry (see Manoim 1983). Principally, white media companies in both eras acquired or started black papers based on the belief that the black market was about to take off, and that a media company could reap the benefits of the advertising that would flow into media that successfully tapped that market. The idea of a "boom" is present in both the 1940s and the 1980s, with the *Sunday Express* headlining its story "New rush to join black media boom in townships" (Fenton 1981, 31). However, once again this anticipated boom seems to be a marketing illusion, as few of the black publications mentioned in the article have survived.[3]

Another echo of the post-war era is that the projected scenarios of media success tend to come from marketers and advertisers and the articles rely on their views of new media developments. This demonstrates the way that many media ventures follow the advertisers' needs, rather than being driven by a desire to reach new publics or readers. The articles about the new publications focus on the readers entirely as potential consumers and do not engage with their political or societal circumstances at all. Such reports are mostly located in the business press or media and marketing sections of general newspapers, thus relegating these issues to specialist areas, rather than general public view. Commercial discussions of media in the 1980s are rarely integrated into the political reports and commentary.

2 The legacy of representation

2.1 Born into struggle

Sowetan was introduced at a time when the *Post* was the dominant black readership daily, with a circulation of about 112 000 (Fenton 1981, 31), and operating out of the same offices in Soweto (Maseko interview 2011). However, in October 1980, less than a year later, the *Post* ceased publication because of a strike by the newly established trade union, the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa),

which downed tools in support of workers striking at the *Cape Herald*, a low budget newspaper aimed at the Coloured community (Staff reporter 1980, 1; Qwelane 1981, 16). Percy Qoboza, then editor of the *Post*, resigned in January 1981 (by telegram) after a period as visiting editor on a newspaper in Washington D.C. (Percy Qoboza resigns as Post editor 1981, 1).

During the strike, the registration of the newspaper was allowed to lapse. When the labour dispute ended and the Argus tried to reregister the *Post* in January 1981, they were informed by the National Party government that the paper would be banned before it hit the streets (The Sowetan nou dagblad 1981, 14; The Post is silenced 1981, 1). The Minister of Justice, Kobie Coetsee, told Parliament that the *Post*, under the editorship of Percy Qoboza, had been infiltrated by ANC activists. He maintained that the paper was producing "unmistakeably revolutionary propaganda" for the movement ('Melaatse' media 1981, 12). Several of the *Post*'s journalists were banned, including Mathatha Tsedu, Mari Subramoney, Mono Badela, Zwelakhe Sisulu and Marcus Ngani (The press: Ex post-facto 1981, 355). The banning orders made it impossible for them to work as journalists, because banned persons could not be published.

The Argus Company decided not to fight the government decision. Instead, they turned the *Sowetan* into a daily and hired 18 of *Post*'s journalists to staff it (The Sowetan nou dagblad 1981, 14). *Sowetan* was re-launched on February 2, 1981, this time with a cover price of 15 cents[4] ('Melaatse' media 1981, 12). The political problems continued, however: journalists Phil Mtimkulu and Joe Thloloe were banned on January 30, shortly after having joined the *Sowetan* (The press: Ex post-facto 1981, 355).

The Argus Company did not dwell on the details of the labour disputes in its public statements, nor comment on Qoboza's actions; managing director Hal Miller focused instead on the government prohibition, and publicly objected to the banning of *Post*. "We do not believe that this Government, or any Government, should have the power to ban newspapers and people without trial or review," he is quoted as saying. "… by acting in this way, it diminishes us all" (The Post is silenced 1981, 1). The problem of the Mwasa strike, which had played a role in the demise of the *Post* newspapers, is thus papered over in the article, with the company giving no hint of the conflict between management and black workers (particularly journalists and editors) at its newspapers.

Sowetan's sister newspaper in the Argus Company stable, the *Star*, introduced the paper as a "gutsy new tabloid" to its largely white English-speaking readers, describing the newly appointed editor, Joe Latakgomo, as "the man in the new hot seat of black news" … "walking the thin line of publish and be damned" (Duff 1981, 21). According to the article, Latakgomo is not a "raving revolutionary" or a "honky-hater", but a moderate, who believes there is still time and hope for a fair deal for black South Africans. It mentions his "location" childhood, his election as school librarian in high school, his love of books, and his writing of short stories, painting a picture of an educated and literate man. It also sets out his mission for the paper: exposing exploitation of "our people" and social ills of the country, striving for justice for "all the peoples of this country", and standing by the "greatest traditions of journalism: honesty and fair reporting" (Duff 1981, 21). In this article, the *Star* aligns itself with the *Sowetan* without specifically making clear that the paper is owned by the same company or referring to disputes between the newspaper and its parent company. It explicitly states that Latakgomo is independent of the "all-white management" (Duff 1981, 21).

It is only the *Financial Mail* that points out that the white owner/black newsroom relationship is intrinsically problematic. In an article on Qoboza's resignation, it notes that black editors at the Argus Company had previously been subject to a white editorial director, and that Qoboza had to wrest control of the *World* from its previous sports and crime approach (Black press: Situation vacant 1981, 172). Qoboza, according to the *FM*, is "the first black editor to have shaken off white editorial control" (Black press: Situation vacant 1981, 172). Qoboza "judged (correctly) that the black community was ready for a highly political newspaper", which he created out of the tabloid *World"* (Black press: Situation vacant 1981, 172).

The *FM* was also the only publication to note that a "desire by blacks for their own newspapers refuses to die down" (The press: Starting over 1981), reporting on a venture to launch a black-owned and managed paper. Black ownership here is characterised as the way to express the aspirations and desires of the black majority, rather than a money-making enterprise. The venture did not succeed, and the commercial black press remained in the hands of white owners.

The *FM* notes that the job of being a black editor in a white-owned newspaper was fraught with difficulty, characterising it this way:

> Wanted: Editor of Post (Transvaal) and Weekend Post. Must be black, literate, informed about national and international affairs and able to deal diplomatically with politicised staff, edgy management, suspicious politicians and paranoid government. (Black press: Situation vacant 1981, 172)

The new *Sowetan* editor was Joe Latakgomo, who had deputised for Qoboza at the *Post* and had been news editor at the *World* (Duff 1981, 21). He introduced the paper with an editorial on the front page and an article on the leader page, outlining the problems of being a black journalist in apartheid South Africa. Focusing on the state/newspaper relationship, rather than the owner/newsroom dynamic, he writes:

> If the black journalist – in fact any respectable journalist – is asked to make a choice between loyalty to his country and loyalty to a political party, he would almost certainly opt for the former. In South African terms, however, if you are not loyal to and support fully the Nationalists, you must be a communist, Marxist, or any of a host of other descriptions that come forth from the Government. (Latakgomo 1981, 8)

Latakgomo goes on to argue that *Post* and *Sunday Post* were closed down by the government because the journalists chose to "pursue their profession", "believing that this is a free and democratic country" and serving the readers' "right to know". They were "institutions in black society," "a watchdog for a community that the white press did not serve" (Latakgomo 1981, 8). Part of the media's role is to "articulate the aspirations of the community" and "to educate".

The black press are treated differently to the white press, he continues, in being prohibited from publishing, and having their journalists banned without any semblance of a hearing. But press freedom could not be "divided into freedom of the black press and freedom of the white press" (Latakgomo 1981, 8). As the black press's readership consists of people who are not represented in Parliament, he concludes:

> Must a black newspaper not mirror society because the Government does not like the images it sees? Indeed, the Government's attitude has been: If we don't like the images we see in this mirror, we will smash it. (Latakgomo 1981, 8)

On its front page, the *Sowetan* pledges to report honestly, independently and responsibly, not to promote personal or sectional interests, but to operate in the public interest – a statement of an impartial approach to journalism.

Latakgomo articulates similar sentiments in an article in the *Star* after the *Post* was banned:

> "The job of a white editor is clear. He is part of an establishment," Mr Latakgomo said. "But a black newspaper editor faces an entirely different set of circumstances. To start with, the Government does not have to answer to a black voting public. Whatever happens to a black newspaper has little effect on the dominant white political scene. But this is an even stronger reason why we as the main representative voice of black opinion should be looked to as valid representatives of a point of view that must be heard." (Moderates are now totally discounted, says Post editor 1981, 4)

He says that the *Post* tried to reflect black society "as we saw it". "We believed in fighting for a just society for all and supported in our columns those black organisations which reasonably reflected the views of the majority" (Moderates are now totally discounted, says Post editor 1981, 4).

Thus, at the *Sowetan*'s inception Latakgomo describes the journalism of the newspaper as falling in the independent, objective mode of Western journalism. The service to its black readers is described as accountability to a public, as representing majority black opinion, and as a mirror that shows 'what is really going on'. This journalistic discourse resonates with the Anglo-American 'professional' tradition, discussed in Chapter 4.

Latakgomo explicitly draws a distinction between *Sowetan* journalism and the journalism of Afrikaans-language newspapers. "The Afrikaner's history is riddled with incidents of press manipulation, starting up their own newspapers to counter 'the English influence' and using those newspapers in their battle to get into power" (Latakgomo 1981, 4). He characterises the Afrikaans press as serving its political masters, the National Party government – unlike the *Sowetan*. Meanwhile, *Beeld*, an Afrikaans-language newspaper, carries two critical opinion pieces about the banning of the *Post*. In the first, "Lood se Praatjies" (1981, 17) notes that the black media

workers' union, Mwasa, had had the *Post* "against the ropes" and that editor Qoboza had "scandalously left his paper in the lurch" and run off to the U.S. The state's action is described as unnecessary, giving credibility to both Qoboza and Mwasa, and effectively making them into martyrs (Lood se Praatjies: Dis anvoeling soos dié wat a mens laat sidder 1981, 17). A second column points out that the re-launch of *Sowetan* is a manoeuvre to sidestep the government ban of *Post*, and argues that the *Sowetan*, under pressure from "militant black nationalism", is likely to follow the path of the *Post*, and its forerunner, the *World* ('Melaatse' media 1981, 12). The Afrikaans newspaper positions itself as opposed to closures of newspapers, while maintaining a critical attitude to the journalists and managers of the Argus Company. These opinion pieces show an active hostility between these two leading newspapers of the Afrikaans and Black press respectively.

Not everyone agreed with Latakgomo's assessment of *Post* and *Sowetan* journalism as different from the partisan journalism of the Afrikaans media. A comment piece in the *Star* notes that both the *Post* and the *World* were "in the Black Consciousness camp" (The future of the black press 1981, 4), and characterises Mwasa as the "organ of the black journalists who align themselves with the philosophy of Black Consciousness" (The future of the black press 1981, 4). The commentary describes Mwasa's perspective as holding that a white-owned newspaper in South Africa can never fully mirror the black majority view; the majority calls for "a unitary state, universal suffrage and total opposition to any accommodation with the present government" (The future of the black press 1981, 4). The anonymous commentator seems dubious about whether Mwasa's view is the majority view, and even more dubious about Mwasa's espousal of "commitment journalism", in which journalists become "propagandists for Black Consciousness" (The future of the black press 1981, 4).

The commentator positions such engaged journalism as a rejection of journalistic standards such as objectivity and serving the public with "total information" (The future of the black press 1981, 4). The Argus Company approach is described, by contrast, as governed by a code of ethics, the requirement to report news objectively and fairly, and to "pursue a balanced policy calculated to enhance the wellbeing and progress of all sections of the population" (The future of the black press 1981, 4). The writer describes the Argus approach to journalism as a middle way, and as distinct from the two nationalisms – Afrikaner and black – on a collision

course. The shifting perspectives that we see in these articles about journalism in the early 1980s indicate the contested nature of values and practice among South African journalists at that time. As chapter 5 describes, engaged forms of journalism would emerge in the 1980s in alternative publications that were explicitly opposed to the apartheid system. The *Sowetan* differed from these publications in being part of the establishment commercial media, but its journalists were similar in their opposition to the apartheid system.

The form of ownership of *Sowetan*, as one of a few black readership publications in a group that largely privileged its white establishment papers, meant that although more resources were potentially available to the newspaper than to an alternative publication, its owners could direct those resources towards its stablemates, particularly its flagship newspaper, the *Star*. As Raubenheimer shows, the *Cape Herald* suffered from poor working conditions and low salaries, which was what led to the Mwasa strike in 1980 (1991, 110). This form of ownership (and management) split journalists along racial lines, and divided them in their attempts to improve their working conditions. It also allied black journalists with black workers, as they did away with issues of status in their organisations, in order to take on management. Race thus was a defining force on the organisational cultures of Argus newspapers.

In addition to the internal conflicts of the 1980s, South African journalism was challenged from outside the field, specifically by the state and its institutions. The events of the *Post*'s demise and the *Sowetan*'s reinvention ran concurrently with the Steyn commissions' interrogation of the press (see chapter 5). Testifying before the commission shortly after the establishment of *Sowetan,* the president of the Black Sash,[5] Joyce Harris, said the newspaper had not filled the gap left by the *Post* and was struggling to find its feet (Freimond 1981, 6). The demise of the *World* and *Post* newspapers "cut off the public's access to black thinking", Harris said, which was bad for the country (Freimond 1981, 6). In its report, the Steyn Commission echoes this sentiment when noting that it is an important responsibility of the press to report on the black community, and that the black press is captive to white owners (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 12).

To sum up: newspaper articles from the early 1980s show that the *Sowetan's* birth as a daily took place in an environment of intense contestation – the strike that closed the *Post*, the resignation of its respected editor Percy Qoboza under unsettling

circumstances, contestation over different forms of journalism, and conflict with government over the perceived subversive content of the papers. There were also powerful commercial motivations for the new daily's establishment: the desire by the Argus Company to maintain a presence in the black market, the need advertisers had for access to black consumers, ideas about a growing black middle class. Economic factors both drove and constrained the paper's operations. It was situated, apparently at the bottom of the pile, in a hierarchy of newspapers, unevenly resourced and with differing commercial contexts and readerships. The paper was thus palpably a product of the commercial desires of its owners and the political contestation over the operations of the independent news media; it was inserted into a confrontational role – oppositional to government policies and a conflicted relationship with its white owners – that would shape it.

Notwithstanding the fact that Latakgomo and *Sowetan* are seen as representing "black thinking", the black population was not politically cohesive in the 1980s. Political groupings took up a range of different ideological responses to the apartheid system – among others, Black Consciousness, Charterist, non-racial, Marxist, Pan-African and workerist positions (see, for example, Gibson 2007). These had an impact on conceptions of journalism among black journalists; indeed, Charney shows that BC activists deliberately engaged journalists on their role (1993, 11). Political differences could cause divisions among black journalists, though: for example, Mwasa split in 1984 over whether to affiliate to the non-racial United Democratic Front (UDF) (Sisulu 1987, 18), and, according to Tsedu,[6] Mwasa was able to maintain unity by not affiliating to one political movement, thus allowing members to keep their political loyalties. Despite such political differences in the newsroom, the notion that the *Sowetan* represented the views and experiences of black South Africans generally was widely agreed. This idea would also shape the values and practice of *Sowetan* journalists.

2.2 The role of representation

We see from the articles that the *Sowetan*'s entry into the media landscape was described by local newspapers in ways that embodied larger ideas of its place and status as a black newspaper. The newspaper also articulated for itself a position and a role in society, and the reports from that time show the conceptions of journalism held by *Sowetan* journalists in the early 1980s. These contemporaneous accounts provide evidence of the relationship that the *Sowetan* imagined it had with a black public, its

position in relation to black opinion, and the first signs of the public that would come into being in relation to the paper.

If part of the normative imaginings of a national media sector is that it addresses a national public, in which issues of common interest can be discussed, this project was made virtually impossible by the existence of a press system that envisaged three separate publics: black, English and Afrikaans. Whether these were three partisan presses, or presses with different journalistic cultures focused on different audiences, the ethnically divided presses could not constitute a national imaginary. This bears out the critique of the concept of a unitary public sphere by Fraser, who argues that, in a stratified society, publics, counterpublics and subaltern publics jostle for space (1992), and resonates with Michael Warner's descriptions of publics as coming into being in relation to texts (2002). Drawing on Cook's idea of the media as forming an institution in society (1998), we can see that in South Africa of the 1980s the media-as-institution was deeply fractured along ethnic lines. The imagined public of each press comprised a particular racial and cultural community – Afrikaner, English-speaking whites, and black (mostly African). Each public would have had to "read" the others' opinions from the pages of "their" newspapers.

Black opinion was especially inaccessible to whites, as the different racial communities were confined to different living areas through the legislation contained in the Group Areas Act.[7] Also, black South Africans could not express themselves through the ballot box and had no access to Parliament as a forum. This did not mean that a black public or publics did not exist, in the sense of a collective of people debating and representing their views. However, their views could only be accessed or imagined by those outside the communities through sites like the media. Anyone in search of "black opinion" would have to find it in a credible black paper - the point made by the Black Sash in the Steyn Commission hearings (Freimond 1981, 6). So, although *Sowetan* was owned by a "white company", which had invested in it in order to grow its holdings and to make money, it was seen to represent "black opinion", and differences of politics, class, and social standing were elided.

As the articles cited above show, the editorial staff of the *Sowetan* also saw the paper as representing black opinion. The newspaper was defined by Joe Latakgomo very specifically as a black newspaper, and as having a close and significant relationship with black South Africans (Latakgomo 1981, 8). Although the term 'black' is never specifically defined, it is implicit that it refers mostly to "Africans",

as defined by apartheid's racial categories. The newspaper's relationship to the disenfranchised majority was defined in editorials as one of "representation" or "representing", with both meanings of that word in play (see Moderates are now totally discounted, says Post editor 1981, 4). One, the newspaper aimed to represent the interests of a community that was not represented in Parliament, and whose voices were therefore not heard in the highest decision-making body in the land. In this conceptualisation, the newspaper represented in the sense of "standing for", taking the place of elected representatives, as there were no credibly elected representatives for black South Africans. This is an extension and intensification of the normative role of journalism in quality public interest media, but is not significantly divergent in its conceptualisation.

In the second meaning, the newspaper described itself as "representing" in the sense of "showing" the reality of black life under apartheid, making visible the range of views and positions (Latakgomo 1981, 8). Latakgomo acknowledged that these views were not always the same. However, the differences between black constituencies tended to fade into the background under the burden of representation carried by the few black newspapers and the few black individuals who were identified as speaking of black experience and black life. A number of white newspapers carried regular columns based on content in the black papers, which were treated as windows on to the inaccessible world beyond the white suburbs.[8] This was true for both Afrikaans and English-language papers. The mantle of representation, taken up by the *Sowetan*, was thus accepted as legitimate by the white media and the white publics looking on.

Despite a tremendous responsibility towards representing its community, *Sowetan* made a commitment to certain norms of public interest journalism, describing a conception of its role that was very similar to professional and public service conceptions in Western democracies, and not very different from the Argus Company's codes. A recurring theme in the discussions around the death of the *Post* – and the re-invention of the *Sowetan* as a daily – was the relationship of media to society, and what kind of journalism should be produced. This discourse was mobilised as a defence of the right of newspapers to publish and to report on aspects of the society (The Post is silenced 1981, 1; Moderates are now totally discounted, says Post editor 1981, 4).

The claims of the *Sowetan* that it pursued an independent journalistic role were consistently contested by the state and by other media ('Melaatse' media 1981, 12). The journalists' espousal of Mwasa as their union was cited as evidence that the newspaper had been infiltrated by BC activists and that it did not produce objective journalism (The future of the black press 1981, 4). Journalism and its practices were thus differently inflected across newspapers and cultural groups, and the relationship of a newspaper to its readers and to the state was differently conceptualised around the understanding of media representation of the public. In this particular moment of *Sowetan*'s identity, the public interest version of journalism was infused with the strong need to represent the disenfranchised majority and to serve its cause by opposing the apartheid ideology of the state.

3 Modelling citizenship

The *Sowetan* quickly established itself in the Johannesburg area. It averaged about 60 000 sales in the first six months of 1981; by 1989, it averaged almost 175 000, the second biggest daily in the country after the *Star*, and about two-thirds of this circulation was from outside the PWV area[9] (A changing scene for newspapers 1989, 17).

The 1980s were turbulent, with strikes, civil society campaigns and protest against the apartheid system (Qwelane 1981, 16), and this was matched with increasing repression by the state, especially once the states of emergency had been implemented. They gave increased powers to the police and to ministers to limit publication of material considered subversive and to detain and ban individuals and shut down organisations (Switzer 2000, 30). The *Sowetan*, along with the alternative newspapers that had entered the scene in the mid-80s, were prime targets of the state. However, the state considered the *Sowetan* to be promoting both the ANC and PAC, "legitimising" them by reporting their views or "giving positive publicity" to the statements of their leaders (Govt warns black newspaper for 'promoting the ANC and PAC' 1987, 15). The state also attempted to restrict *Sowetan* and *City Press*, as well as the *Weekly Mail*, from publishing the statements of anti-apartheid organisations inside the country (see, for example, Cowling and Tennant 1986, 2).

Sowetan was not intimidated, however. In 1987, it conducted its own poll, in reaction to elections being held for the white population, opening a "ballot box" for its readers. In a leader page headlined "One man, one vote", the paper said it was going

beyond apartheid, centuries-old white domination, racial and other differences in allowing anyone to vote for the top ten people they thought should run the country (Paper launches one man, one vote 'election' 1987, 2). They announced the results on the same day as the official white election results were announced (Mandela is top of the heap 1987, 1). Assistant editor Joe Thloloe wrote on the front page:

> As the 3-million white voters went to the polls in an all-white election yesterday, staff at the *Sowetan* were counting the final votes in the Ballot Box and the results give an indication of what a post-apartheid Government, chosen freely by all South Africans, would look like. (Thloloe 1987, 1)

The poll was topped by Nelson Mandela, jailed senior leader of the ANC, followed by Oliver Tambo, its leader in exile, and then by anti-apartheid cleric Desmond Tutu. There were three whites in the top ten: opposition politicians Frederick van Zyl Slabbert and Helen Suzman, as well as Joe Slovo, exiled head of the SA Communist Party. Thloloe wrote that the paper had come up with the Ballot Box "to show what it would be like if we did not have apartheid and we lived in a united South Africa" (Thloloe 1987, 1). "The final voting tally was 11 404 and a total of 466 people were nominated", *Sowetan* noted. "We had to discard about 6 000 other votes because of infringements of the rules" (Thloloe 1987, 1).

The newspaper followed up by running a double page feature inside, with profiles of the top ten winners, including pictures. The political prisoners could not be depicted, due to security legislation, so empty frames were placed next to their names (The Sowetan ballot box: The top ten leaders 1987, 8). The next day, the newspaper published a piece by Nelson Mandela's wife, Winnie Mandela, in which she quoted from a speech he made during his trial for treason. As the ANC was banned, and Nelson Mandela prohibited from being quoted, this was an explicit act of resistance.

The white-readership media portrayed the results as politically significant. Anthony Johnson of the *Cape Times* wrote in his politics column that some indication of how "the disenfranchised masses" would vote could be gleaned from *Sowetan*'s "shadow election" (Johnson 1987, 10), while the *Argus* noted that the poll had attracted international attention (Wightman 1987, 6). Editor of the *Star*, Harvey Tyson, wrote: "The poll illustrated, not just the obvious fact that black South Africans differ widely in culture, creed and ideology, but that most have a genuine desire for

multiracial government that cuts across every kind of barrier, including party lines" (Tyson 1987, 8). The *FM* quoted the *Sowetan*'s assistant editor, Joe Thloloe, saying "the only way to interpret this mix is to see it as a 'tendency to create a government of reconciliation'", and noted the presence of white Nationalists among the results, as well as a Pan-African Congress and Azapo following (Black attitudes: Mandela is tops 1987, 43). The white newspapers thus tended to characterise the results as providing a reading of what a majority vote would produce and as offering significant insights into black politics.

The ballot box was not simply oppositional to the apartheid elections; it positioned the *Sowetan* firmly as representative of the people, exemplifying the "standing for" aspect of representing black South Africans. The newspaper's ballot, although obviously not an official electoral process, was conducted according to a set of procedures, with votes disqualified if they did not meet the rules. The paper also explicitly declared the ballot open to everyone in the country – all its people, regardless of race and ethnicity – thus taking the high ground of inclusive citizenship In announcing the final results, *Sowetan* read conciliatory aspects into the poll, specifically, the inclusion of white politicians. This flowed into an argument about what a majority election might look like (Thloloe 1987, 1).

Through the ballot box, *Sowetan* found a way to allow its black readers to act "as if" they were really citizens with voting rights and to provide them with the opportunity for that significant act of democratic engagement. Even though their votes could not be counted towards South Africa's Parliament, the aspirant citizens' choices were taken seriously by the paper. The ballot box modelled, in a small way, what it would be like were there to be a truly democratic dispensation in South Africa.

In this historical moment, the newspaper explicitly allowed a collective imagining (and practising) by its readers of being a voting public. By hosting the election in its pages, the newspaper went beyond the more neutral conceptions of journalism to actively enter into civic life. This act of explicit campaigning extended beyond a purely oppositional approach to apartheid, in which the undemocratic *status quo* is attacked, to the facilitation of an election process, in which an approximation of democracy is produced. This moment of *Sowetan*'s evolution prefigured the more sustained constructing of citizenship that would become nation-building.

4 Nation-building

4.1 Aggrey Klaaste's "big idea"

Joe Latakgomo was succeeded as editor by his deputy, Aggrey Klaaste, in 1988, after Latakgomo was made an assistant editor at the *Star*. Percy Qoboza, editor of *City Press*, had died shortly before, and the *Financial Mail* characterised both Latakgomo and Klaaste as Qoboza's "heirs apparent", "players in a difficult and often dangerous game that is little understood by any but the initiated" (Aggrey Klaaste and Joe Latakgomo: Putting on heirs 1988, 69). The black press was an outlet for black people's aspirations and frustrations, the *FM* argued, so black editors "confront great expectations and even greater pressures from rival social and political groups striving to claim their allegiance" (Aggrey Klaaste and Joe Latakgomo: Putting on heirs 1988, 69). Latakgomo was quoted as saying that *Sowetan* job was "the toughest editorship in the country" (Aggrey Klaaste and Joe Latakgomo: Putting on heirs 1988, 69).

Klaaste had worked for *Golden City Post*, and then for the *World*. He was detained for six months in 1977, when the *World* was banned, and had gone on to be a Nieman fellow at Harvard University in the U.S., an appointment that carries a certain prestige in South Africa's journalistic fraternity. He wrote a hard-hitting column about life under apartheid, "On the line", in the *Sowetan* from its inception in 1981 (see 1981a; 1981b). However, despite these credentials, the *FM* noted that Klaaste had been criticised for being "weak" in "political commitment and leadership" (Aggrey Klaaste and Joe Latakgomo: Putting on heirs 1988, 69). Another anonymous concern was that "he might be swayed by forceful personalities on the newspaper who ardently espouse black consciousness (BC)" (Aggrey Klaaste and Joe Latakgomo: Putting on heirs 1988, 69).

Klaaste soon proved that he had persuasive powers of his own. In August 1988, shortly after assuming the editorship, he introduced nation-building, which was to become a key project of the *Sowetan*. Years later, Mathatha Tsedu, who worked for *Sowetan* as a young journalist through Klaaste's editorship, describes its inception in this way:

> As the flames of ungovernability engulfed our communities and structures and morals broke down, Bra Aggrey used his position as editor of *Sowetan* for brainstorming publicly and loudly what he called the Big Idea.

> The Big Idea was to eventually evolve into nation-building, a concept that came before its time, but in its time. Many hotheads like myself argued with him endlessly, saying the demands of the revolution were not to rebuild, but to destroy the structures of the regime of the time … But he would have none of that …
>
> The future, he always argued, lay with us, and we could not destroy ourselves and hope that once freedom was achieved we would wave a magic wand that would turn the clock back. How right he was and still is, but some of us were too deep into Marxism and revolutionary talk to grasp it. (Tsedu 2004, 4)

The idea of nation-building was advanced by campaigning columns written by Klaaste and through editorials in the paper, as well as in columns written by other senior journalists, in particular, Sam Mabe.[10] A journalist was assigned full-time to write stories about community projects and builders, and *Sowetan* changed its masthead to flag nation-building. Black achievers were encouraged to get involved, and *Sowetan* reported on community projects and held symposia on issues affecting black communities. Klaaste tirelessly promoted the idea in other forums, both in black community structures and among the white establishment (Nyatsumba 1989, 7).

The initiative was written about approvingly by *Sowetan*'s Argus Company stable mates. The *Star* announced the project by running a profile on Klaaste headlined: "I have a dream, says top editor" (Nyatsumba 1988, 13). The dream was "to save this country", the article said. "Mr Klaaste believes further that black people – through his newspaper, which he is planning to give a new face – can play a significant role in taking the country out of its quandary and political morass" (Nyatsumba 1988, 13). Klaaste was quoted as saying: "The problem is that we have always focused exclusively on political power and forgotten the other equally important aspects of power." He identified this as the *ubuntu* (humanity) of ordinary black people.

In an article on political developments commissioned by the *Star,* political scientist Professor Lawrence Schlemmer described the project in this way:

> ... distressed by the breakdown of community organisation and morale in black communities, under the impact of apartheid and the state of emergency, [Klaaste] recently committed his newspaper to spearheading community re-mobilisation and nation-

> building, from the ground up, through positive,
> realisable development goals. (Schlemmer 1988, 15)

The *Weekly Mail* characterised Klaaste's vision as based on the Black Consciousness mantra "Black man, you are on your own" (Harber 1989, 15).

The idea was received with suspicion in some quarters. Klaaste listed some of the "interpretations" of nation-building in one of his early articles: it was linked to Pan-Africanism, allied to Black Consciousness, "something to do with Inkatha",[11] "the scuttling of the political struggle" and "more concerned with dinner parties" (Klaaste 1988a, 5). He responded by carefully positioning nation-building as not nailed to any political faction or ideological flag, but as "the nation's forum to sort out divisiveness" (Klaaste 1988a, 5). Nation-building was not an alternative to the struggle for liberation, but an addition to it. "I have said it is about time that people with leadership potential outside of political activism stood up to be counted. I did not say they should get out of the struggle," he wrote (Klaaste 1988a, 5).

In a later column, he reported that white intellectuals seemed "bothered by my seeming lack of bitterness and anger", seeing him as "naively apolitical" (Klaaste 1989a, 5). "For the last time, Nation Building may be ideological neutral, but it is radically, even revolutionary political" (Klaaste 1989a, 5). The revolutionary aspect lay in the strong emphasis on self-reliance, which made nation-building allied to Black Consciousness "in its way" (Klaaste 1988a, 5). Early on, Klaaste urged taxi owners to "copy Afrikaans business methods" by "sticking together" and stopping their "dependence on whites" (Ngcobo 1988, 3). "You must assume a larger vision underpinned by the indefinable quality (*ubuntu*) we blacks have," *Business Day* quoted him as saying (Ngcobo 1988, 3).

4.2 Nation-building established

A year into the "the big idea", *Sowetan* carried a "Nation Building manifesto" that outlined what it meant in practice: rebuilding structures in black communities; "striving for the best in all that we do for ourselves and our people"; an effort to gain control of structures of power; creating leadership; and having a vision for the future: "Let us, therefore, set ourselves goals and design objectives and a programme of action that will set the wheels of Nation Building in motion" (Nation building manifesto 1989, 5). The manifesto marked *Sowetan's* commitment as a newspaper to the project of nation-building. The key points of the manifesto were the result of

continuous discussion of nation-building in the pages of *Sowetan*, as Klaaste, Mabe and other columnists attempted to articulate what it should be. The discussion included journalists and other media workers in the organisation, as I discuss below.

Klaaste's column was often a space for his ideas to be in dialogue with other approaches, a brainstorming approach, as Mathatha Tsedu remembers it (2004, 4). In one column, Klaaste wrote of an unnamed friend "who has in various courageous, responsible ways, showed me what it means to be committed to the struggle" and outlined the different positions they hold on the best way forward. The friend, he said, believed it would be necessary to go through a "bloodbath", "that we have to smash everything and start from scratch" (1989b, 5). Klaaste countered:

> I say to my friend, is it not better for us to build the hands, to develop the minds and skills that will rebuild this country if we go the whole hog to damnation? He smiles ruefully and says, give it a shot. (1989b, 5)

Klaaste's vision of nation-building and his project to get people behind it involved a discursive approach in which the idea was not presented as finalised, but as an ongoing work in progress in which anyone could become engaged.

As nation-building evolved, the *Sowetan* actively began to plan community initiatives, along with township organisations, churches, community leaders and businessmen. One of these was to upgrade township areas, to make them "as attractive and liveable as we can" (Comment 1988, 8). Part of this project was also to change misconceptions of townships as crime-ridden and "littered with dead bodies" (Comment 1988, 8). The project started with an area of Orlando East, one of the oldest townships in the country. Klaaste reported that he had received a donation from First National Bank "towards the first phase of the rebuilding of this area – the garden competition" (1988b, 5). He expressed the hope that they could convince tourists and white South Africans to spend time in the townships.

Another project was to rebuild Orlando High School, in order to address the dismal results of black students (Comment: We all have to move 1988, 4). Klaaste motivated for this project by referring to independence experiences in Africa, writing about how the Congolese had thought freedom would automatically lead to better lives, getting houses and cars (1988b, 5). South Africans could learn from history by not having such simplistic expectations, he argued, and instead of streaming out of the unliveable townships, try to make them better (1988b, 5). The intriguing aspect of this

column is that, at this stage, there was no definite indication that democracy was around the corner, although prominent South African businessmen were already talking to the ANC in exile (Sampson 2008, 222-234). Klaaste invoked a time of independence as if it were on the horizon, conjuring a new era. This resonates with the ballot box exercise, which constructed an election process for its readers.

Much of the work of nation-building was an attempt to rebuild dignity among blacks in a society that persistently denied them any status. Sometimes, nation-building drew on African legacies for inspiration; *ubuntu* was thus a central concept. A column by Lebamang Sebidi defined *ubuntu* as an African form of humanism. Sebidi argued that Western humanism puts man at the centre of things, but is "bedevilled by two intractable elements: *individualism* and *atheism"* (1988, 9). "Ubuntu – African humanism – is stubbornly and inherently anti-individualism while at the same time it is incurably religious," he wrote. *Ubuntuism*, as he called it, was inclusive, humane and concerned with community; "I am because they are and they are because I am." Nation-building, he argued, should include all sectors of society if it were to build on the concept of *ubuntu*, thus looking to a future of non-racialism. Once again, a democratic future is invoked.

Nation-building itself became a source of pride. In October 1989, *Sowetan* began a nation-building week with a prayer meeting at Regina Mundi church in Soweto. Klaaste characterised it in his column this way:

> This meeting captured exactly the spirit, the resonance of Nation Building – a serious, thoughtful, painful, slightly old-fashioned set-piece of items; good but serious music, good speakers and the theme that underlined that blacks have the innate dignity to act like leaders. (1989c, 4)

He invoked African and African-American political-intellectual legacies.

> I was reminded strangely of people like Professor DDT Jabavu and his ilk, who in days of yore displayed the type of dignity that a black man, given the right time and place, is able to exude … there was a feeling about this special event that reminded you of Martin Luther King, of Booker T Washington, of Dr A B Xuma, men of a particular substance whose footprints will be implanted in our history books. (1989c, 4)

The column is infused with Klaaste's almost spiritual feelings about the event. In contrast to "populist political anger" or "flippant but extremely popular" soccer games, he talked of a "dignified affair" "laid on with a gravity that takes our lives, our sorrows and our joys seriously" (1989c, 4). Here Klaaste drew a distinction between an opposition that aims to tear down the system, and nation-building, which intends to build the dignity, leadership and self-reliance of black South Africans.

Sam Mabe, in his column "Sam's Notebook", argued that nation-building was about rebuilding structures that had collapsed in communities, and about power.

> By power, we mean anything that can enhance our pride and respectability and which can increase our capacity to think and to do that which can make us a better people. (1988, 12)

African culture, as expressed in traditions such as Zulu stick-fighting, could be a source of pride (Mabe 1988, 12). In the same column, he salutes the publishing activities of the black publisher Skotaville Press, and encourages people to read, thus positioning the new and the traditional as equally important for African pride.

As *Sowetan* promoted nation-building and projects got under way, white business came on board to fund various projects. Klaaste was uncomfortable about some of the ways in which the white establishment saw nation-building (as a way to head off revolution), but pushed on regardless, starting with small local ventures and trying to build them into bigger projects (Harber 1989, 15). Mabe confronted the issue of white approval directly – "some members of the ruling class [who] seem to get excited about the Nation Building concept" (1989, 8). He wrote in one column that there are two ways to see empowerment, the liberal and the revolutionary.

> The liberal perspective suggests that blacks should empower themselves to be able to get more out of the system … In other words, it says that members of the ruling class are materially well-off because they are more educated and more skilled … and that for us to get as much as they do from the system, we have to be equally educated and skilled. (Mabe 1989, 8)

However, Mabe noted that this was an expedient approach that condoned a racial and class system that provided skills unequally. The black empowerment that was a cornerstone of nation-building, he argued, went far beyond that. It "equips the slave

with a deeper understanding of his master's mentality – the apartheid system" (Mabe 1989, 8). This empowerment enabled adults and children to identify the mental and physical structures of their enslavement and to break them down. He wrote:

> What we are after is our country. We are not asking for equal rights or equal opportunities. If you ask for equality from foreigners who are enslaving you in your own country, you will be recognising their right to rule you. (Mabe 1989, 8)

Mabe's rhetoric was more fiery than Klaaste's, but both position the black majority as "nation", implying a much larger presence than "community". In other ways, the concept of nation-building, while addressing the African majority, implied a wider purpose than serving the political aspirations of one ethnic group. It was community writ large as nation, building its own structures, regenerating schools, encouraging neighbourhood renewal and taking on the responsibilities of self-rule. Klaaste's nation-building could be characterised as moderate and middle class; rather than make the townships ungovernable, he stressed education, choir festivals, and business. But he explicitly drew on Black Consciousness for the core of the philosophy: radical self-reliance, in which the aim was for black communities to take charge of their own existence. That strand was clear in arguments that empowerment came from freeing the mind (and the structures of society) from the oppressor.

A type of public discussion associated with democracy was modelled through the nation-building focus. For example, the newspaper articles show that nation-building in its first years was constantly in dialogue with political and societal discourses. The discussion was open-ended, in the sense that nation-building was presented as an inquiry and invited other perspectives. Opposing views were given space within the columns. Nation-building was explicitly set up as not wedded to a movement or to particular political position, such as Charterist, Africanist, or BC intellectual legacies. It provided a broad church that could accommodate most political and societal legacies in the black community. This resonates with the Habermasean conception of public discussion in a democracy, as well as with normative expectations on the media to provide a space for diverse voices to discuss issues of common importance.

Although Klaaste pioneered nation-building, it was seeded before Klaaste's stewardship, as the legacy of the *World* and *Post* newspapers was explicitly taken up by Latakgomo and his team. The responsibility to "represent" the disenfranchised majority was embraced as a necessary adaptation of journalism's role in a democracy. The activism of Mwasa in the organisation, and the commercial advantages for the white owners of dominating the black market, freed up the editorial space of the newspaper. This allowed the journalists to take the paper in the direction of explicit opposition to apartheid and radical representation of their community. With the Ballot Box exercise, the newspaper shifted from a purely oppositional approach to orchestrate acts of citizenship.

The public re-imagining of citizenship was expanded through the narratives and projects of nation-building. In convening a public that engaged with community building, *Sowetan* offered an alternative to the street warfare of anti-apartheid activists and to the restrictive roles assigned to blacks by the apartheid state. This counter-public enacted the possible modes of engaged, local, thinking and acting citizenship for the black urban classes that could come into being in a democracy. These forms of publicness linked *Sowetan* readers and journalists to *modern* social imaginaries of the public sphere and democracy, as described in Chapter 3.

5 Leadership and organisational culture in *Sowetan's* founding period

The public interest is a significant normative concept in journalism practice, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4. From the perspective of organisational culture, then, such a concept is a crucial constituent in the values of journalism as an occupation. My focus on the public role of *Sowetan* in the 1980s provides a basis for understanding its organisational culture, as the group dynamics in the inception of an organisation establish the culture (see Schein 2010; Handy 1993; Kotter 1992; Pascale 1991). Schein notes:

> All groups and organizations face two archetypical problems: (1) survival in and adaptation to the external environment, and (2) integration of the internal processes to ensure the capacity to continue to survive and adapt. (2010, 3)

In simple terms, if the group develops practices in its early stages that help it to thrive, they will become integrated into the organisation's *modus operandi*.

Two fundamental bases of organisational culture are the leadership and how the organisation comprehends its core mission, understood by Schein as its "function in the larger scheme of things" (2010, 75). However, the mission and the leader are closely tied together, as the leader promotes the vision within the organisation. The adherence to the vision and leader, and the strength of the organisational culture, depends on the "length and emotional intensity of [its] actual history", Schein argues (2010, 3). The story of the *Sowetan* – from the turbulent demise of its predecessors, the *World* and the *Post*, to its relative stability as a nation-building newspaper – is a story of struggle. Representing the dispossessed black majority was always a key focus, but it took different forms in different contexts and eras. With Klaaste, previous forms of representation were melded into the nation-building project, but a sustained campaign was required to make it the key focus of *Sowetan*.

5.1 The role of Aggrey Klaaste

As we have seen, *Sowetan* didn't start out with a nation-building mission that underpinned its journalism. Its first editor, Joe Latakgomo, publicly espoused the impartial "professional" version of journalism, but with the responsibility to represent the black community articulated as an important focus. At the same time, *Sowetan* journalists, largely members of Mwasa, expressed their opposition to the system via "engaged journalism" (according to the *Star*) and protest against management.

Len Maseko, who worked as a young reporter for *Sowetan* from its early days as a freesheet, describes the journalists as keeping alive the tradition of activism that had developed in the *Post* and the *World* under Percy Qoboza's editorship.

> We were liberation fighters using a pen. We just saw ourselves as political soldiers and we were going out there to expose the brutalities of the system and how it was affecting our people. So that was our mindset from the start. (Maseko interview 2011)

The journalists also subscribed to journalistic codes, such as objectivity, fairness and balance. Maseko says he was taught that journalistic ethics were paramount in a training course for entry-level reporters he was required to take at the *Post*. Asked how he squared the different approaches, Maseko says:

> What was happening to our people also affected us. I know we could be objective to a certain extent, but somehow we told the story as we could, also adding the emotion that only our people could understand, but try to keep the ethics of journalism, of accuracy, of balancing a story. After you had spoken to the victims of whatever, in locations or whatever, you also spoke to the authorities. (Maseko interview 2011)

Maseko's description of the journalist's role resonates with Joe Latakgomo's public statements at the establishment of *Sowetan*, described above. Maseko does not distinguish, in his discussion, between the various approaches to journalism practice in the organisation, but sees them all as informing the journalism of *Sowetan*. This suggests that a variety of discourses co-existed (and sometimes conflicted) in the newsroom.

Mike Tissong, a Mwasa member who began work at *Sowetan* shortly before Klaaste became editor, describes the early stages of nation-building in this way:

> We were recording the history of the early stages of the turn-around of this country and in that sense those kinds of stories would not have been tolerated at other newspapers, whereas at *Sowetan* they were encouraged. And the stories that we generated were not only the negative stories you know of people being killed, of people being detained and oppressed etc, etc. Aggrey Klaaste came in with the idea that it's well and good for us to write those stories, but write about our heroes as well. You know write about the positive things that are coming out of this shattered society and that's when he developed the ideas of nation building. That the *Sowetan's* story should not only be about the oppression and the fight for liberation and those kinds of stories, but they should also be uplifting. (Tissong interview 2009)

Tissong, who was an Azapo member, said this approach was hard for *Sowetan* journalists to accept. "We actually confronted and fought Klaaste over the saying, you know, 'liberation now' and good stuff later" (Tissong interview 2009). But Klaaste's argument was "you can't have us just writing about the war for liberation and then no vision of what we are looking forward to after that" (Tissong interview 2009).

Klaaste's friend and former colleague Joe Thloloe has a similar memory of that time, as he wrote in a tribute to Klaaste after his death:

> When I asked him how he could even think of Nation Building in the middle of a revolution, when our responsibility was to tear down apartheid South Africa, he argued that even in a revolution, we needed nation building, and we as *Sowetan* had to acknowledge the efforts of unsung heroes and heroines who were doing their bit.
>
> Zola [Klaaste] was prophetic. A mere two years later, South Africa started on our road to 1994. He was vindicated. (Thloloe 2004, 15)

The *Mail & Guardian*, looking back on his tenure a decade into the transition, called him "a wise and far-sighted elder statesman whose contribution went beyond the purely journalistic" (RIP Aggrey Klaaste 2004, 30). The nation-building project, the newspaper argued:

> ... illustrated Klaaste's ability to look beyond the present. While most South Africans were nailing their colours to different political masts, he was preaching the improbable – that we are really one nation ... Through Nation Building, Klaaste also championed a unique form of committed journalism, where newspapers are one with the community of readers they serve. (RIP Aggrey Klaaste 2004, 30)

Nation-building was generally enacted through opinion pieces, editorials, projects and newspaper reports on the projects. This raises the question of whether nation-building was an integral core of the journalism of *Sowetan*, or confined to its editorial and political positioning. For example, Mike Siluma, who became editor a decade later, argues that nation-building was part of the newspaper's brand, promoted through Klaaste's columns and the analysis pages, and had little impact on ordinary day-to-day news reporting. [12]

On the other hand, Tissong argues strongly that *Sowetan* was "not just reporting on things but engaging and building" (Tissong interview 2009). When the paper reported on a dysfunctional school, for example, it would also try to raise funds for the school and get the community involved in it. It would then revisit the story

from time to time to map its progress. "The story wasn't just an event and ... then you move on to the next one. The story had life beyond just what was published" (Tissong interview 2009). In Tissong's view, the journalism thus merged with the nation-building focus. These disparate views of the relationship of nation-building to the full range of journalism at *Sowetan*, however, appear 20 years later, and are strongly coloured by the context in which they are made, as explored in Chapter 8.

Whatever the era, a close relationship to readers was central to the conceptions of journalism at the newspaper. Maseko says *Sowetan* was trusted by the community, and readers would simply walk into the offices with their problems.

> ... it was fighting for the underdog and the people embraced it as their own. Even now you see they call it 'our newspaper' and there was that affinity between us and the readers. It was everything to the people's lives. I mean it was an information bureau, if people were being attacked by police … by criminals, people would phone the *Sowetan*, and they would phone the *Sowetan* before they [would] phone the police. (Maseko interview 2011)[13]

What this meant for the culture of the newspaper is that the staff imagined themselves deeply embedded in the lives of their readers, understood as black township dwellers, engaged in their communities. The public of the *Sowetan* was therefore not the broader South African public, but the marginalised majority without rights, in need of representation and empowerment.

Klaaste merged different journalism approaches and contained conflicting views through his particular style of editing.

> Aggrey had an open door policy you know. Even I as a sub could come and discuss things with him and in that way it made us understand where he's coming from and also allowed him the opportunity to bounce ideas off other people. You know because he didn't come with a complete idea of nation building, it's something which evolved as he was editor of Sowetan so he would discuss it with everybody; you know 'this is my idea what do you think of it?' (Tissong interview 2009)

Klaaste's discussion with his staff in the 1980s was a genuine desire to engage with them and collaborate on the nation-building idea. Says Tissong: "You know he would never come and dictate; he always consulted, found out what people were thinking and in that way it honed his own thinking" (Tissong interview 2009). Klaaste was an educated man, with a degree from Wits University, unlike most of his journalists (Tissong interview 2009). However, Tissong says Klaaste did not mind being challenged and welcomed input.

Maseko says:

> Aggrey was a great leader. Aggrey was a statesman as well and he was a great leader in the sense that he nurtured his leaders. People that worked under him, he gave them serious responsibilities without looking over [their] shoulder[s]. (Maseko interview 2011)

From Tissong and Maseko's accounts, Klaaste created a democratic and egalitarian culture at the newspaper in the 1980s.

> There was always an endless flow of discussion. Nobody's doors were closed or you felt that you couldn't go into that area or you couldn't discuss the leader with the leader writer (who at the time used to be Joe Thloloe or Sam Mabe or Aggrey Klaaste). (Tissong interview 2009)

This extended to socialising new journalists into the newsroom.

> Until that first day at *Sowetan* in June 1990, I had never known starting a job could be that easy. Aggrey invited me into his office and, over a cup of tea, slowly and gently welcomed me into the fold. (Segola 2004, 19)

It appears that Klaaste's commitment to dialogue, to listening and allowing differing views and approaches to co-exist was important to obtaining the buy-in of *Sowetan* journalists. His political credentials as a former detainee and BC member also meant that he was listened to by his activist journalists. He persisted in promoting the ideas of nation-building, through the editorial pages, and ongoing discussion with staff. This is how nation-building came to be accepted as a primary focus for the

newspaper. What this meant, specifically, for the practice of *Sowetan* journalists is explored in Chapter 9.

The loyalty and affection Klaaste managed to inspire from his journalists was demonstrated at his death in 2004; the newspaper carried a special insert about him, with many pages of personal pieces from staffers and former colleagues, and people outside the paper. They serialised his articles for some weeks after his death. "The depth of our grief at *Sowetan* is unfathomable," wrote Junior Motsei (2004). Another colleague wrote:

> If you happened to be introduced to someone or to a group of people as being with Sowetan, almost always the rejoinder would be: "So you are with Aggrey." … His profile within the black community was such that he belonged to the people and they in turn owned him. (Segola 2004, 19)

The tributes to Klaaste on his death by staff members and former journalists from *Sowetan* underline that he attained the position of "founder" in the organisational culture, much in the way that Reith and Turner were founder figures for the BBC and CNN respectively. In other words, he occupied that position imaginatively in the organisation's culture by the time of his death, and his name was a reference point to the imagined glory days of *Sowetan's* past. His nation-building became part of the espoused values of the organisation, and journalists saw service to a black public – largely in a nation-building mode – as the *raison d'etre* of the newspaper. The journalists could imagine themselves as the special facilitators of opposition, representation and citizenship for their community – citizens of a special kind. Thus, at the *Sowetan*, ideas of nation, the public interest, and journalism were interpreted and enacted in highly specific ways.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has largely focused on the public position of *Sowetan* in the socio-political context of the 1980s and its impact on the broader journalistic culture. In this historical moment, the public-political aspects of *Sowetan* are foregrounded, making it possible to delineate the ways in which its public role developed. Commercial aspects of the newspaper, although crucial to the newspaper's establishment, are less visible. Many operations usually categorised as commercial emerge in media coverage of

Sowetan as political, such as ownership, resources, staffing and strikes. The traditional separation between the commercial and editorial functions of a newspaper played out in South Africa's black press in the apartheid period as a racial divide, a separation between black journalists and white managers. The contest between commercial and editorial functions, and the fight by journalists for editorial independence, was subsumed into a struggle by black people against the system.

However, the political positioning of the newspaper at particular moments cannot be separated from commercial issues – it could attract readers, which meant more advertising, but also action from the authorities, which could potentially cost the newspaper revenue. Under Aggrey Klaaste's editorship, for example, the *Sowetan* became the largest circulation newspaper in the country (see Appendix A, page 255). By 1990, its circulation had reached 200 000 (Sowetan vaar beter 1990), making it a publishing success story. The growth in circulation made the Argus Company the dominant publisher in the black press, and the nation-building focus did not conflict with Argus's own liberal position. These political economic issues will be further explored in Chapter 7.

An important aspect of the publicness of the *Sowetan* during this time was its emphasis on discussion and dialogue. This form of journalism constituted a public that talked, accepted difference, and acted to uplift the community. The black urban readers that formed the basic public of the newspaper were imagined as the nation of the country. Nation-building, as a project of engagement and consensus, with its roots in both middle class aspiration and BC self-reliance, was an imaginary that could join both its readers and its journalists. It demanded ways of thinking and acting that prefigured the democracy that would be negotiated between the National Party government and the ANC in the early 1990s. Nation-building also resonated with the ANC's receptiveness in the late 1980s to negotiating a peaceful transition.

The paper's history is significant not only to the re-imagining of its relationship with its readers and the rethinking of content, but also for the ways in which it informed the organisational culture and professional practice of *Sowetan* journalists. The *Sowetan*'s responsibility to represent a marginalised public meant that journalism was interpreted differently from the journalism of other newspapers in the Argus group, and from the disengaged journalism of impartiality. The notion of service in such an environment was not conceptualised as the public interest, with "public" indicating all the citizens of a society in which they are represented. Instead,

the attachment to a form of public good was expressed through representation, opposition and finally nation-building.

It should be noted that this chapter is not an exhaustive history of *Sowetan*, but an investigation of a seminal period in its life. I use newspaper texts and memories of the period in the interviews to examine the issues raised by the case study. Comparing contemporary texts with the individual accounts given years later indicate how the legacy of the newspaper has been reconstructed, what differences are now elided, what is emphasized and consecrated in a later period in its life. The present-day "contemporary constructions" of the past highlight what is significant to the interviewees in relation to current politics, ideas, and discourses.

Indications are that the founding period of the *Sowetan* entrenched a culture of struggle, a legacy of service to a disenfranchised, black community, and an attachment to Aggrey Klaaste as founder and nation-building as vision. While there was ongoing contestation at the time around nation-building and co-existing strands of journalistic and political practice, by 2004 it had been subsumed into a relatively seamless narrative. The circulation growth of the newspaper, its reach and influence, and its dominant position in the black market, made it an important institution of black public life. From an organisational theory perspective, an organisation that has achieved success with a certain set of strategies will be slow to adapt to changing external conditions. The intensity of *Sowetan's* early struggles, its imaginative link to past black newspapers, and its growth into a successful and influential publication deeply entrenched the organisational and journalistic culture of the founding period.

Notes on Chapter 6

[1] I use a formulation by Lynette Steenveld.

[2] Many white newspapers in the 1980s produced so-called "African editions", which had different front pages, and content aimed at black readers.

[3] These included: the monthly publications *Alex Times* and *Tembisa Times*, knock-and-drops distributed in Alexandra and Tembisa; *Soweto News*, published by SAAN; *Goal*, published by the football leagues; *Shopper*, published by a supermarket group; *Taxi*, published by a Soweto taxi owners' association; and *E Spotini*, the mouthpiece of the National Tavern Association (Fenton 1981, 31).

[4] Half the price of a loaf of white bread, which was 30 cents (Rabothata 1981, 1).

[5] The Black Sash was part of a group of NGOs and civic organisations, such as the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), and the Institute for Democratic Alternatives for South Africa (Idasa), which, according to Habib and Taylor, "conceived of themselves as liberal-oriented organizations and positioned themselves somewhere between the ideological extremes of Afrikaner and African nationalism", but were also "aligned to the anti-apartheid cause and concerned about giving assistance and support to the struggle" (1999, 74). "Almost all anti-apartheid NGOs experienced some degree of confrontation with the state during the 1980s. NGO leaders and activists were subjected to

banning, arrests, detentions without trial, death threats and assassination attempts, and having their homes and cars petrol bombed. NGOs were subjected to general Security Police harassment by having their telephones tapped, post intercepted, meetings disrupted, and structures infiltrated." (1999, 75).

[6] Personal conversation

[7] The Group Areas Act was introduced in 1950 as a measure "to preserve White South Africa" (Christopher 2001) by effecting separation of different racially categorized groups into specific areas set aside for those groups. According to Christopher, "The result was to be total segregation (apartheid), not the piecemeal results of colonial and Union segregationism" (2001, 103).

[8] See, for example, the *Financial Mail's* Black press: Situation vacant 1981, the *Cape Times's* "Barry Streek reviews the black press" (Streek 1986), and the *Argus*'s "David Wightman looks at the Black Press" (Wightman 1987).

[9] PWV (Pretoria, Witwatersrand, Vaal) was the name for the greater Johannesburg area, the towns of the "Rand", i.e. from Roodepoort to Springs, the greater Pretoria area, and some of the area extending into the countryside around these metropoles, corresponding roughly to what is now known as Gauteng province.

[10] See Maseko 2006 for a profile on Mabe.

[11] Inkatha was launched as a "cultural movement" in 1975 in the province of Natal by Zulu leader Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi (see Hassim 1993). According to Hassim, "Until the immediate post-Soweto period, the ANC regarded Buthelezi as an ally." However, in the late 1970s, Buthelezi's opposition to youth politics and his location in an apartheid-established Bantustan, kwaZulu, caused a divide between him and the ANC. "Increasingly, a Zulu nationalism, shot through with ethnic chauvinism and authoritarianism, began to be posited in opposition to the non-racial nationalism of the ANC" (Hassim 1993, 2).

[12] It may be that Siluma's observation was a product of the particular time in which he was editor, in which nation building was already established as a project for the company. This issue is addressed in greater detail in chapter 8.

[13] It should be noted that readers of the *Sun*, established decades later, behave in similar ways (Steenveld and Strelitz 2010).

Chapter 7: *Sowetan* in a time of change

Organisational theorists argue that the culture of an organisation is laid down in its founding period, and becomes entrenched as its 'DNA' (see Schein 2010; Kotter and Heskett 1992; Pascale 1991). However, there comes a time when the company's habitual strategies no longer deliver success, either because of developments within the organisation, or changes to the environment in which it operates, or both. In order to survive, the organisation must change. But, as Kotter and Heskett observe, after studying 20 top American companies, the transformation of certain cultures is extraordinarily difficult and frequently unsuccessful (1992, 78). It involves breaking the underlying paradigms on which the cultures are built.

In the case of the *Sowetan*, a particular kind of journalistic culture was laid down in its founding period, as Chapter 6 shows. Its public and political role dominated its operations throughout the 1980s, and was inextricably bound up with black township life and the politics of struggle under apartheid. Klaaste's nation-building became a keystone of the newspaper's public positioning; *Sowetan*'s version of the 'public interest'. From a business perspective, the newspaper was successful in growing its circulation (see Appendix A, page 255). The nation-building focus thus did not impede the commercial aspects of the business; rather, some argue that it was key to the newspaper's commercial success (Tissong interview 2009). Nation-building was predicated on moving South Africa's 'black African'[1] majority into imagining itself as 'the nation' and acting out its citizenship, as a counterpoint to its marginalised, disenfranchised position in the apartheid state.

South Africa's move towards democracy in the 1990s thus confronted *Sowetan* with significant changes. Political-economic forces, such as the inclusion of black South Africans in the economy and the removal of apartheid-era constraints on market forces (Southall 2004, 314), transformed the environment in which the newspaper operated. The changes were mostly expressed as economic challenges; changes in ownership, immense societal shifts for readers, and developments in the advertising and media industries. Thus, a focus on commercial issues is vividly evident in newspaper reports on *Sowetan* in the 1990s.[2] Articles about *Sowetan* in the 1980s are largely concerned with politics, with the few articles about the business of the newspaper confined to media and marketing sections. But in the years that follow, media coverage of the newspaper is almost exclusively concerned with what is

categorised, in critical political economy terms, as commercial/economic; ownership, circulation and advertising.[3]

Underwood (1993) and McManus (1994) have shown that when external conditions affect media markets – especially the loss of readers – industry leaders respond with a set of strategies. These arise from theories in the media industry about what is commercially viable and how newspapers can remain profitable. Such ideas about the commercial are translated into media production and journalism work in a range of material ways, as Underwood and McManus demonstrate. The impact is not simply on content, but goes to the ways in which journalists operate in newsrooms, how much autonomy they have, whether they work in teams or as individuals, the stories they can report on and in what ways. Scholarly literature from both organisational culture and the field of journalism work shows that such changes affect more than an individual's daily routine, but can go to the heart of his or her self concept, the imagined relationship that a particular employee has with the organisation and greater society. In the case of journalists, the impact of commercial factors on work they consider to be in the public interest can be deeply threatening (see, for example, Hujanen 2009; Dramat 2007; Beam 2006; McManus 1994; Underwood 1993).

As described in this chapter, *Sowetan* seemed relatively stable throughout the 1990s, then experienced a dramatic readership collapse in 2002 under the ownership of Nail, which I call here 'the Nail crisis'. This triggered *Sowetan's* sale to Johncom and its relaunch. However, in order to understand the debates around 'the Nail crisis' and the relaunch, it is necessary to examine the developments in the 1990s that preceded it. Accordingly, this chapter provides, first, a brief account of the historical context for the *Sowetan* in the 1990s, a period of transition from the apartheid state to a constitutional democracy. This was a time in which black people were incorporated into 'the South African nation' from which they had been excluded, which significantly changed the environment in which the *Sowetan* had positioned itself as 'nation-builder'. I sketch features that I contend were significant for the operating environment of the newspaper. I move then to focus on key areas of the newspaper's relationship with its external environment: ownership; advertising; and readership. These aspects of the newspaper's operations were implicated in the problems the newspaper faced in 'the Nail crisis' of the early 2000s; and the relaunch by Johncom that followed in 2004.

1 The South African transition

The late 1980s to mid-1990s saw a turbulent period of change from white minority rule towards inclusive democracy. The nature of the South African transition – what forces caused it, how it unfolded, the key players etc – is subject to many different perspectives in political studies (see Marais 2010). Those discussions are beyond the scope of my project; in this section, I merely set out some of the broad features of the transition in order to illustrate – and to understand – the scale of the changes faced by *Sowetan* (and indeed most news media in South Africa). These include: black economic empowerment (BEE); the growth and differentiation of "the black middle class"; and expansion and fragmentation in the advertising and media sectors.[4]

There is a school of thought that South Africa's negotiated transition from an apartheid state to a constitutional democracy was largely a consequence of global economic shifts. Political economist Hein Marais argues that, by the 1980s, South Africa's capitalist economy could not continue to develop along the same path (2010, 37), and that business began to see the need for structural changes. Chief among these was the inclusion of the black majority in the commercial activities of the society, in order to grow the market for consumer goods produced by the economy. The violent resistance to the apartheid system in the 1980s threatened outright instability; the resulting transition, Marais argues, was "a gamble by the apartheid state (supported by the economic elite) to resolve the political dimension of the crisis" (2010, 66). In other words, trade political control by whites for a democratically inclusive society, in order to retain control of (and grow) lucrative business interests in South Africa.

Marais notes that, in 1985, four major South African conglomerates, Anglo-American Corporation (which had a stake in commercial English-language media), the Rembrandt Group, Sanlam and Old Mutual, dominated the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, holding more than 80% of its listed shares (2010, 32). This made them significant players in the economy. Marais argues that

> considerable economic power and political weight continued to be concentrated in and around the MEC [mining-energy complex], key elements of which were now strategically focused on globalising their operations. (2010, 33)

These companies began to look towards negotiating a solution to the crisis.

On the other hand, Marais argues, the ANC in exile had made little headway with the armed struggle (2010, 58), and by 1985 certain key players became more receptive to meeting with businessmen who had interests in South Africa (Sampson 2008, 224). Anthony Sampson remembers that the ANC's leader in exile, Oliver Tambo, first met with American businessmen in 1985 (2008, 224). A group of South African businessmen flew to Lusaka later that year to meet Tambo (Sampson 2008, 225). After National Party leader P.W. Botha was ousted by F.W. de Klerk in 1989, ANC leaders were released, a referendum among white South Africans about their willingness for reforms was held, and 'talks about talks' began in 1990 (Marais 2010, 62). These led to an agreed Constitution and Bill of Rights. The first democratic elections were held in 1994, Nelson Mandela became president, and the South African economy opened to global markets (see Marais 2010).

The ANC's vision of National Democratic Revolution (NDR) prior to liberation saw it as unfolding in two stages: a national revolution, followed by a transition to socialism (Southall 2004, 313). However, as Clive Barnett observes, the peaceful transfer of power to an ANC-led government was accompanied by a revision of this position towards an economic policy that "posits redistribution as an outcome rather than a condition of economic growth" (1999, 653) and "an uneasy realignment of business with the new political regime and organized labour" (1999, 653). Moving away from state involvement in the economy, the ANC opted to rely on a "patriotic black bourgeoisie" to contribute to economic growth and development (Southall 2012; Saul 2012; Butler 2006). This repurposing of NDR envisaged the ANC leading change in society by deploying its cadres in both the public service and business (De Jager 2009, 280).

At the start of the 1990s, the media sector was dominated by Anglo-American and Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI) in a complex web of relationships (Tomaselli 1997, 16; Press to loosen the knot 1993, 32).[5] Tomaselli argues that "strategic movements in mining capital after 1990 were intentionally initiated by Anglo American and JCI in defence of their broader business interests, rather than purely those of the press" (1997, 16).[6] Anglo, JCI and Argus all began a process of "unbundling" – "selling off constituent parts" of their companies, some of which were earmarked for black ownership. The first unbundling by Argus was the *Sowetan*, which was put up for sale in the early 1990s (Tomaselli 1997, 16).

By the mid-1990s, a number of key black economic empowerment deals were

put together that, according to Barnett, "illustrated the convergence of the interests of new black capital and established white capital in the refashioning of a multi-racial capitalism" (1999, 653). These early empowerment deals have been characterised by Moeletsi Mbeki as the beginning of the co-option of black elites by white capital:

> Most people … naively believe that BEE was an invention of South Africa's black nationalists, especially the African National Congress, which won the first democratic election in April 1994 …
>
> BEE was, in fact, invented by South Africa's economic oligarchs, that handful of white businessmen and their families who control the commanding heights of the country's economy … (Mbeki 2009)

Mbeki notes that media company Nail, established in 1992, was a prime beneficiary of white capital, created by "South African insurance company, Sanlam," and the "Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), a state-owned industrial investment bank" (Mbeki 2009, 11). Mbeki argues that the object of such deals was to co-opt struggle leaders by transferring assets to them at no cost – in the case of Nail, he argues, to several ANC and PAC-affiliated leaders (Mbeki 2009, 11). ~~Mbeki argues that t~~These kinds of transactions were characterised as reparations to the previously disadvantaged, but in fact have largely been paid out to political elites, thus locking them into a relationship with white capital (Mbeki 2009, 11).

Nail, as we shall see, would become part-owner of *Sowetan* in 1994 and a player in the media sector. In 1996, JCI unbundled Johnnic Holdings, the company that owned TML. Led by Nail, a consortium consisting mostly of trade unions – the National Empowerment Consortium (NEC) – took a controlling share in it. Tomaselli notes that the NEC was, at the outset, "a loose association of business and unions" (1997, 16), but was later joined by Nail, among other BEE companies, for the Johnnic deal in 1996. "Although NAIL had the management experience and funds to buy Johnnic on its own, some of the other NEC constituents – as did Anglo – questioned Nail's commitment to black empowerment. The unions viewed Nail as a vehicle for black enrichment of an elite group of businessmen rather than facilitating real popular progress. Cyril Ramaphosa, then ANC General-Secretary, joined Nail in April 1996" Tomaselli 1997, 16.

The concerns about "black enrichment" expressed in the Johnnic deal

demonstrate that issues of class were already emerging, and there was a push to include working class and marginalised groups in BEE. Although the NEC did not initially acquire a majority share of Johnnic, 10 members of the new board of 20 were from the NEC, of whom four were union representatives, and the NEC chose the chairman, giving them *de facto* control of the company (Tomaselli 1997, 67).

John Saul argues that South Africa has followed the path of other African states post-liberation, in which the "national middle class" takes up the role of "intermediary" between the nation and a system of global capitalism that enriches this middle class, while increasing inequality in the society as a whole (2012, 348). Given its relatively disempowered position in relation to what Saul calls the global "Empire of Capital", South African capitalism is driven by global priorities and able to deliver only limited development, with the majority of its citizens remaining impoverished, he argues (2012, 349).

Alongside the growth of black capitalists came an expansion of the black middle class, or as Southall prefers, the "middle strata" (2012, 326). The term "middle class" is a slippery one. Southall reminds us it can refer to the "petite bourgeoisie" of classical Marxism: "petty capitalists, traders, shopkeepers and professionals" or the more liberal conceptions that define it through education, skills and status (2012, 328). In Marxist conceptions, this group sits "uneasily between the two great opposing forces of capitalist and proletariat … destined to be crushed in the battles between them unless they choose sides" (Southall 2012, 328). In liberal conceptions, the middle class is a stabilising force, because of its investment in the economic activity of society. This was the idea of the black middle class promoted by marketers in post-war South Africa, as chapter 5 recounts.

In apartheid South Africa, the idea of a black middle class tended to refer to teachers, white-collar workers, small store owners and those who were educated (Manoim 1983, 35). This group did not have the same opportunities for jobs and business as white South Africans and had very limited buying power. They were confined to the townships and other areas set aside for black South Africans, so that even self-made taxi or soccer millionaires lived among the poor and the working class. In these circumstances, educated individuals and the small businessmen comprised an elite, but the black middle class was not much more affluent than the working class (Marais 2010, 27).

Southall points out that use of the term "black middle class" is contentious,

"assuming a unity of group purpose and identity which may not exist in practice" (2012, 328). Depending on the definitions, the middle strata can range quite widely from the "upper" middle class of executives and professionals to relatively low-paid and low-status clerical and sales jobs (Southall 2012, 329). Drawing on data from Stats SA and the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), Southall shows that black South Africans (African, Coloured, Indian) held about 46,5% of all "non-manual jobs" in 1991, but only 20% of executive and managerial positions. By 2011, black South Africans occupied almost three out of four non-manual jobs; 87% of all clerical and sales jobs, two-thirds of professional, semi-professional and technical jobs and just below half of managerial, executive and administrative jobs (Southall 2012, 329).

The numbers show a massive shift in opportunities for black South Africans over the past 20 years, with about 3,5-million being added to the category of "non-manual occupations" (Southall 2012, 329). By contrast, the sector employed only 200 000 more white South Africans in 2011 than it did in 1991. Whites are still overrepresented (relative to their proportion of the population) in executive, managerial and administrative jobs. However, Southall notes that the long-term trend (from figures by the SAIRR) shows substantial growth in the proportion of national income for black South Africans – 28.9% in 1970, 53.9% in 1996, and 58% in 2010 (2012, 330). Added to that, the removal of apartheid legislation confining black South Africans to certain living areas, limiting where they are schooled, with whom they associate, and how they shop and play, has opened up lifestyle choices for people employed in white collar work.

Parallel to the growth of the black middle strata has been an increase in inequality, and the "upper" middle class has benefitted more than the "lower" middle class, and is "the principal beneficiary of a changing distribution in income" (Southall 2012, 330). This gap is even greater between rich and poor: the country's Gini Coefficient, a measure of inequality, increased from 0.66 in 1993 to 0.70 in 2008.[7] Manual work has turned from permanent employment to casual and temporary labour (Southall 2012, 330) and the mass of poor and unemployed is largely black and coloured.

> Although living standards for the majority of blacks have increased significantly since 1994, the last two

> decades have seen a simultaneous and very significant increasing differentiation among blacks along lines of class. (Southall 2012, 331)

The 1990s and 2000s thus saw rapid and major shifts among the black South Africans from whom *Sowetan* drew its readership.

It seems trite to say that readers are crucial to newspapers, which cannot exist without them. The point, however, is the ways in which readership is important, i.e., audiences have value to media to the extent that they can 'sell' them to advertisers, which targets readers as consumers, rather than publics (Gandy 2000, 47). Media producers construct their audiences in a process that Stuart Hall conceptualised as "encoding" (1993), while marketers construct audiences in a process known as "segmentation" (Gandy 2000, 47). As chapter 4 shows, journalists are more inclined to imagine themselves as serving a public, rather than selling to consumers, and market-oriented journalism needs to be successfully reframed as a service to readers for journalists to comfortably make the transition to different modes of production (Hujanen 2009; Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008). It follows, then, that huge societal shifts among the traditional readers of a newspaper would be a major challenge for that newspaper's established operations.

In addition to readership changes and BEE, a range of other developments affected the media sector during the 1990s, including the entry of global capital. Anglo-American unbundled the Argus Company and sold it off in phases to Irish media company, Independent Newspapers. Independent bought 31% of Argus in 1994, increased its stake to 58% in 1995, and finally acquired 100% in 1999 (Tomaselli 1997, 16; Berger 2002, 152). Other foreign acquisitions in the sector were Pearson's buying into *Business Day* and the *Financial Mail* and the Guardian group buying a controlling share of the *Mail & Guardian* (Berger 2002, 153). The magazine market saw the influx of international media brands such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *GQ* and *Marie Claire*, which were produced as South African editions.

Berger argues that the acquisition of the Argus Group, and a further four newspapers, by the foreign-owned Independent Group, increased the dominance of the former Argus in the market, as they acquired the morning and afternoon newspapers of two big cities (2002, 153). It should be noted that the Independent Group was criticised locally for its handling of its South African assets; the Independent squeezed its South African business for profits in order to keep its failing

international assets afloat.[8] Both the Guardian and Independent groups have since sold their South African interests.

Change to the media sector was on the ANC's agenda in the early 1990s, as a result of the media's legacy of acquiescence to the apartheid state (see the discussion in Daniels 2010, 96 -207). Harber notes:

> The ANC signalled early on in the post-1990 transition period that the media would get particular attention as both a sector in need of change and a vehicle for transformation in other sectors. (2014, 1)

In a 1992 speech, Nelson Mandela expressed concern about the monopoly of South African media by a few conglomerates and the lack of diversity in newsrooms, led largely by white middle-class men (he cited *Sowetan* as the one exception) (Harber 2014, 2). However, he also strongly affirmed the importance of a free press. The negotiated Constitution enshrined freedom of expression and freedom of the press in the Bill of Rights.[9] Thus, before the 1994 elections, the ANC looked to establish independent media institutions, "rather than exerting its own control over media" (Duncan 2009, 3).

Government also diversified the broadcasting sector by adding one free-to-air television channel to the existing three SABC stations and selling off a number of SABC radio stations to commercial companies (see Berger 2002 and Barnett 1999). A further initiative saw the introduction of a community radio sector, designed to be non-commercial and focused on reaching underserved communities, both geographic and communities of interest (Berger 2002; Barnett 1999). The cumulative effect of these developments was an increasingly competitive operating environment for media in the 1990s (Harber 2004d, 86). The proliferation of new media "gave advertisers a much wider choice of vehicle for their advertisements, and … fragmented audiences" (Cowling et al 2008, 104). The alternative press, which had existed mostly on foreign donations, found that funding dried up during the transition: *South*, *Vrye Weekblad* and *New Nation* died (Berger 2002, 53).

The commercial media were required to reflect on the role they played during apartheid at a special Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearing in 1997 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission report 1998). This was followed in 2000 by hearings at the Human Rights Commission into racism in the media (see Steenveld 2007b and

South African Human Rights Commission 2000), after a complaint was brought against the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sunday Times* by two black professional bodies. Steenveld notes that responses to the commission were not uniform across journalists and editors, or amongst black journalists and white journalists:

> The discourses of the journalists who engaged in the public debate reveal a tension between what many regard as "the principles of journalism" on which their "professional" identity is based and, for others, an awareness that those "principles" have not always been acted on, and have not served their or the public's interest. (2007b, 112)

Differences in values and practice among South African journalists and editors were also revealed by events that have generated heated debate in the sector. I briefly note here just two examples: conflict at the SABC; and the launch of brash new tabloids in the 2000s, many aimed at a black readership.

In the case of the SABC, there have been many crises around its management and its perceived closeness to government. Two studies have shown that journalists at the organisation are caught up in ongoing contestation around the nature and practice of journalism. Corinna Arndt details how beliefs related to editorial independence are highly contested in the news division; conflict over the values and practices of journalism has become so endemic that "the struggle around which ones should be dominant has become part of the institutional culture itself" (2007, 3). Cowling and Hamilton, on the other hand, found that professional practice and journalistic autonomy is highly contested at the broadcaster (2010). A controversy over the use of news commentators, they argue, "signalled more than simply a political struggle for control of the public broadcaster", but "centred on the definition and understanding of the term 'public interest'" (Cowling and Hamilton 2010, 93). The transition from being a state broadcaster to a public broadcaster has resulted in a set of disparate (and highly contested) journalism role conceptions and practices.

In the commercial sector, the introduction of a number of tabloid newspapers, including the *Sun* in 2002, was met with public concern. Wasserman writes that the "journalistic establishment perceived them as flaunting conventional norms like objectivity, neutrality and truth-telling through their sensationalist, opinionated and seemingly far-fetched stories" (2008, 789).

Some commentators have argued that tabloids extend access to marginalised groups, creating new reading publics (see Steenveld and Strelitz 2010; Wasserman 2009, 2008 and 2006). Critics of the tabloids pointed to news reports on peoples' accounts of *tokoloshes* and witches, and xenophobic and gender prejudice, to argue that the information and discussion facilitated by tabloids was unhealthy for the public life. Much of this criticism addressed questions of race; Joe Thloloe, former *Sowetan* journalist, UBJ member, and subsequently the press ombudsman, compared the *Sun* to the *Bantu World* of the 1950s, a publication contemptuous of its black readers and filled with sensation, crime and witchcraft (Thloloe quoted in Wasserman 2010, 48 and 68).

However, Wasserman's research shows that, unlike their Dutch and English counterparts, South African tabloid reporters "tended to express their professional identities more in terms of the ideals of public journalism or community journalism that they saw as having been forsaken by their mainstream counterparts …" (Wasserman 2009, 5). He found that tabloid journalists were strongly connected to the value of serving their readers, and renegotiated the values of mainstream journalism to align with new forms of service – a reframing of their work to service to a community, rather than public interest (see Steenveld and Strelitz 2010).

These contestations suggest that there is not an agreed vision for the role of journalism in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. Far from being an institution of society held together by a national professional imagination, or an occupational culture that adheres to largely similar role conceptions and work practices, South African journalism is uneven, fractured, and often conflicted. New ownership, developments in the black middle strata, increased competition for advertising and readers, and the ANC's change agenda for media all contributed to an unpredictable environment for journalism organisations post apartheid. In the following sections, I attempt to track how these greater societal changes played out for the *Sowetan* in different moments in the 1990s and early 2000s, focusing on the areas of ownership, advertising and readership.

2 Ownership and its impact

2.1 A "captive press"

As Chapter 5 describes, the commercial black press was owned by white capital from the 1930s, which led the Steyn Commission to note in the early 1980s that it was a

"captive press" (Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1982, 12). *Sowetan* was wholly owned by the Argus Company from its birth until 1994, and managed by it until 1997 (Parker 1997, 1). The Argus Company owned a range of newspapers, and media-related business such as distribution and printing (see Tomaselli 1997), which gave it considerable economies of scope and scale. The Argus Company provided stability to *Sowetan*, due to its dominant position in the market and tightly controlled ownership arrangements. However, *Sowetan* was only one of a large media portfolio that consisted largely of newspapers (Tomaselli 1997, 16).

Interviews with staff members employed during Argus's tenure indicate that there was ongoing tension between the "mother ship" and its township satellite. The *Sowetan* was the poor relation of the Argus group of newspapers, located in Industria, just outside Soweto.

> It was located among factories … it was like a converted factory. It had that feeling to it, even inside. It wasn't like *The Star*. It had all these corridors and things, quite cramped. (Siluma interview 2009)

The *Star* was the flagship newspaper of the Argus stable, and *Sowetan* was resourced with its hand-me-downs – old cars were sent there, old typewriters and furniture, salaries were lower and there was no training. Even old retired white sub-editors ended up there (Zondi interview 2010; Siluma interview 2009).

> So it was a graveyard shift, but that also permeated in the way people did things. They realised we are in the middle of nowhere, we're not wanted, we're the bastard kids, so it doesn't really matter how I do what I do. (Zondi interview 2010)

One outcome of the racialised ownership structure was that Mwasa, unlike other unions, incorporated black editorial management into its ranks, as well as workers, which made it a powerful player in the organisation. It continued to hold power throughout the 1990s, and well into the era of black economic empowerment (Zondi interview 2010; Siluma interview 2009). The relationship between the owners (including the business managers and subs seconded to the paper) and the newsroom, dominated by the explicitly BC union, was fraught and antagonistic.[10]

Commenting in 1981 on Mwasa's dominance, the *Star* asked: "Can a black

newspaper – operating under South African laws and owned by whites – ever faithfully portray the viewpoints and aspirations of black people?" (The future of the black press 1981, 4). The piece quotes Mwasa as saying that a white-owned paper would never be able to "fully mirror" the "black majority view". Ownership here was dealt with as a political issue, with an uncomplicated connection assumed between ownership and the capacity to authentically represent a particular group.

In this kind of environment, the editor's role is demanding. As discussed in chapter 4, the editor has the responsibility to deliver readers, control costs, appoint staff and set an editorial vision for the newspaper. The editor is thus the link between the journalists, the managers, and the owners. After Percy Qoboza resigned from the *Post* during the Mwasa strike, the *Financial Mail* pointed out that a new editor would need to deal with "politicised staff, edgy management and … paranoid government" (Black press: Situation vacant 1981, 172). Thus, although management is an important element in the commercial health of a newspaper, ownership of the *Sowetan* was discussed in the early 1980s as a political issue. In a relatively stable business environment, but an extremely volatile political environment, commercial discourse was overdetermined by the contestation around black self-determination and white dominance.

One of the key ways in which ownership can have an impact on a newspaper is through its control of or disbursement of resources. In the 1980s, there was a perception that the Argus Company made money from *Sowetan* without putting anything back. "Argus reaped a whole lot of money out of it at minimal cost" (Zondi interview 2010). Former editor Mike Siluma described Argus's approach as a "deal with the devil".

> We [are] going to accommodate you in conditions which are less than ideal, in other words inferior to those of the *Star*, we are going to let you get away with murder most of the time, we are not going to give you training necessarily, we are not going to insist on standards, but in return we are not going to pay you so well. (Siluma interview 2009)

However, a former manager of the newspaper, Mike Tissong, argues that the *Sowetan* was not very profitable in the early years, and nor were its forerunners, the *Post* and the *World*. In 1989, however, Rory Wilson was seconded to the paper from

Argus as general manager, and he and Klaaste developed a productive working relationship (Tissong interview 2009; Soul truth 1993, 16).

> Rory was the one manager who understood Aggrey's vision and made sure that, using his clout as a former sub-editor and understanding of editorial, he would force from the management … the disbursement of monies … to make sure that these ideas get going. (Zondi interview 2010)

Rory Wilson "effectively made a profit turn-around of *Sowetan*; and as *Sowetan* generated its own profits, the company was able to reinvest in its own infrastructure and then conditions improved after that" (Tissong interview 2009). He oversaw the introduction of basic systems necessary to manage the paper, such as publishing, editing and accounting (Soul truth 1993, 16).

In Wilson and Klaaste's time, the newspaper grew its circulation rapidly and became the most read daily in the country (see Appendix A, 255). Nation-building continued to be a cornerstone of *Sowetan* in the 1990s. The newspaper entered into a period of relative prosperity and became the largest daily in the country in 1992. It held that top spot for almost a decade, before repositioning by Nail led to a precipitous decline (see Appendix B, page 256). Even in 2001, shortly before the newspaper began to lose readers, AMPS showed that *Sowetan* was the most-read daily in the country, with two million readers per day (*Sowetan* remains SA's best-read daily 2001, 2). The "boom" in readers that had been predicted for black media in the years after World War II appeared to have finally come: to *Sowetan*, on the eve of democracy.

The power of the owners in the Argus era was thus not to compel the *Sowetan* to take a particular editorial line or produce certain types of content, but was mostly over the commercial functions of the newspaper; the appointment of managers, control over budgets, and the management of production, printing, distribution, advertising, marketing, and resources. Despite the newsroom's seeming insulation from the commercial part of the business, the work of journalists is shaped by parameters set by business imperatives. There is also an impact on organisational culture: at *Sowetan*, the journalists experienced the owners as neglectful, the newspaper as "the stepchild" and journalists as the "bastard kids" of the Argus Company. It was only during the Wilson-Klaaste era that management and editorial

was aligned, and that was attributed to Wilson himself rather than to the Argus Company's investment in the product. It is worth noting, however, that Wilson would not have been sent to *Sowetan* if the Argus had not considered it worthwhile to second one of their experienced managers there.

2.2 Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)

Changes in ownership were mooted in media coverage of the *Sowetan* for the first time in the 1990s. *Sowetan* seemed poised for success, and finally black ownership was on the cards. In September 1991, the ANC was reported to be interested in buying the *Sowetan*, but the Argus responded that the paper was showing strong growth and the company did not want to sell it. "But, apart from the paper making a profit, we are proud of it because we feel it is playing a valuable role in the communities it serves," Argus executive Peter McLean said, echoing the sentiments underlying nation-building (ANC newspaper 1991, 26). Here McLean articulates a normative liberal view, i.e., that the ideal situation for a newspaper is to be commercially viable, politically independent and serve the community.

But media monopolies and the need to restructure them became a predominant theme in articles referring to the *Sowetan*. The *Weekly Mail* noted in 1992 that control of the media, especially newspapers, was concentrated in a few companies.

> … 65 percent of all daily newspapers sold in the country are Anglo American-owned Argus/Times Media Limited newspapers. Apart from the *Citizen* (Perskor) and the *Natal Witness* in Pietermaritzburg, this combine has effective control of the English-language press. (Weekly Mail reporter 1992, 5)

The *Weekly Mail* pointed out that, in addition to ownership, Argus/TML also controlled the infrastructure vital to the operation of individual newspapers; organisations through which advertising was sold, and companies that printed and distributed newspapers:

> All this highlights the big problem of unbundling the big press groups. The operating companies (the "titles") are all integrated into a much bigger infrastructure controlled by Argus/TML. (Weekly Mail reporter 1992, 5)

In other words, the *Mail* argued, parcelling off bits of the media companies would not

address the underlying web of control exercised by the big media groups.

The Argus began a process of establishing a community trust, which would take a 45% share of *Sowetan*, with staff taking five percent (Rumney 1992, 5). The Argus Company formed a panel of eminent persons – including Soweto businessmen Sam Motsuenyane and Dr Nthato Motlana – to identify trustees who could act in the interests of the black community, an unusual move in the South African media sector. The one proviso was that the trustees could not be serving officers of political parties (Aunty Argus wields a new broom 1992, 57). Along with the refusal to sell *Sowetan* to the ANC, this move indicated a determination by the Argus Company to keep the newspaper out of the hands of politicians.

The planned transfer to a trust never happened. Motlana later told *Beeld* that he and his associates were totally against the proposal:

> It must be owned by black people who will run it on a commercial basis. Black people must become part of the economy. We already have Afrikaans and English business camps. I believe there must also be a black camp, although as we go along such distinctions will be less. (Von Keyserlingk 1994, 2)[11]

Motlana was thus articulating a view of media as a business, rather than a trust that could pursue the public interest, insulated from commercial considerations; a perspective in keeping with the greater push to include black South Africans in the economy.

In pursuit of this vision, Motlana and other black leaders (Sam Motsuenyane, Franklin Sonn, Paul Gama and Enos Mabuza) established a company called Prosper Africa, and Argus did the deal with them. In early 1994, before the first democratic elections took place, the Argus Company agreed to release control of *Sowetan* through a partnership arrangement with Prosper Africa, whose new subsidiary, New Africa Publishers, would acquire the newspaper (Argus to let Sowetan go? 1994, 3). The Argus Company agreed to continue to provide management services to the paper for five years.

Argus executive Doug Band said:

> This is not a sale to a political party. The board members are known as supporters of the ANC, but there are other diverse groups that will play a role. The

> transaction will empower black business and place control of the *Sowetan* in black community hands. (Argus unbundles the *Sowetan* 1994, 78)

Once again, Argus sought to allay concerns about political influence and stress the independence of *Sowetan*, which is guaranteed (it is implied) by its commercial status.

The deal was not without controversy. Prosper Africa had been the beneficiary of a stake in the newly established cell-phone company MTN, and the deal with Argus effectively saw the company paying for their share of *Sowetan* by cutting Argus in on the MTN stake. The *FM* noted:

> The group, which is led by Dr Nthato Motlana, got 52,5% of the Sowetan from the Argus Group by trading 6% in one of the two cellular networks now under construction – just three months after the ANC concluded a long series of tense negotiations with the networks, government and Cosatu aimed at increasing blacks' share of the networks. (Bidoli 1994, 67)

The ANC was furious that a stake they had negotiated "for black economic empowerment" had benefited the Argus Company (Bidoli 1994, 67). By contrast, former *Sowetan* staffer Thami Mazwai wrote in support of partnering with Argus, arguing that a drastic change in ownership and management could lead to the revolt of staff and the defection of suppliers, advertisers and readers, who required continuity.

> The bottom line is that if the Argus sells all its shares in the *Sowetan*, this would devalue the publication. Of what use would it then be to blacks, its intended buyers? …The unbundling of the *Sowetan* must be done on the basis of good business sense, not political emotions. (Mazwai 1992, 14)

In his column, Mazwai thus acknowledged the power of the monopolistic business environment in which the *Sowetan* would operate, and advocated "business sense" over "political emotions", setting the commercial and political up as oppositional.

Motlana himself took a pro-business line. "I am a capitalist with a human face ... I am definitely a proponent of the position that there is no better way to create wealth than the free-market system" (Von Keyserlingk 1994, 2). But he also cited the history of his struggle to establish a black newspaper, saying he had "worked since

the 1970s [with Biko and a BC organisation] for a life-affirming newspaper for black people" (Von Keyserlingk 1994, 2).[12] Motlana described the acquisition of the *Sowetan* as a "commercial" deal, rather than black economic empowerment.

Motlana and Mazwai, both of whom came out of the BC movement, appeared at this time to be articulating ideas that black business should operate according to commercial principles as a route to commercial independence. This was the reason given for the alliance with the big media companies. The distinctions being made between "commercial" and "political/empowerment" point to differing perspectives on how black South Africans should enter into the South African economy. The choice to partner with Argus tied new black business into old media monopolies, and reveals a divergence with the ANC on how black empowerment should unfold. Thus the ownership of the *Sowetan* did not go to a community-focused trust. It also did not become a single-owned newspaper, which to some extent protected it from being a lone newspaper in a market dominated by big companies. Instead, it was owned by Nail as part of a divergent portfolio of assets, and continued to be managed by the Argus Company through a partnership deal with the new owners. This was to have its own disadvantages, however.

Sowetan staff members were suspicious of the deal: they believed Motlana was too close to the ANC. In 1994, Wilson was deployed to Cape Newspapers by the Argus Company and Roger Wellsted became MD. Not two years later, Mwasa accused Wellsted of being manipulated by Motlana into "interfering with the editorial content of the newspaper" in order to push an ANC line (Golding-Duffy 1996a, 5). Other staff members were reported as believing that it was not Motlana, but the Argus Company (which had, in the intervening years, been acquired by the Independent Group) that wanted *Sowetan* to take a more ANC-friendly position, in order to head off government criticism of media monopolies (Golding-Duffy 1996a, 5). This particular point resonates with the critical political economy argument that global media companies tend to produce content that is light-weight and promotes consumerism, rather than social critique and activism (McChesney 2003, 36). However, it also speaks to Picard's position that the shape of ownership and its portfolios have an impact on management, as in this case there was little incentive for Argus to send its best managers to *Sowetan* when they could be deployed to their own newspapers.

According to two senior staffers of the *Sowetan*, during the period that

Argus/Independent had the management contract, the newspaper was mismanaged (Zondi interview 2010). "By the end of '96, *Sowetan* was running at a loss of R5-million" (Tissong interview 2009). Tissong ascribed the losses to bad management practices, such as increasing the print run unnecessarily, or expanding the pagination of the newspaper without having secured the necessary advertising.[13] Once again, we see the specific power of owners to affect the newspaper through their selection of managers.

The editor arrangements also changed. Klaaste became editor-in-chief in 1996, and Mike Siluma, who had joined *Sowetan* in 1995, was appointed editor (Sowetan wil steun só versterk 1996, 4). Klaaste left day-to-day editorial matters to focus on the nation-building programme, which moved away from being an editorial project and became a corporate social responsibility programme. He continued to write his column, to operate from the *Sowetan* building in Industria, to live in Soweto and to interact with staff.

2.3 Nail as owners

In 1997, Nail bought the rest of the *Sowetan* from Independent Newspaper Holdings, making it the sole owner (Nail takes 100pc of Sowetan 1997, 20).[14] The company also terminated its management agreement with the Independent Group (Parker 1997, 1). In 1998, Mike Tissong was appointed MD of New Africa Publications, which managed Nail's print interests, including *Sowetan*. Mwasa had a few skirmishes with management during the time that Nail was sole owner, complaining that staff members from inside the organisation were being overlooked for promotion in favour of external applicants (Grawitzky 1998, 2), or charging that the race and gender balance at the newspaper was not in line with the new equity requirements for companies (*Sowetan* reporter 2001, 3). The ownership change, therefore, did not dispel the wariness of Mwasa and *Sowetan* staff towards their owners, especially as Nail grew into an R8-billion conglomerate, enormously enriching its executives.

In 2000, Siluma left the newspaper, moving to Nail's head office, and an acting editor, Chris More, was appointed (Mahabane 2002, 24; Tissong interview 2009). Despite the change of owners, managers and senior editorial leaders, circulation remained relatively steady in the 1990s, and *Sowetan* held its position as the top-selling daily newspaper. But after 2000, circulation began to dip downward a little (see Appendix B, page 256). Then, in 2001, advertising revenue also dropped (Interim report 2001, 6). In response to this, Nail decided on a new business strategy

for *Sowetan*, which triggered the readership decline and consequent sale of the newspaper – 'the Nail crisis'– described below. In order to make sense of Nail's strategy, the next section looks at readership and advertising at the *Sowetan*.

3 Readership and advertising

Commercial media's dependence on advertising for its revenue means that what marketers and advertisers want, i.e., to reach those people most likely to buy their products, has a tendency to drive the industry in certain directions or to constrain it (see, for example, Cowling 2004; Bagdikian 2004; Herman and Chomsky 1988; Murdoch 1992). Some critical political economists have argued (see McChesney 2000; Bagdikian 2004) that the need to generate revenue can lead to media that target majority populations, tending not to serve cultural, religious or regional minorities, and use a lowest common denominator approach to content. Graham Murdock (1992) and Robert McChesney (2003) have argued that commercialism leads to a homogenisation of content and the commodifying of the news. As advertisers tend also to target affluent segments of the population, poor and working class communities are marginalised (Cowling 2004, 34)

This skewing appears in the case of South Africa's black press: Manoim argues that, in the post-war period, media with black audiences did not attract equivalent advertising to media with white audiences (1983), thus there was not sufficient advertising to grow the publications. The business of individual black newspapers was circumscribed by the political economy of the sector.

In order to target particular readers (understood as markets), newspapers make use of market research and statistics. In South Africa, the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) provides an independent measure of the numbers of copies sold by South African publications (known as circulation). In addition to this data, the industry also relies on research by the South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF) for other kinds of reader information, especially the numbers of readers per copy of a newspaper, which may vary widely.[15] Thus readership and circulation are not identical.

In 1989, SAARF developed the Living Standards Measure (LSM), which categorises audiences by the products they own and by lifestyle choices.[16] The LSM is now widely used by media planners and by media producers, often to target more affluent audiences. The LSM has been credited with allowing marketers to stop

reading race and rural/urban as markers of affluence and target potential consumers in black communities.[17] It is now commonplace in South Africa for media to talk about their audiences in terms of LSMs; and the importance of the LSM as a segmentation tool was underlined by the hearings into the advertising industry, as discussed below. As Gandy argues, the segmentation of media audiences tends to target them as consumers, rather than publics (2000, 47).

Berger reminds us:

> How audiences are constituted, how they consume media and what they make of this is clearly of critical bearing for the effective role of media. Unfortunately, while figures exist on the sizes of (some) audiences, very little research has been done on how they decode, negotiate, and make use of the contents of media. (1999, 110)

In other words, the numbers from the ABCs, AMPS and the LSMs can tell us roughly how many people are reading what and who they are in terms of the attributes being measured (how affluent, where they live, age, sex, race, home language etc). They cannot tell us why people read a newspaper or why they stop reading it. For that, additional research is needed.

For example, the *Post*, before it was closed, was the biggest black-readership newspaper in the country at a daily circulation of 112 000 (Fenton 1981, 31). After its establishment as a daily, the *Sowetan* averaged about 60 000 circulation, a significant knock for the Argus Company in loss of readers (and advertising revenue). Despite the fact that the newsroom was largely filled with the same journalists, it appeared that the *Sowetan* was not taken up as an automatic replacement by all the readers of the *Post*. The period of turbulence caused by the Mwasa strike, and the resignation of Percy Qoboza, may have played a role, but the reasons for the decline are not known, which demonstrates how unpredictable the relationship with readers can be.

As Appendix A (page 255) shows, by 1983, *Sowetan* was at 95 000 circulation. Only in 1986, five years after the demise of the *Post*, did *Sowetan* reach *Post*'s circulation figure. In 1989, under Klaaste and Wilson, circulation began to grow, overtaking the *Star* in 1991 (Sowetan is the biggest 1991, 4; Sowetan soars 1991, 30). It reached a daily circulation of more than 200 000, and maintained its top position for the rest of the decade.

An independent survey conducted in November 1989, targeting Soweto residents, found that it was the most popular newspaper, followed by *The Star* and the *Sunday Times* (Woods 1989, 4). The *Sowetan* readership in 1991, according to AMPS, was largely a young one, with 69% of readers under the age of 35, although mostly married. The *Sowetan* noted that more than 30% of their readers had completed matric or had another qualification, and almost two-thirds had bank accounts (*Sowetan* is the biggest 1991, 4). This appears to indicate that the paper was read by educated people in the townships, likely to be the 'black middle class' so desired by marketers. However, by extension, the other 60% of their readers would not have any qualification and a third would not have had bank accounts, which indicates a much larger pool of readers who would be at the bottom of the "middle strata" Roger Southall refers to, or would be unemployed or blue-collar workers.

Sowetan General Manager Rory Wilson ascribed the growth of the paper to "the burgeoning feeling of political freedom" and *Sowetan's* decision to be politically non-aligned and independent: "As the only black daily in SA, we need to be impartial" (*Sowetan* soars 1991, 30).

However, big advertisers were still not getting behind the paper: Wilson said support came "in dribs and drabs", generally from a few national retailers and a lot of small, local businesses (*Sowetan* soars 1991, 30). *Finance Week* in 1992 noted that growth in circulations of black readership newspapers was not translating into increased ad revenue (Black spend poser 1992, 37). Increased circulations in 1991 for *Sowetan* and *New Nation* (by 13% and 15% respectively) had coincided with a drop (in real terms) in adspend on "black, coloured and Asian newspapers" (Black spend poser 1992, 37; Trends in black and white 1992, 25). Although black buyers accounted for more than half of sales in most fast-moving consumer goods categories, adspend on historically white print media was more than R890-million, as opposed to R65,6-million on black [African], coloured and Asian magazines and newspapers (Black spend poser 1992, 37). It should be noted, however, that historically white media had significant numbers of black readers already in the 1990s, with AMPS putting the *Sunday Times*' black readers in 1991 at more than a million (*Sowetan* is the biggest 1991, 4).

In July 1992, a new-look *Sowetan* hit a peak of 291 000 copies sold in one day. *Finance Week's* Media and Marketing Focus saw this as entrenching the newspaper as South Africa's largest-selling daily, but also speculated that "the long-

awaited surge in adspend on black media may be gaining momentum" (Trends in black and white 1992, 25). It cited increased adspend in *Sowetan*, which had grown from 33 to 46 pages, as evidence for the growth, but noted that increased adspend on black print media "comes off a relatively low base" (Trends in black and white 1992, 25). In November, the *FM* notes that, although the *Sowetan's* ad revenues had increased 63% in a year, the *Star* (although no longer the circulation front-runner) "had display advertising worth R109,9m in the 12 months to September, compared with R18,7m in the *Sowetan*" (Unbundling of the *Sowetan* 1992, 84).

Sowetan commissioned an advertorial feature in *Leadership* in 1993, a strategy to sell the newspaper to potential advertisers. Aggrey Klaaste was quoted as saying, "*Sowetan* is much, much more than just a newspaper. We live the lives of our readers" (Soul truth 1993, 16). The article cited research that showed that "the average *Sowetan* reader spends 26 minutes reading the newspaper and 80% read it in their own homes, although just over 70% of readers buy the newspaper before 9am" (Soul truth 1993, 16). This information was presumably intended to demonstrate the closeness of the relationship between the newspaper and its readers, as they held on to it all day and then read it at home. Such closeness would translate into a good environment into which advertisers could place their ads, as this is believed to create the right associations for the product.

Research showcased in the *Leadership* piece shows that the vast majority of *Sowetan* readers – approximately 88% – supported the ANC, while almost 10% supported the PAC, and almost four percent Inkatha. *Sowetan*'s readers at this time were spread across a range of income and educational levels, and political affiliations. They were also largely African, young, and attached to the newspaper.

The next few years saw the *Sowetan* holding the top position among the dailies, and fluctuating around the 200 000 circulation mark. In 1995, it was just over 200 000 (Golding-Duffy 1996b, 9), and similarly in 1996 (Campher 1997, 7). Advertising agency Hunt Lascaris's group media director Lyndall Campher wrote:

> The *Sowetan's* great strength has always been that it was a community newspaper for Soweto, coupled with the presence of Aggrey Klaaste. This positioned the *Sowetan* in the community as it was seen to be putting something back into the community. (1997, 7)

In the first half of 2001, *Sowetan's* circulation dropped by two percent to 188 288, a decline that was attributed to a general decline in daily newspaper sales in South Africa. Berger points out that newspaper readership declined across publications from 1994 to 1999 (Berger 1999, 111), and this can be seen in Appendix B (page 256), so the drop may not have been specific to the *Sowetan*. Tissong, interviewed as MD of New Africa Publications, noted that *Sowetan* was still South Africa's best-selling daily and the top brand in the newspaper market. He said they were "working on strategies to adapt the newspaper to the changing market circumstances"; in particular, trying to "grow our proportion of top-end readers" without losing the existing 2.1-million readers (*Sowetan* is still no 1 in sales 2001, 3). Tissong feels that these strategies were getting the newspaper back on track (Tissong interview 2009). The circulation graph (Appendix C, 257) does show a lift in the second half of 2001, but it seems to mirror a lift from the previous year – in fact, the graph appears to have a pattern of zigzagging, downward in the first half, upward in the second. Not much can therefore be read into the upward tick of circulation in 2001.

Once again, advertising emerged as a problem. Nail said in its published results for the first half of 2001 that New Africa Publications had "experienced a disappointing period as a direct result of the softer advertising trends where the impact was particularly felt at the *Sowetan*, which reflected a weaker performance than the equivalent period last year" (Interim report 2001, 6). The newspaper thus faced a decline both in readers and in advertising revenue.[18] They were not the only black-focused media experiencing low levels of advertising despite large audience numbers; some new popular radio stations were struggling too.

In May 2001, the chairman of the portfolio committee on communication, Nat Kekana, argued in Parliament that "black media" were not getting their share of adspend, because decisions were made by a largely white advertising industry. He said that the advertising industry was largely unregulated, yet commanded huge budgets, which determined "what and who create, develop, package and distribute content of television, radio and print" ('Lily white' ad agencies lambasted 2001, 13). He said:

> A radio station with a predominantly white listenership received huge backing from the advertising industry,

> while another with a predominantly black listenership did not, despite both having the same broadcast "footprint", the same number of listeners and the same target audience. ('Lily white' ad agencies lambasted 2001, 13)

Commentator Tony Koenderman argued that the fact that the 'white' station, Radio Highveld, got more advertising than black audience Kaya FM might be due to "the difference in affluence of the two audiences" (Koenderman 2001, 82). He noted, however, that critics of the advertising industry did not buy this "market reality" position, and felt that the "white dolly birds" who bought media did not understand publications like the *Sowetan* (Koenderman 2001, 82).

In July, Kekana announced hearings into the advertising and marketing industry (Taylor 2001, 17), which took place over two years. A report presented to the hearings by research group Nielson demonstrated that 68% of adspend was targeted at LSMs 6-10, the most affluent 35% of the population (Wortley and Bolton 2002, 33). Further, the report showed that, in 2001, 93% of whites fell into LSMs 6-10, whereas only 17% of blacks (excluding Coloureds and Indians) fell into 6-10 (Wortley and Bolton 2002, 38). About 87% of LSM5, 67% of LSM6, and almost 40% of LSM7 were black (Wortley and Bolton 2002, 38), which indicates that black South Africans were significant in those LSM groupings. The household income for those segments in the second half of 2001 were R2 200, R3 500, and R 5 500 respectively (Wortley and Bolton 2002, 30).

The report argued that advertising was placed according to the target market of the advertiser, and LSMs were used to decide which media could deliver that market (see Wortley and Bolton 2002). The advancement of a commercial logic, in this contested arena, outflanked the government's argument that the media should serve the poor and the marginalised. The ruling party was hamstrung by its commitment to free-market policies, which included requiring the SABC to fund its public broadcasting mandate through commercialising its channels.

The logic of following adspend means that commercial media in South Africa must largely ignore the LSMs 1-5 – 68% of the population – in order to generate profits or even to be viable (Cowling 2004, 35). Poorer readers can attract retail advertising, but only if they are part of a mass audience, as advertisers follow the numbers. Thus many media products are created for the urban middle class, while the

poorer black majority is largely reliant on community media and public broadcasting for information. This situation undercuts the argument that commercial independence allows the news media to serve 'the people'; rather, they serve the richest third.

Further, as I have argued elsewhere, commercial newspapers in competitive environments are propelled in certain editorial directions as they develop strategies to attract advertising (see Cowling, Hadland and Tabi Tabe 2008). Some of these tactics have been to develop advertiser-friendly content, such as supplements, surveys and advertorial (Cowling, Hadland and Tabi Tabe 2008); other strategies have been targeted at readers, as Underwood's studies in declining readership in the U.S. have shown (1993).

In South Africa, as discussed in Chapter 8, it has sometimes been argued that there are only two ways to generate revenue: via a mass market that can attract retail adspend and advertising for staples; or through targeting the upper LSMs (Harber 2004c, 22). The decline in *Sowetan*'s traditional readership, low advertising revenue and the expansion of the black middle class, along with the idea that the upper LSMs were where the advertising was, triggered a major shift in strategy by *Sowetan*'s owners, Nail. This was a gamble that would tip *Sowetan* into dangerous territory and threaten its very survival.

4 The Nail crisis

Nail by the early 2000s was a very different company to the Argus of the 1980s and early 90s. By contrast to Argus's relative stability, Nail had experienced shareholder conflict and leadership changes. Chairman Nthato Motlana and executive director Jonty Sandler resigned in 1999 over a dispute with minority shareholders about the planned transfer of R130-million in share options to the four Nail directors (Rumney and Wilhelm 1999, 153). The two remaining directors, Dikgang Moseneke and Zwelakhe Sisulu, set about restructuring Nail, unbundling non-core assets and streamlining it into a financial services division and a media division (Kobokoane 2001, 4).

Despite the restructuring, and the introduction by Moseneke of principles of corporate governance, the share price declined by 40% from February 2000 to mid-2001 (Cohen 2001, 1). Moseneke then resigned from Nail, reportedly because of interference by the new shareholders. Saki Macozoma, who was closely connected to the ANC and then president Thabo Mbeki, took over as Nail CEO in July 2001.

At that stage, Nail's media holdings were New Africa Publications (NAP), which owned *Sowetan*, half of *Sowetan Sunday World*, and a few small publishing interests. Nail also owned a radio company. Media thus formed a very small part of its assets. NAP earned just over R5-million from the third quarter of 1999 to December 2000, about 3,4% of Nail's income. This was a drop from the previous earnings of close to R11-million, reported in September 1999. NAP did even more poorly in the six months to June 2001, *Sowetan* in particular losing ad revenue, while the tabloid *Sowetan Sunday World* continued to grow rapidly (Interim report 2001, 6).

Macozoma announced his intention of growing Nail into a "major media company", and said that "the new Nail executive team would be more hands-on than in the past" (Makhari 2001, 1). However, Nail's attempts to acquire Kagiso Media, which would have expanded their broadcast portfolio, were blocked by the regulator, Icasa. A bid to acquire Johncom fell through as the price was too high (Beckett 2003, x). Nail, with sufficient cash reserves to acquire media assets, was thus stymied in growing a media portfolio by regulatory issues and the inability to make a deal with existing print companies in the market.

Instead, Nail decided to reposition *Sowetan.* The advertising hearings appeared to demonstrate that two-thirds of adspend was targeted at higher LSMs, so Nail decided to aim for a more affluent and educated black market (Mahabane 2002, 24). The newspaper relaunched on January 31, 2002, under acting editor Chris More. An editorial announced the changes by referring to "the pedigreed line of newspapers preceding *Sowetan*" and the "founder-editor" of the *Bantu World*, Selope Thema, "also a founder-member of the African National Congress" (*Sowetan* poised for exciting new chapter 2002, 22). This was a shift in *Sowetan's* positioning from being politically impartial to an explicit link to the ANC (through Thema). The more recent history of the newspaper and its nation-building role was not mentioned. Tissong thought that it was possibly Klaaste who had written the editorial, and that he would have been too modest to talk about himself as a worthy predecessor.[19] However, it is curious that the editorial ignored 15 years of nation-building.

John Dludlu, a senior journalist at *Business Day*, became editor in June 2002, the same month that the tabloid daily *Sun* was launched. By the end of the year, *Sowetan's* circulation was 154 757, having "dropped spectacularly by 43 682 copies" (You're reading SA's no 1 paper 2003, 3). The *Star*, after 10 years, was back at the top with 164 364. But not for long: by 2003, the *Sun* had a circulation of 235 386, putting

it at number 1. *Sowetan* dropped further to 123 560 and to third place after the *Star*.

In March 2003, Nail CEO Saki Macozoma was asked whether "the decision to turn the newspaper into a middle-brow read, dumping the soccer and crime stories formula of the past, [has] been the correct one" (Msomi 2003, 3). He replied that the black middle class was likely to grow as a result of "empowerment initiatives and poverty eradication … the *Sowetan* must seek to prosper with its traditional readers, otherwise it will remain chained to the ghetto" (Msomi 2003, 3). Macozoma's remarks demonstrated a shift in the way the *Sowetan* reader was imagined; not as a nation-building, township community, but as the emerging black elite, now living in the suburbs. However, *Sowetan* under Nail was not able to make a successful shift to the black elite (the reasons given for this failure are explored further in the next chapter).

"In May 2003 Nail announced its intention to sell part of its media asset base, citing the need to improve strategic focus, as well as cash flow concerns" (Duncan 2004, 17), and put *Sowetan* and *Sowetan Sunday World* on the market. In February 2004, Johncom bought them. However, they did not take over immediately, as the Competition Commission needed to approve the deal, and for some months, *Sowetan* was in limbo. In June 2004, Klaaste fell ill and was hospitalised. During Dludlu's editorship, Klaaste had been moved to Nail's head office in Bryanston (Tissong 2004, 26). Mathatha Tsedu wrote:

> When the new owners at Nail moved in, he was removed from the paper and given new social responsibility duties at Nail's head office. As Nail is being sold, the uncertainty about his own fate, as other employees were retrenched, has been eating at him. (2004, 4)

Klaaste died shortly after Tsedu's tribute appeared, "as much from heartache as from the illness that took his life," according to Tissong, who wrote:

> Klaaste's heartache started two years ago when he was told he would have to leave *Sowetan* to relocate to Nail's offices in cold corporate Bryanston ...
>
> His concern was not only for himself, but also for his Nation Building programme which he felt had to be run from *Sowetan* and not from distant Bryanston. Nation

> Building was about people and their upliftment and it needed a voice and a life through *Sowetan*. (Tissong 2004, 26)

Tissong said Klaaste's column had gradually been downgraded in the paper (presumably by John Dludlu, although Tissong does not name anyone). When it was finally taken away from him, Tissong wrote that

> [I]t was like his umbilical cord to his beloved readers was painfully hacked off. Klaaste hardly came to *Sowetan* after that, and did so reluctantly for Nation Building trustees meetings. His heart was broken. (Tissong 2004, 26)

The newspaper produced a special supplement dedicated to Klaaste's memory, with many *Sowetan* journalists and former journalists writing tributes to him. The outpouring of emotion at Klaaste's death, and the publicly expressed anger at Nail, arguably indicated more than simple grief at the passing of a beloved leader: the *Sowetan* they knew seemed to be passing with him.

5 Conclusion

In the 1990s, *Sowetan* faced significant changes in its operating environment. Some of these affected the newspaper directly: changes in ownership, societal shifts for its readership base, and increased competition for advertising and readers. *Sowetan's* founder editor, Aggrey Klaaste, moved away from being a hands-on editor in the mid 1990s and then out of the newspaper completely. On the other hand, certain established features – inherent to *Sowetan's* historical position as a black newspaper – continued into the 1990s and 2000s, despite the transition. These included being a product built on a majority black readership, a continuing inability to attract as much advertising as historically white papers, and a difficult relationship with owners and the managers they appointed. Despite this, the newspaper became the top-selling daily in the 1990s and maintained a circulation of around 200 000 until the early 2000s.

It appears, then, that *Sowetan* was a circulation success *despite* its problems with ownership, advertising and political and labour turmoil described above and in the previous chapter. This success was often attributed to Aggrey Klaaste and nation-building (as discussed in the next chapter), and indeed the circulation climbed as the country moved towards its first democratic elections. In the 1990s, the environment

shifted towards negotiated settlement and democracy-building, and the *Sowetan* was aligned with that project. In this period, the newspaper also had little competition in the daily black readership market, which was likely to have been a factor in its circulation dominance. The inherent stability of the Argus Company, and its delivery of better management and more resources to *Sowetan* also contributed to the commercial health of the newspaper.

However, both elements of the newspaper's success – public position and commercial viability – began to be affected by changes in the environment: the movement of its readership from a marginalised counterpublic into full democratic citizenship; and increased competition for this readership by new or transforming media outlets. The decline of circulation from 2002 – the Nail crisis – appeared to be a dramatic collapse of readership, rather than a gentle decline, as Appendix C (page 257) shows. In the next chapter, I will look in more detail at the debate around what specifically caused the readership collapse. From an organisational perspective, the newspaper's failure to react decisively to the change around it would have eventually eroded its market edge (Kotter and Heskett 1992, 78).

The case of *Sowetan* bears out critical political economy perspectives that the power of owners to hire and fire managers and editors, their hold over resources, and ability to determine strategy for a publication can dramatically impact on the operations and culture of a newsroom. Also, the form of ownership and the nature of the portfolios media companies hold, can introduce significant challenges for the media they own, as the stewardship eras of the Argus Company and Nail show. However, it also shows that the power of the owners to achieve their vision is limited; it can be impeded by entrenched ways of doing things and even actively resisted. The power of owners is also limited by readers, advertisers, and investors, as these are crucial to the operations of media owned by corporations. Issues related to these constituencies were at the heart of the failure of Nail's relaunch strategy, despite its attempts to follow the established commercial tactic of chasing affluent readers.

The history of ownership of *Sowetan* also shows how racialised economic arrangements of the apartheid era set up an under-resourced product with distrustful staff. The assumption (expressed by, among others, the Steyn Commission) that black ownership would necessarily lead to better representation of the black community was not borne out in practice. The *Sowetan* newsroom was at odds with the new owners throughout their tenure, with Mwasa mounting a number of skirmishes over

operational issues. Black ownership, instead of freeing up the newspaper, appeared to bring new divisions. Some of these were related to politics, as Nail executives were seen as close to the ruling party, and *Sowetan* journalists were historically aligned to rival BC groupings. However, issues of status may also have played a role, with Nail executives wanting to follow black readers who were growing more affluent, rather than staying with a "ghetto" readership (Macozoma quoted in Msomi 2003, 3). As we see in Chapter 9, the legacy of the owner/management relationship played a part in constructing the organisational culture, and creating practices of resistance in the newsroom that persisted into the 2000s.

The danger of commercial media's dependence on advertising, a point raised in many critical political economy perspectives, is also demonstrated by *Sowetan's* situation. The newspaper's impressive ability to attract readers and grow its circulation through the 1980s and 1990s never yielded the kind of advertising revenue that historically white newspapers attracted. Limited ad revenue thus kept the newspaper resource-poor. It was the need to grow advertising that led Nail to refocus the newspaper on more affluent readers, a shift that tipped the newspaper into crisis. At this moment in the paper's history, attempting to act on an established commercial logic – that newspapers with higher LSMs were more profitable than mass market publications – was a key factor in the paper's decline. The owners' ideas of who the readers should be and how they should be served did not translate into a successful repositioning.

The normative discourse that sets up the commercial and the public interest aspects of journalism as fundamentally opposed is thus an oversimplification of the way in which newspapers operate. The flows of ideas, practices, values, conditions are entangled and complicated, sometimes coalescing to create a public and commercial success (such as the *Sowetan* of the early 1990s) and sometimes leading to dramatic failure. In South African newsrooms, commercial and political issues have been overdetermined by the racialised structures of the apartheid system. As the society began to change, divisions that were once between white (owners) and black (journalists) shifted, and so did alliances based on black opposition to the apartheid system. What emerged were deep rifts in the imagining of the newspaper's role, its readers, its identity and its culture. Ideas of the commercial and the public interest were implicated in these ruptures, but were not the primary cause.

The case of the *Sowetan* demonstrates that media companies operate in a fluid

and changing environment with many variables, so that there are few certainties of successful business practice. Change came to *Sowetan* over a decade, but it continued to operate in a broadly similar fashion and to hold its position in the market throughout the shifts in ownership and societal transitions. The Nail crisis, and the subsequent sale to Johncom, finally forced a moment of profound change upon them. The founder was dead, *Sowetan* readers were abandoning the newspaper, ownership was unstable and the newspaper's existence was threatened. In such an environment, Schein argues, it is the role of the leadership to transform organisational culture. But first the organisation has to decide what it has to transform to, and for *Sowetan*, this was far from clear.

Notes on Chapter 7

[1] The terms 'black', 'African', and 'coloured' were used in the apartheid system of legalised racial categorisation, and such usage has persisted into the present day. Where 'black', as in Black Consciousness, was used as a political term that united all categories of South Africans categorised as not white, African was used to refer to the indigenous population. It is contested by communities who lay claim to being African by virtue of living in Africa and identification.

[2] As part of my research, I accessed all articles on *Sowetan* through SAMedia, a Sabinet database subscribed to by the Wits University library; I searched across their clippings collection by using the keyword "Sowetan" and the date range 1980 – 2005. This observation is based on my reading of that collection of clippings.

[3] Observation based on reading of articles, as per previous footnote.

[4] I selected this list based on a reading of the articles, as per previous footnote, as these were the key themes that emerged for discussion in the collection of clippings.

[5] Times Media Limited was the descendant of South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN), one of the "big four" media groups, and the forerunner of Johnnic and Johncom, which bought the *Sowetan* in 2004.

[6] The page numbers for the article in the online edition of this journal are incorrect.

[7] However, it should be noted that the Gini Coefficient does not factor in social grants when calculating income inequality. See the following article by Lynley Donnelly in the *Mail & Guardian*, http://mg.co.za/article/2013-05-10-00-welfare-could-be-gini-in-the-bottle.

[8] Harber notes: "The Independent Group (owners of 18 titles including the *Star*, *Cape Times* and *Daily News*) has cut its total staff from 6 000 to a reported 1 500" (2014, 4). He also notes that certain specialist functions (such as business) have been merged into one unit that works for all the Independent's newspapers (Harber 2014, 4).

[9] Constitution of SA, Chapter 2, section 16 (1) (a) and (b). Retrieved from http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/1996/a108-96.pdf, on December 1, 2013.

[10] Taken from a presentation by Anton Harber at the School of Literature, Languages and Media, Wits University, 2013. He remembers:

My introduction to a highly-politicised, activist journalism came when I joined the *Sunday Post* a few months later. The *Post* and *Sunday Post* were the inheritors of the mantle of the *World* and *Sunday World*, banned a few years before. The daily production of the newspaper was in the hands of a Black Consciousness clique - such eminences as Zwelakhe Sisulu, Joe Thloloe, Thami Mazwai and Mathatha Tsedu, who made no bones about their brand of journalism: hard-core advocacy, where they defined themselves first as black activists and then as journalists, the latter only useful in service to the former. But the paper was owned by the deeply conservative Argus Company .. who lived in fear of their own journalists. What I experienced then was a journalism of subversion within the strictures of corporate control. It was a tough and unpleasant place to work, to say the least, and a hard place to be white, caught in the midst of an internal war between black radicals and cautious white bosses, with the repressive state machinery just waiting at the door for a chance to come in … That internal tension led

to the famous Mwasa strike of 1980, which gave me experience of the rough edge of trade unionism and the brutal limitations of journalism in a corporate culture… The strike led to the closure of the *Post* and *Sunday Post* and their replacement by the *Sowetan*, where I was deputy chief sub-editor. But it was a bitter, unpleasant place to work … (2013a,)

[11] Translated from the Afrikaans: "Dit moes deur swartmense besit word, wat dit op a kommersiële grondslag bedryf. Swartmense moet deel van die ekonomie bekom. Ons het reeds die Afrikaner and die Engelse sakekampe. Ek glo daar moet ook 'n swart sakekamp wees hoewel sulke onderskeidings gaandeweg minder relevant sal word".

[12] "Ek het my sedert die jare sewentig vir a lewensvatbare koerant vir swart mense beywer," se Dr Motlana. "In die begin, het ek, Steve Biko, en 'n organisasie wat swart bewustheid bevorder, gesukkel om geld van die Wereldraad van Kerke en ander oorsese bronne te werf. Ons het niks gekry nie en het eindelik aanvaar dat ons dit op ons eie sal moet doen."

[13] The print run of a newspaper refers to the number of copies ordered from the printer for distribution. Printing is one of the highest expenses of a newspaper, so the print run should closely approximate the numbers of newspapers likely to be sold. Pagination refers to the number of pages the newspaper is set at, and commercial newspapers usually decide their pagination based on advertising. In other words, newspapers have a rough rule-of-thumb for what proportion of the newspaper needs to carry advertising in order for the newspaper to be profitable. If the proportion drops too low, the costs of producing the pages and printing them will exceed the income of the newspaper, sending it into loss-making territory. (Based on discussions with Mike Martin, publisher of the *Mail & Guardian* when I was a supplements editor in 1998, responsible for pagination. I also managed pagination for the *Sunday Times* magazine in 1996, as assistant editor.)

[14] In spite of the headline to the article, Nail only took 95% of Sowetan, with 5% held by staff.

[15] See the SAARF website: www.saarf.co.za for information on their segmentation instruments and media and product surveys.

[16] See http://saarf.co.za/LSM/lsms.asp for background on the development of the LSM.

[17] It should be noted that SAARF specifically points out that the LSM does not measure household income, and is not necessarily able to predict how much disposable income a consumer has.

[18] According to Mike Tissong, *Sowetan*'s ad revenue financials in the period 1998-2004 are inaccessible, as they were recorded on a software system different to the one used by Johncom when it acquired the newspaper. In Nail's company reports, *Sowetan*'s total ad revenue is consolidated in the NAP financials, and thus it is not possible be accurate about ad revenue based on those figures, although general trends can be observed (email communication July 2014).

[19] Personal communication 2012.

Chapter 8: Saving the Sowetan: The relaunch of 2004

This chapter deals with the *occasion* for this research – the moment in which the *Sowetan* was acquired by Johncom in 2004 and the relaunch process that followed. This was the entry point into the research; I formulated my research question around this moment because I felt that the project of rethinking the newspaper would make the imaginings and practices of journalism available for analysis, in particular, revealing discourses of the public interest versus commercial imperatives. Because of the *Sowetan's* place as an institution of black society, it seemed that the contest would be between so-called 'commercial realities' and the normative desire to serve its historical public. In a sense, the case seemed to exemplify the commercial-public interest binary expressed by many critical political economists, as well as surfacing the "market-driven journalism" described in the studies in Underwood (1993) and McManus (1994). The conflict in the organisation suggested that there was not an easy "reframing" of a journalistic position, as described in the Finnish examples in Chapter 4 (Hujanen 2009; Kunelius and Ruusunoksa 2008).

The work of repositioning the *Sowetan* focused attention on issues and processes that are relatively established in a going concern. These entrenched ways of doing things are the bedrock of most organisations and difficult to change, as numerous organisational studies have shown (see, for example, Schein 2010, Kotter and Heskett 1992, and Pascale 1991). The challenge of stabilising *Sowetan's* circulation, after its collapse in the Nail crisis, required those involved in the relaunch to ask questions about the readers: who they were, what they wanted and what *Sowetan* meant to them. They were also required to negotiate societal changes, described in the previous chapter, which had resulted in social mobility and differentiation among black township dwellers and a highly competitive environment for readers and advertisers.

As this chapter shows, implementing changes at the *Sowetan* was a trial-and-error approach, and it generated resistance from many of the veteran editorial middle managers. However, the conflict did not break down into a simple binary of commercial interests versus public interest. Certainly, such debates took place, and they are outlined here. But new strategies were also disputed on the basis of their ability to be commercially effective, as, for example, the discussion of which readers to target and how to target them. These disputes are also shown here. I argue that

there was also conflict about the type of journalism that should be practised at the *Sowetan*.

Finally, there was conflict over the identity of the organisation that could not be said to be purely 'journalistic' in nature: conflict centred on day-to-day human practices such as eating, drinking, how journalists related to their colleagues both in and outside of the newsroom, how disciplinary issues were handled and so on. Although not originally a part of the research question, this organisational aspect of the journalism culture of the *Sowetan*, and its hostility to the incoming 'professional class' culture of Johncom, emerged as pivotal to the disputes. It is thus my position that the organisational and journalism cultures of the newspaper were intertwined, and that they could not be separated in the newsroom practices, although they can be identified for analysis. The organisational culture of *Sowetan* is more fully explored in Chapter 9, where I approach it from the perspective of organisational theory.

This chapter draws out the journalism aspects of the relaunch for analysis, outlining the dynamics of the change process, and describing key elements of the discourses around the transformation. First, I lay out the chronology of the sale and relaunch of *Sowetan*. I briefly note points of conflict, and differences in the understandings of what took place. To do this, I draw on published newspaper articles, interviews with key players, and strategy documents from Johncom. This opening section is designed to provide the context and background for the themes that emerge in the analysis.

Next, I identify and track various themes that arose from the interview data and the documents. I examine the discussion of the *Sowetan* as a public and commercial entity, and focus on the discourses relating to a number of disputed issues. These include: What went wrong? Who are our readers and how should we serve them? What strategies should be followed in rethinking *Sowetan*? I focus in particular on the contention about the readers, the gap between what is knowable about readers (set out in the industry research, circulation numbers, and sometimes interactions with actual readers), and the interpretations that this partial data gives rise to. I will show in this chapter that the readership is 'imagined', based on different and partial sources of information, and used to decide on features of readership that are unpredictable – these include what will attract readers and keep them reading the newspaper. Newspapers employ market research in an attempt to grasp these uncertainties, while journalists may receive bits of information about readers through

responses to their stories and personal interactions; both these sources of information can only supply a very limited amount of information about readership.

Within these uncertainties of audience, many journalists invoke normative attachments to ideas of serving the readers, conceptualised as the public, the community, or the people, as basic to the success of a newspaper. This chapter shows that *Sowetan* journalists imagined their readers as the black township classes the newspaper had historically represented. The idea that the reader responds to the commitment of the newspaper and its journalists also surfaced in the discussions; that readers abandon a publication that no longer serves them.

Conversely, so-called 'commercial' strategies sometimes adopt more instrumental approaches to readers, assuming that 'lighter' forms of journalism – sex, crimes and celebrity gossip – will deliver success. This chapter argues that neither of these positions is *necessarily* a recipe for success; each approach, or a combination, may work at different times and in different contexts. The relative success of different content choices cannot be predicted; the product must simply be put out into the market and the reaction monitored. This is how the reworked *Sowetan* became a mix of old and new, community content and tabloid reporting, a hybrid product resulting from compromises and adaptations.

1 Chronology of the acquisition and relaunch

1.1. The sale of the *Sowetan*

As chapter 7 shows, *Sowetan* began losing readers after Nail repositioned it in 2002, aiming at a higher LSM readership (see Appendix B, 256). Nail was then acquired by a consortium, which began to sell off its assets. In February 2004, Johncom made an offer for *Sowetan*. "We knew Nail was unbundling so we went through a process of looking at all of its assets," says Andy Gill, who was running business development for Johncom at the time. "We had always had a view that we required a daily newspaper at [Johncom] to be able to attract more retail advertising."[1] Part of the strategy was to have a seven-day week newspaper business (Andrew Gill interview 2010). Johncom already owned the *Sunday Times*, *Business Day* (a niche business daily) and a share of *Sowetan Sunday World*, based at *Sowetan's* offices and co-owned with Nail. The Sunday's 'sex-and-celeb' formula had been a circulation success, and Johncom proposed to acquire it from Nail.

The Competition Commission had to vet the acquisition, which meant there was an interregnum between the sale of *Sowetan* and the takeover of its operations. Media commentator Kevin Bloom wrote:

> With Johncom's proposed acquisition of New Africa Publications (NAP) titles *Sowetan* and *Sowetan Sunday World* under scrutiny by the Competition Commission, the media chiefs are forced to remain tight-lipped. (2004, 19)

For the *Sowetan* staff, this meant carrying on operations for six months amid speculation about whether it would go upmarket, downmarket, tabloid and so on. There were reports that Johncom planned to retrench more than 30 people (Sowaga 2004x, 4). Taryn Gill, who was employed by *Sowetan's* marketing arm, said this was an unpleasant time.

> It struck fear in everyone … I just remember our jobs [of selling the newspaper to advertisers] became increasingly more difficult. Morale started to dip. (Taryn Gill interview 2009)

Aggrey Klaaste fell ill, was hospitalised and died in June 2004. As discussed in previous chapters, his death was deeply felt and mourned by *Sowetan* staff, past and present.

During this waiting period, Johncom began to develop a strategy for the newspaper. "We did a lot of a) research and b) brought in our own experts to try and do some revamp and some work around those aspects" (Andrew Gill interview 2010). From Gill's perspective, the research showed that they were in trouble. "The older market still had a very large nation-building view of what the product was, but they said it was no longer representing them" (Andrew Gill interview 2010). Focus groups were asked to "personify" the *Sowetan* relative to the daily *Sun*; for example, they were asked to select people who best represented the *Sowetan* and the *Sun* in their minds. *"Sowetan* was Gary Player, daily *Sun* was Tiger Woods" (Andrew Gill interview 2010).[2] This suggested to the Johncom team that the *Sowetan* was associated with the old and staid, and the *Sun* was associated with the new and exciting.

Andrew Gill was tasked with managing the *Sowetan* project. Gill had many years of experience as a journalist, working for *Business Day* in Johannesburg and Reuters in London. He had migrated some years before from a position as editor of the *Business Times*, a section of the *Sunday Times*, to the commercial side of Johncom, specifically, new business development. This was not unusual for Johncom, which employed many former journalists on the commercial side of the operations, promoting them into marketing, circulation, new business, product development and publishing (Andrew Gill interview 2010).

Gill approached Lloyd Coutts and asked him to join them in working on the redesign of *Sowetan* (Coutts interview 2010; Andrew Gill interview 2010). Coutts was an experienced journalist, who had worked in editorial management at the *Sunday World* with Thabo Leshilo, then editor. Coutts had worked at a range of publications, and also had some experience as a media consultant.

Coutts says there were a few initial meetings with Johncom executives, where they "discussed … the bigger picture. At that point, they hadn't decided who was going to be where" (Coutts interview 2010). He was asked to write a report on the situation at the *Sowetan*. He wrote a detailed overview of the people, the editorial processes, the newsroom structures, and touched on some issues of the culture. The focus of the report was to highlight potential problem areas (and people) and to identify potential talent. He noted:

> The current editorial leadership inherited a newspaper that had been depleted of resources in critical areas, such as the subs room, the news desk and the newsroom. Since then, the paper has lost heavyweights, including luminaries such as Aggrey Klaaste and Don Mattera, who gave the paper most of its character and identity, Mathatha Tsedu and latterly Miranda Strydom, William Mervyn Gumede and a host of others to *The Star*, the SABC and *This Day*. (Coutts 2004, 1)

It is clear from the report that Johncom was already considering making *Sowetan* a more "downmarket" tabloid, and was concerned about how this would affect advertising revenue, which was still coming in. Coutts reported: "*Sowetan* is profitable and its costs are falling, although there is some awareness that this is a false economy and that the sales figures will eventually catch up with the operation" (Coutts 2004, 6). He pointed to potential resistance from "more ideological members

of staff, who are proud of the history of the paper and perhaps still hanker for its role as an agent for struggle and change" (Coutts 2004, 6). Noting staffing shortages, Coutts sounded a note of caution about retrenching any editorial staff and set out a list of training (and retraining) needs.

Coutts spent a couple of months at Johncom's Rosebank offices "working on putting the product together, a redesign", with Nadine Dreyer, a Johncom employee (Coutts interview 2010). They added a designer from the *Sowetan*, John Tsatsi, and a designer from the *Sunday World*, Mzi Oliphant, to the team (Coutts interview 2010) - four "very smart people", in Andrew Gill's words (Andrew Gill interview 2010). Coutts investigated different kinds of tabloids, specifically, the U.K. "red tops" (light and sensationalist) and the "blue tops" (more serious), but said he liked the idea of the Brazilian tabloids ("purple tops"), which included both light and serious content (Coutts interview 2010).

1.2 Taking over operations

Once the Competition Commission had approved the deal, Johncom moved Gill over to *Sowetan* as publisher, to do "a fix-it job for about a year and a half" (Andrew Gill interview 2010). Thabo Leshilo was appointed editor of *Sowetan* and *Sunday World*. Leshilo was a senior editor, who had edited the *Pretoria News* and *Business Times*, and had previously edited *Sunday World*. *Sowetan's* current editor, John Dludlu, moved to Johncom's Rosebank offices, along with its MD, Mike Tissong, who was asked to assist with the merger of New Africa Publications (NAP) into Johncom. This entailed rationalising the commercial departments and retrenching 31 staff from those departments (Tissong interview 2009). Tissong then took up a position in Johncom's magazine division (Andrew Gill interview 2010).

Apart from John Tsatsi and Mzi Oliphant, Johncom did not involve anyone from *Sowetan* in the redesign, because "we felt the need to change the organisation" (Andrew Gill interview 2010).

> We ended up I suppose in three or four months losing three or four senior people, which we needed to do, and introduced our own people on the business end, be it circulation or [other] critical areas of publishing.
> (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

After the retrenchments, Gill's first order of business was to stabilise circulation, which had dropped below 100 000 on certain days of the week. He brought in a team

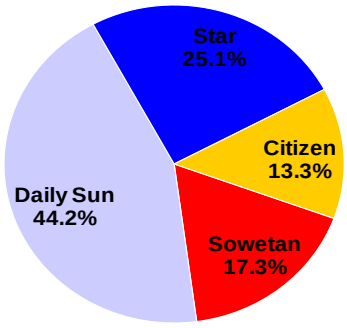
that specialised in distribution, using "high-tech, modern ways of looking at distribution – everything was numbers-focused" (Taryn Gill interview 2010). "We completely revamped circulation and we got circulation up very quickly" (Andrew Gill interview 2010). They did this by paying attention to the physical distribution of the newspaper, making sure it was available at commuter spots, like taxi ranks and train stations, and other outlets where it would potentially sell.[3]

While Johncom had brought in their own people on the business end, the editorial side was left largely untouched, except for the appointment of Leshilo as editor (Andrew Gill interview 2010). Despite his previous term in the building, Leshilo says his reception was "icy" (Leshilo interview 2010). It took a while for him to get his editorial managers on board; many deliberately absented themselves on deadline and he found himself working long hours from the first day (Leshilo interview 2010).

The design team also moved into the *Sowetan* offices. Nadine Dreyer was the project manager, but spent only one day at the Industria offices, citing the conditions as inadequate, and returned to Rosebank (Coutts interview 2010). Lloyd Coutts then became the project manager on site. An office was set aside for the design team; their task was to sell the redesign to the staff and to implement the new templates for pages and the content. Coutts presented the new vision for the *Sowetan* at a *bosberaad* [4] (Coutts interview 2010).

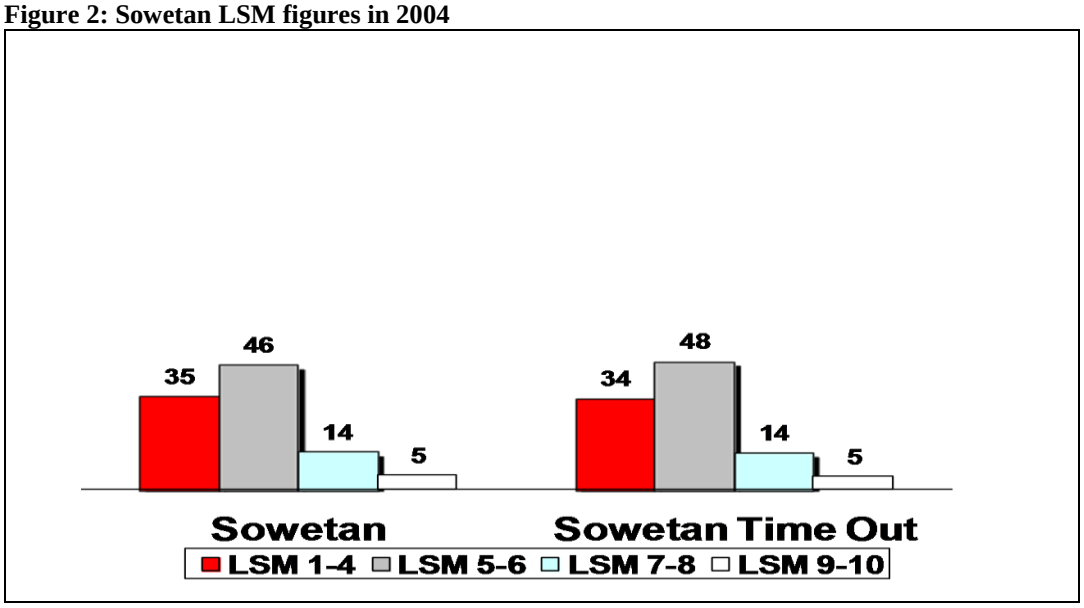
The presentation outlined the circulation losses of the previous two years, using graphs and statistics to demonstrate the extent of *Sowetan's* loss of readership. Figure 1, below, shows market share in 2004 (Sowetan: The thinking behind the dummy, 9).

Figure 1: Share of the daily market



The presentation also included the following table of the *Sowetan's* readers categorised by LSMs (Sowetan: Reasons behind the dummy, 15).

Figure 2: Sowetan LSM figures in 2004



The table showed *Sowetan's* readership (by percentage) spread over the LSM categories, with the majority sitting in LSMs 5-6, but considerable numbers in the bottom LSMs. There were relatively few readers in the higher LSMs – just under 20%, which would have translated to under 25 000 if circulation was about 120 000. However, these 25 000 readers were likely to include significant black players in business and politics.

Graphing LSMs 5 and 6 together at this point was an interesting choice of segmentation, as the Nielson presentation to the Advertising Hearings two years previously had drawn a dividing line between those two LSM categories. Nielson noted that LSMs 1-5 (68% of the population) received only a third of adspend because of their limited income, and 6-10 received the bulk of the revenue. The presentation shows that *Sowetan* executives were focusing on 5 and 6 as a crucial "middle" category of potentially mobile and aspirational readers (Sowetan: The thinking behind the dummy, 17), and it went on to identify LSMs 4-7 as their target market, "because of the segments' conspicuous spending [and] their potential for growth" (Sowetan: The thinking behind the dummy, 19).

Focus group research was presented, and it included the information that *Sowetan* was associated with former National Party heavyweight Pik Botha, and the *Sun* with pop diva Brenda Fassie.

The presentation gave some examples of tabloids the world over and outlined a tabloid approach for *Sowetan* that included celebrities, lifestyle and television, but balanced that with local stories and community issues. A lot of emphasis was placed on design. The presentation gave the following overview of the new look:

- Cut the copy
- Present information visually
- Use great photographs well
- Use bold, loud and extremely imaginative headlines
- Present a visually appealing package (Sowetan: The thinking behind the dummy 2004, 154)

One of the principles was that design would be basic to the conceptualisation of pages, rather than applied after the content had been produced.

The *Sowetan*'s new approach was specifically differentiated from the *Sun's*; stories of the bizarre and the supernatural, like a woman having sex with a snake or witches flying on to roofs, would not be acceptable.[5] But the presentation also stressed the importance of never boring the reader. Different inserts were proposed for different days, on jobs, television, community notices and so on.

Coutts said there was a lot of tension at the *bosberaad*. "The critical thing was going in there and saying 'listen this over-emphasis on politics has got to go' and that's when the resistance came in" (Coutts interview 2010). He said that he was attacked by a group he called "the old guard", who strongly resisted the idea of moving away from serious political content to a lighter approach. This was an element that provoked resistance from many of the senior staff.

The new-look *Sowetan* was launched in November 2004. *Sowetan* reported that:

> … hot young models dressed in the skimpiest skirts and boob tubes had red-blooded males salivating when they dished out the new-look, sexy and very vibey newspaper in the township. (Ntshinga 2004, 22)

The so-called "King of Kwaito",[6] Arthur Mafokate, was roped in to give away free copies of the newspaper in Soweto. The next edition was given out by popular deejay,

DJ Cleo (flanked by the girls), at two large taxi ranks. *Sowetan* published quotes from readers saying how much they liked the new version (Ntshinga 2004, 22). However, not everyone was thrilled. Console Tleane, head of research at the Freedom of Expression Institute, wrote in *City Press*:

> Percy Qoboza should be turning in his grave. Yes, I overheard him talking to Aggrey Klaaste over the telephone. "Definitely, this is not what we shaped. Not what we had in mind. For us, it was a matter of moving black people from gutter journalism to something deep, something more analytical." (Tleane 2004, 6)

He went on to proclaim the death of "the *Sowetan* that we knew" (2004, 6).

In the weeks that followed, the design team monitored the implementation of the new design, looking at the pages as they came in, interacting with the subs desk about the templates. Coutts was concerned that the content was sliding back to its old state; he kept pushing for his tabloid approach (Coutts interview 2010). Leshilo, on the other hand, wanted *Sowetan* to have some tabloid elements, but to continue to have serious content (Leshilo interview 2010). The paper was a hybrid of the old and new, a compromise of different visions, and Leshilo and Coutts clashed over their different perspectives (Coutts interview 2010). But circulation went up and advertising revenue came in, so *Sowetan* continued in this mode (Leshilo interview 2010; Andrew Gill interview 2010; see also Appendix C, 257).

Coutts left *Sowetan* for personal reasons (Coutts interview 2010). Andy Gill went back to Johncom in 2006; Leshilo stayed until 2008, when he went to the U.S. on a Nieman Fellowship. Taryn Gill was offered a place at the Johncom head office. *Sowetan* also finally moved out of its offices in Industria to join the *Sunday Times* and *Business Day* in Johncom's Rosebank offices. This moved *Sowetan* out of Soweto; the paper was no longer on the outskirts of the township, where it had been relatively accessible to its residents.

2 Discourses, theories, explanations

What was noticeable in the discussion about the sale and relaunch of *Sowetan* – both inside and outside the newspaper – was the range of different explanations advanced for why it was in a predicament, and what it should do to get out of it. The discussions made certain discourses visible; and the beliefs in those discourses about the way

newspapers operate commercially, their place in public life, the status of the reader and the state of the market (i.e. the environment in which media was operating). I set these out in order to demonstrate the different discourses about commercial 'realities' in black-readership newspapers. They also demonstrate some of the ideas around local conditions for newspapers that were afloat in the South African media at the time.

2.1 The Nail crisis: What went wrong?

As Chapter 7 outlines, Nail decided to reposition *Sowetan* towards higher LSMs, relaunched it in 2002 and employed a new editor, John Dludlu. In two years, it lost almost half its readers. As the chronology above sets out, there was an interregnum between the sale and Johncom taking over management of the newspaper, and in this limbo period, there was much media commentary on *Sowetan's* situation, and strategising at Johncom to relaunch the newspaper. One of the key questions was what went wrong in the two-year period before the sale; 'the Nail crisis'.

In simple terms, it appeared that Nail's strategy to move the newspaper to higher LSMs triggered the drop in readers. However, the period also saw the launch of the *Sun*, the first new daily aimed at a black readership to be launched since *New Nation* had closed some years previously. The *Sun* was thought to be a factor in the loss of readers. A small dip in readership prior to the Nail crisis also indicated that the problems may have pre-dated the Nail repositioning and the launch of the *Sun*. What emerges from the newspaper articles and the interviews I conducted is that there were multiple overlapping theories about what had led to the decline in readers, but the precise causes were not agreed upon. I set these out below, not in order to establish the 'reality' of the *Sowetan's* situation, but to show the variety of explanations. I do not attempt to verify each theory and to adjudicate between them, as the work I did of grounding them in audience research and circulation figures could not comprehensively establish the validity of one explanation over the others. Rather, I map the discussions in order to demonstrate the elusiveness of any definite agreement on the reasons for the collapse of circulation.

In the press commentary on the newspaper's situation, the problem was characterised as the *Sowetan's* "position", in other words, a combination of contextual and internal changes. Harber wrote that the newspaper had "lost a huge chunk of its readership in the past two years since it pushed itself upmarket and abandoned its position as the leading black mass-market paper" (Harber 2004c, 22), while Bloom referred to "Nail's repositioning towards a black middle-class audience" (2004, 31) as

a key factor in the decline. Bloom does not define the "black middle class", but his column refers to the higher LSM categories that Nail targeted in its repositioning. There is a lot of fuzziness in media reports around the term 'black middle class', which is never explicitly defined, and seems to include everyone from white-collar workers to newly emerging black capitalists – what Roger Southall calls "the black middle strata" (see Chapter 7, 161). The question of why black readers in the higher LSMs did not buy the paper is not answered in the article.

Many media pundits fingered the *Sun* and its entry into the market as the reason for the decline (Harber 2004b, 23; Harber 2004c, 22; and Mahabane 2004, 24); Harber wrote:

> The position traditionally held by the *Sowetan* has been filled. This is something like going to the bathroom in a restaurant and returning to find your seat and date have been stolen by an orangutan. (2004b, 23)

By contrast, the media executives who were close to the *Sowetan* and its relaunch strategy did not see the *Sun* as the *primary* factor; in other words, none of them believed that the *Sun* walked in and took away 100 000 *Sowetan* readers. At the time of the acquisition,

> we were not that concerned about the *Daily Sun*, which hadn't really taken off too heavily and was still attracting almost no advertising. So I think we hadn't discounted them but we didn't feel it was as much of a threat as it has become … (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Tissong noted that, at the time of the *Sun's* launch in 2001, it was "a lower LSM publication, so the two newspapers would have served completely different markets" (Tissong interview 2009). The *Sun* was targeting LSMs 1, 2 and 3, "blue-collar workers", whereas *Sowetan* was focusing (at the time the *Sun* was launched) on a more "upmarket" readership (Tissong interview 2009). In the 2004 table that Coutts presented at the *Sowetan* bosberaad (see Figure 2, above), the newspaper still appeared to have significant numbers of lower LSM readers, which was the category the *Sun* was focusing on. However, as discussed below, there was some controversy about just how accurate those figures were, and Andrew Gill felt that there had been losses in the lower LSMs in 2004 that were not showing up in AMPS.[7]

Unlike Tissong and Andrew Gill, Coutts saw the *Sun* as significant to the loss of readers. However, even he did not see it as the sole reason for the decline. In his presentation to staff about the new-look *Sowetan*, the reasons for *Sowetan*'s loss of readers were given as:

> - Misreading of the market
> - Competition from *Daily Sun*
> - Proliferation of media, but mostly
> - we produced a very poor newspaper out of touch with the needs of the market (*Sowetan*: The thinking behind the dummy, 11).

By this, Coutts meant that the paper was not serving its readers, or attracting potential readers.

Mike Tissong, who started work at the *Sowetan* in 1988 and thus had a long view of the problem, saw the readership decline as beginning after 2000, even though the circulation drop began in earnest in 2002, when Nail began repositioning (see Appendices B and C, 256-257). Tissong cites factors dating from 1995 as significant to the decline. The most important of these, in Tissong's opinion, was Klaaste's move from running the daily operations of the paper to being editor-in-chief, where his responsibility was to focus on the nation-building projects.

> *Sowetan* … chased the ordinary story, [the same story] as *The Star* was chasing, as every other newspaper was chasing and it began to lose some of its unique nation building flavour. …
>
> So I would say to a certain extent the content of the newspaper started changing because of Aggrey's lack of hands-on operation and that's when you had a succession of editors [coming in]. (Tissong interview 2009)

Ultimately, he ascribed the decline to the *abandonment of nation-building* as "the USP [unique selling point]" of the paper (Tissong interview 2009).

Andrew Gill believed there were a number of contributing factors, but also saw the move away from community news and nation-building as significant.

> Under Nail they had not only lost direction, but they had changed direction so often and that had created a situation where it was more important to be talking about Thabo Mbeki on a trip to Haiti than it was about particular issues in the township, in the areas that it serviced. The *Sowetan* didn't come from that place; it came from a place of nation building, being close to the community … they spent the last three years hiding from that and trying to create itself as this upper LSM product that its brand didn't really represent. (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Another cause that was advanced for the decline was the *social mobility* of black readers. Johncom executives were aware that the media environment had changed drastically. "The *Sunday Times* had gone from a predominantly white paper 15 to 20 years [before] to 75% black even by [2004]" (Andrew Gill interview 2010).[8] Newspapers like the *Star* and the *Sunday Times* were thus serving the needs of black middle-class readers for more national and general information, and news of the suburbs that they were now living or working in.

Nail's decision to move the newspaper to higher LSMs was based on what its executives saw as the move of the traditional *Sowetan* reader from the township to the formerly whites-only suburbs (Leshilo interview 2010). However, this would have been a very small proportion of the existing readers. Also, Leshilo argued, even those readers who no longer lived in the townships were still connected to them, migrating between the old and new neighbourhoods. When they read *Sowetan*, they read for its connection to the old neighbourhood (Leshilo interview 2010), for local, community stories, not for national and political news. He interpreted the decision to move up the LSMs as the *Sowetan* "deserting it readers". "It forgot its role – what it was supposed to do – and it walked away from its readers. And its readers obliged it and walked away in droves" (Leshilo interview 2010).

Linked to the social mobility argument, the idea of being out of touch – a *failure to adjust* to the changes in the society – was another theory advanced for *Sowetan*'s decline. Mike Siluma, who edited the paper from 1995 to 2000, noted that "the transition left *Sowetan* behind" (Siluma interview 2009). Similarly, Musa Zondi, a senior journalist who worked at *Sowetan* for two periods, one in the 1990s and then again under Avusa in the 2000s, said:

> Post ’94 there was a serious identity crisis in that … I’m not sure that readers were looking at [*Sowetan*] from the same “you are our champion” type of thing because they’ve since found that they could be champions in their own right. (Zondi interview 2010)

Nation building was a project that was both ‘community-building’ and ‘national’; community in its focus on black townships and community projects, and national in its imaginings of such communities as the majority citizens of the nation. It could be said to have its feet in the community and its eyes on the horizon. With the nation now actually the majority citizens, how would the traditional nation-building discourses play in the new dispensation? Although many commentators saw Klaaste as prescient in his vision (as Chapter 6 recounts), what purchase could it have post-1994?

Taryn Gill argued that *Sowetan* readers had changed, had moved from nation building, which was community focused, to self-empowerment in the “Oprah mode”, which was about individual advancement (Taryn Gill interview 2009). For her, the key problem was that the newspaper refused to “follow the readers”. Taryn Gill’s perspective is directly opposed to the arguments presented by others: that it was precisely the dropping of the nation-building focus that resulted in the loss of readers.

In this new environment, *Sowetan* got confused about its position and was “attacked from the top and the bottom”, according to Siluma, by which he meant the paper lost the lower LSM readers to the *Sun* and the higher LSM readers to the historically white-readership *Star* and *Citizen*. As discussed in the next section, the circulation and reader research show that *Sowetan* spanned a wide band of LSMs and had many different types of readers; it was a broad church, and was thus vulnerable to competition by more niche products.

Another contributory factor was considered to be a *lack of alignment between the owners and the leadership* of *Sowetan*, or, in simple terms, *management*. Nail set John Dludlu up against the staff by appointing him and briefing him without consulting *Sowetan’s* management (Tissong interview 2009). According to Mike Siluma, “the critical thing is whether the owners are willing to back the management. If the owners are not willing to back the management, the management won’t make progress” (Siluma interview 2009). Klaaste was moved to Nail’s head office, and his column was discontinued, which removed the founder figure from the organisation.

Andy Gill also flagged *management* – not simply Nail's management, but the years of managers before – as a legacy problem for *Sowetan*. When he arrived, he found a very hierarchical structure.

> People were scared to come into the management area. It was like a fear to come there; it was bizarre. The management through the years had really created this quite bizarre South African organisation. Owned by whiteys for a long time, run by whiteys for a long time … (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Another problem for the newspaper, which was never specifically discussed as a problem in the media and trade press, was with the *journalism practice*. Coutts' early report (2004, 2) noted a serious set of ruptures in the processes all along the production chain. This included a news editor who felt forced to go out and write stories himself, a depleted subs desk, and deadline times that were unrealistic for a morning daily. Coutts wrote:

> The organisation's structure is considered ineffective, due to a lack of understanding and commitment, and this appears to lead directly to quality problems. Copy is not cleaned or supervised by line managers, and results in a copy crunch by the time it gets to the subs room. (Coutts 2004, 1)

Coutts's report noted that the appearance of advertising was "erratic, and necessitated last-minute changes to pages" (Coutts 2004, 1). A number of "beats", such as crime and courts, were not covered. He set out a long list of training needs for staff in the report (Coutts 2004, 6).

Some of the media commentators referred to the *Sowetan*'s *focus on politics*, by which they meant a shift broadly in support of the ANC and Thabo Mbeki, as a factor in the loss of readers. The *Sowetan* "became the subject of a series of publishing decisions motivated by politics rather than the marketplace" (Harber 2004b, 23). Media journalist Dulile Sowaga also made this point in an article on *Sowetan*: "It isn't for an independent newspaper to please political masters, nor wise in terms of marketing to carry a political torch" (2004, 6). He was referring here to a

perceived shift from a politically inclusive perspective produced via nation building, despite the BC affiliations of the *Sowetan* journalists, to a pro-ANC slant under Nail.

This charge was made even more strongly by *Sowetan* and Johncom insiders; specifically, they saw *Sowetan* as reporting on and following then-president Thabo Mbeki and his doings too closely. This focus was perceived by *Sowetan's* Mwasa-aligned journalists, with their BC roots, as driven by Dludlu, under instructions by Saki Macozoma, an ANC "deployed cadre" (see Chapter 7, 159). Tissong charged that Nail had given Dludlu a mandate to deliver *Sowetan* readers to the ANC, which was seeking a two-thirds majority in the next election.

The incoming Johncom executives did not substantially disagree with this view. Both Gill and Leshilo noted that stories of Mbeki's travels or Richard Branson's visit to South Africa, for instance, took precedence over the local news readers were interested in. Whether this kind of political shift would have been a significant factor in alienating a largely ANC-aligned readership is difficult to calculate; the Johncom position was not so much that the political shift was off-putting to readers, but that content such as global diplomatic events, party politics, politicians' doings, etc was not interesting to them.

The differing explanations of media commentators, Johncom executives and *Sowetan* journalists for the newspaper's problems demonstrate the uncertainties of operating in a changing climate in the newspaper business. Even in hindsight, which specific factors caused the newspaper to lose readers during the Nail crisis were not fully understood or agreed upon. Most theories concurred on which factors were difficult for the newspaper, but how significant those features were to the loss of readers was contested. It was thus not possible to draw an agreed set of conclusions about what triggered the Nail crisis from the opinions and evidence presented.

2.2 Readership

In the discussions about what went wrong, readership was flagged as crucial; it was the decline that triggered the Nail crisis and led to the sale of the newspaper to Johncom. Notwithstanding the various theories raised for the decline, the Nail crisis raised a number of questions about readers. These included: Who were they? Why had they left? Did upper-LSM readers buy the newspaper after the Nail repositioning? If they did not, then why not? Did they lose lower-LSM readers to the *Sun*? Did any one segment of the readership decline more than others? These questions were carried

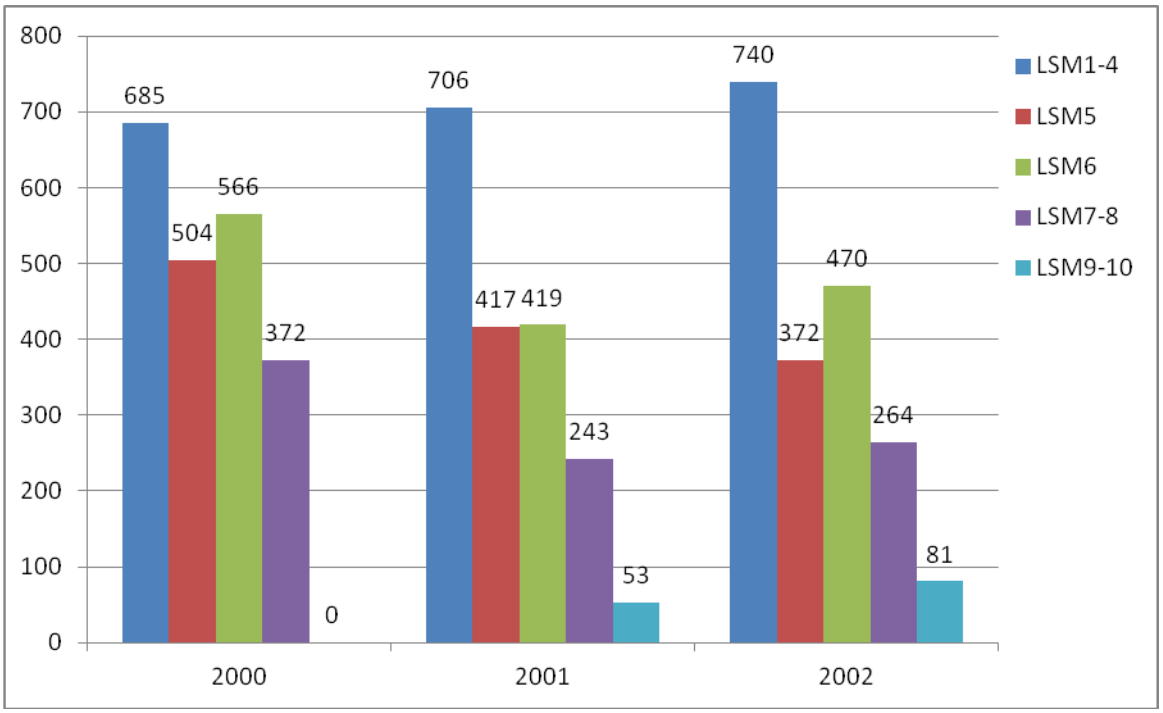
into the change process and the decisions for a new *Sowetan* that the organisation had to grapple with.

In considering which readers to target in 2004, Johncom had *Sowetan*'s existing readers, the readers it had lost, and readers it could potentially attract. Its legacy made it a black urban readership paper, which was its selling point, but also set limits on which demographic groups it could target. In the apartheid years, as previous chapters have shown, the newspaper forged its bond with the readers through its practices of representation and nation building. It was also for long periods of time the only commercial daily newspaper focused on a black readership. *Sowetan* thus historically represented a wide range of readers within that demographic, covering most age categories, income levels, politically affiliations and educational levels.

In the transition period of the 1990s, circulation held relatively steady from 1993 at around 200 000 (see Appendix B, 256). At 2000, there is a small dip, which, in Tissong and Siluma's view, indicates the first readership decline. Appendix C (257), which records the ABCs per half-year, shows a slight zigzagging downwards in the first half of 2000, then a slight recovery (but still below 1999 levels), again a downward tick in the first half of 2001, and once again turning slightly upward, but just below the 200 000 mark. In 2002, with the Nail relaunch and before the *Sun* takes off, the slide becomes dramatic, a big dip, and this continues for 2003. Its lowest point is in the first half of 2004, which is when Nail sells. Circulation then stabilises and starts to bend upward once Johncom has moved into management and editorial.

Tissong's assessment was that the little dip of 2000 represented the beginning of a reader decline. The management of *Sowetan* responded in 2001 to the small dip by moving to define their audience in terms of LSMs, rather than where they lived (Tissong interview 2009). They conducted reader research at *Sowetan* and adjusted the newspaper in accordance with the research, Tissong said, and circulation stabilised (in 2001).[9] They had significant readership in the higher LSMs (see Figure 3 below) and advertising revenue came in (Tissong interview 2009). One of the points he made is that even though the newspaper may have had few readers in the higher LSMs, relative to their total readership, in actual numbers the newspaper had more black high-LSM readers than many other high-LSM publications. The following graph shows readership and LSMs in that time period, based on AMPS.

Figure 3: Sowetan LSM spread 2000-2002



Readership measured in '000s

In 2000, there were only 8 LSM categories, and 17% of *Sowetan*'s readers were in LSM7-8 – an estimated readership (based on AMPs) of 372 000 people. This segment of readers was far greater than the entire readership of other newspapers, such as *Business Day* and the *Mail & Guardian*. In 2001 and 2002, the LSM categories were further stratified, with the addition of LSMs 9 and 10. It is thus not possible to compare 2000 precisely with 2001/2. However, the table suggests that:

- Despite the overall loss of readers in 2001 and 2002, there was a growth in reader numbers in LSMs 1-4.
- From 2000 to 2001, there was a total reader loss of more than 300 000. (For the same time period, the ABCs were showing a loss of circulation of 2 000 to 10 000, depending on the time of year).
- From 2001 to 2002, readership grew by 100 000. This increase is not matched by circulation, which declined dramatically in that same year – by 40 000 copies.
- Loss of readers from 2001 to 2004, according to AMPS, was across all the LSM categories, not any one segment in particular, either higher or lower, despite the entry of the *Sun* and the repositioning of the *Sowetan*.

This readership information was rendered contentious by issues with the methodology of AMPS; the readership and circulation figures did not align. In 2004, AMPS 2003 showed *Sowetan* as having more readers than the *Sun*, even though the *Sun* sold almost double the copies than *Sowetan* did. SAARF attributed this to a lag in the readership figure, but the *Sun*'s Fergus Sampson charged SAARF with using "inflexible and possibly outdated research tools" (Sowaga 2004, 6).[10] Andrew Gill notes that readership numbers are based on brand recognition – AMPS asks interviewees whether they have read a certain title recently. With *Sowetan* having longevity and status in the black market, readers would be more inclined to say they were reading it than the *Sun*.[11] Further, because the LSMs are based on the readership measurement in AMPS, they suffer from the same unreliability, Gill says. For example, AMPS shows that *Sowetan's* readership spread remained fairly stable across the Nail years and the Johncom takeover, despite the huge decline in copies sold. But Andrew Gill says they could see that they had lost readers in the lower LSMs from their distribution monitoring, so the spread of LSMs reflected by AMPS was inaccurate.[12]

The limited explanatory value of the ABCs and the anomalies of AMPS allow many interpretations of readership to flourish and increases the potential for contestation around reader issues. In such an uncertain environment, media companies must do their own research in order to fill in the details about readers that the numbers and categories do not provide. The marketing arm of *Sowetan*, Thengisa, relied heavily on research to try to map black media users in a rapidly changing environment, both in the Nail era and under Johncom (Taryn Gill interview 2009). Their focus was on what they saw as an emerging black middle class.

> We knew that the buyers and the media planners and the media directors were very much in touch with how quickly this emerging black market was developing; and we knew as the marketing team we have to be able to portray the *Sowetan* reader as being the core of that emerging black middle class. (Taryn Gill interview 2009)

Taryn Gill said that because she was not from Johannesburg (she hailed from KwaZulu-Natal), she familiarised herself with the research on *Sowetan* and tried to become expert in the trends the figures were showing. Drawing on the figures,

Thengisa marketers imagined a readership that was young and aspirational, and wanted to market *Sowetan* as a product for this new reader (Taryn Gill interview 2009). *Sowetan* journalists had a different picture of who the readers were, which was not based on research and figures, but on the newspaper's legacy as the representative paper of the black township classes and on their experiences of interactions with readers. There were thus different personifications of 'the *Sowetan* reader', drawing on different (and partial) sources of information.

The personification of the reader is a process that helps journalists and marketers imagine them when producing and selling content. In the *Sowetan* debates, the readership was personified in a number of ways. In the apartheid era, *Sowetan* had forged its bond with the readers through its practices of representation and nation building. Klaaste and his team imagined their township readership writ large as a black public, the dispossessed nation of nation building. Zondi noted that the newspaper was the "champion" of its people. Coutts similarly characterised the newspaper's historical role as "an agent for struggle and change" (Coutts 2004, 6). The growth in circulation over those years reinforced this approach, as did the response of readers who engaged with the newspaper.

Len Maseko said *Sowetan* had such a close relationship with its community that people used to arrive at the Industria offices with their problems and stories.

> It was fighting for the underdog and the people embraced it as their own. Even now you see they call it "our newspaper" and there was that affinity between us and the readers. It was everything to the people's lives. I mean, it was an information bureau. If people were being attacked by police, by criminals, people would phone the *Sowetan,* and they would phone the *Sowetan* before they phone the police. (Maseko interview 2010)

Journalists thus had an embodied feeling of knowing the reader and a tangible sense of relationship, which was reinforced by the visits from readers, and conversations with their neighbours and friends in Soweto.

Zondi said the readers were:

> … our readers, our people, our black people. So if Taryn is coming with the idea of calling the personification of a *Sowetan* reader as an "isikoko",[13]

> who the hell is she because she doesn't even understand what "isikoko" means? (Zondi interview 2009)

Thus, before Nail relaunched, the *Sowetan's* traditional reader was considered by its journalists to be a township dweller, part of a nation-building public, while its marketing arm saw the readers as changing, aspirational, less community-oriented and more individualistic (Taryn Gill interview 2009).

Under Nail, the newspaper's owners imagined the traditional reader of the *Sowetan* as a former township dweller now successful in business and politics; people such as

> Cyril Ramaphosa, Saki Macozoma, and so and so, where are they now? They're in Sandton; they're in Emmarentia, they're in the Northern Suburbs. So they [Nail] attempted to sell them in that wrong strategy; not based on any research. (Leshilo interview 2010)

Macozoma himself was quoted as saying the newspaper "must seek to prosper with its traditional readers, otherwise it will remain chained to the ghetto" (Msomi 2003, 3). Nail thus imagined the readers not as a nation-building, township community, but as the emerging black elite who had moved out of it, despite the relatively small numbers of the traditional readers that would have formed part of that elite.

The relationship to the imagined geography of Soweto was an important aspect of personifying the reader among the journalists, and one that bore little relation to actual demographics. Mike Tissong said that "one of the biggest misunderstandings about *Sowetan* was that it was a Soweto paper. Research [in the 1990s] showed that only 10% of readers came from Soweto" (Tissong interview 2009). However, Soweto operated as an important element in the journalists' imagining of the reader.

> We used to say Soweto's a state of mind. It's not a place; it's a state of mind. So kwaMashu is Soweto, so in a sense, yes, they were from Soweto, but Soweto being a state of mind as opposed to a location. (Zondi interview 2009)

Maseko noted that 'Soweto' operated as an aspirational idea for people across the country.

> Soweto is … about a spirit of resistance. It's about a spirit of raising yourself through hardship and making it as a black person. It has that "chutzpah" thing about it … that's why that name has never been a problem even with the selling of *Sowetan* in Durban. People will always be fine with *Sowetan* because Soweto has always been seen as a trendsetter, as a trend-blazer. (Maseko interview 2010)

In certain situations, if the imagined reader is not borne out by the research, journalists may reject the research. Taryn recalled one incident when she presented research to the sports department that showed that, amongst *Sowetan* readers, soccer and other sports, like wrestling, had replaced boxing as the most popular sport. "The *Sowetan* sports editor told me to my face that my figures were wrong. That there is no way that it is possible that the *Sowetan* reader was not following boxing any more" (Taryn Gill interview 2009).

The inability to come to a collective imagined personification of the *Sowetan* reader was not simply an outcome of the uncertainty of the research data; it also indicated contestation over the identity of black South Africans, with some protagonists keen to re-imagine a new successful class, freed from "the ghetto", and others loyal to the legacy of a township culture. As discussed in Chapter 5, *Sowetan* grew out of the ethnic black press and for many years was the representative black "African" daily. But with the democratic transition, black readers were no longer a captive audience, corralled into particular geographic and social spaces, but a group that was rapidly differentiating. Amongst all these changes was the emergence of class difference. The political transition, with its access to business opportunities, jobs and education, allowed a significant segment of urban black people to move class, entering into what had previously been the exclusively white preserve of privilege.

Even so, as Leshilo noted, the majority of black South Africans were still living in townships, which made media targeted at township dwellers and exclusively black readers highly relevant. These township dwellers were spread across a variety of incomes, positions, and possibilities, which further differentiated the readers and what they wanted. Cutting across the issue of identity was the question of what potential

readers were actually doing, how they related to their cultural roots, how they negotiated new possibilities and changing class positions. The question, then, was how to categorise all these possible readers and which ones to follow? And, once that was decided, what to give them in terms of content?

2.3 Strategies for change

Many commentators saw the solution for the *Sowetan* as aggressively taking on the *Sun*, which had already raised hackles among many established journalists and media commentators for its crassly superstitious and sensationalist content (see Wasserman 2006). Media columnist Anton Harber characterised the problem this way:

> Johncom has a tough decision to make: does the *Sowetan* continue to chase the lucrative but crowded elite market; or does it u-turn and go back to chasing the huge numbers of working class and lower middle class readers it traditionally served?
>
> It has to choose one of these, firmly and clearly. To fall between the two is to deliver neither market to advertisers, and die a slow and painful death. (Harber 2004b, 23)

However, the Johncom executives who took over *Sowetan* did not agree that you could only go low-LSM mass market, or high-LSM affluent elite, in order to attract advertising. In their views (and experience), the poorest of the market attracted very little adspend.

Coutts referred to this dilemma in his initial report:

> The argument against dumbing down is that despite the loss of readers, *Sowetan* is profitable and its costs are falling, although there is some awareness that this is a false economy and that the sales figures will eventually catch up with the operation. (Coutts 2004, 6)

Gill and his team opted not to take on the *Sun* directly and to fight for its readers, but to go for the middle segment of the market – LSM 4-7 – because, despite what AMPS was showing, this was the biggest bloc of the *Sowetan* readers. Andrew Gill says they were not looking for a niche market, but a mass market, so it made sense to target those readers. He argues that this particular segment of the population was

transitioning; many may have had little income, but they were starting out in their first jobs and moving up in the LSMs as their careers advanced.[14]

In targeting the middle, the Johncom executives were considering the need for advertiser buy-in.

> A lower LSM readership … that's where the largest market is, there's no question. So again it points to where do retailers advertise? They advertise to a mass market at a certain LSM level. They don't necessarily go for the LSM9 to 10s; they go for the four to sevens, and so we followed that rationale in buying the *Sowetan*. (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Having selected LSM 4-7 as their core readers, the next step was to decide what content would attract them. Johncom had had the experience of managing *Sunday World*, where the move to lively, sensational and celebrity-focused content had reinvigorated the newspaper and increased its circulation. It seemed obvious to Coutts – who had worked on *Sunday World* – to draw on that approach to save the *Sowetan*, tabloid in the *World* mode (sex, lifestyle, celebrities), rather than the *Sun* mode (witchcraft, crime, and the bizarre), but also to include community-oriented content. Coutts said:

> We wanted a bit of fun. We introduced things like "Mamma Angel", who was, you know, to go out there and help the community, lots of things like that. I wanted to introduce like a cheeky element, but for some reason that seemed to be beyond the pale and nobody really went for that … we brought in the elements from … from the *Sunday World*. Lots of celebrities; we wanted the paper to reflect the community. (Coutts interview 2010)

The *Sowetan's* new leaders "definitely positioned the paper not to be the *Sun*, which was going to be its differentiating point" (Andrew Gill interview 2010).

> You couldn't make it also the *Sun*, because if you made it like the *Sun*, it would be number two. You had to keep a moral high ground in the product and the heritage of the *Sowetan* was not to be the *Sun*. (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

> We were talking about proper journalism as opposed to sensationalist *Daily Sun* type journalism about whatever the hell goes on. That doesn't mean that the *Daily Sun* did something wrong. The *Daily Sun* without a doubt picked up something in the market that was real. (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Leshilo was even more inclined to keep the *Sowetan's* journalism from becoming tabloid in the mode of the *Sunday World* and *Sun*. He argued that the stories of celebrity antics should be there to draw the reader into the paper, but in the paper they should cover serious issues. "The black community needs a quality newspaper and it needs a voice and we don't give it a voice by giving it a tits-and-bums newspaper" (Leshilo interview 2009). Leshilo felt that *Sowetan* needed to cover stories of AIDS orphans, service delivery, problems in schools, and other issues facing black communities. "*Sowetan* needs to campaign, be a campaigning newspaper, because the fruits of freedom have not been felt and enjoyed by everybody" (Leshilo interview 2009).

Many *Sowetan* staff distrusted any form of tabloidisation. Coutts noted:

> Even within the *Sunday World*, "dumbing down" is seen as another attempt by whites to tell black readers what they should be reading, and what is and what isn't of significance to them. (Coutts 2004, 6)

The choice of which mode of journalism to use at *Sowetan* was thus imbued with significance for the journalists beyond serving readers what they wanted, and deeply bound to legacies of black journalism going back to the apartheid era. Leshilo argued:

> … the newspaper should remain true to its legacy even if we adopted new things, we should stick to what made the paper work. And even if we dabble with this, a bit of tabloid tactics here and there, they are mere tactics if it will enable us to do what we do well. (Leshilo interview 2010)

With Andy Gill as publisher, such an approach was acceptable as long as circulation was growing and advertising was coming in (Leshilo interview 2010). Although this was not the strategy Coutts had envisioned (he said *Sowetan* never fully went with his vision for the newspaper), the circulation stabilised and grew, and the

advertising came in. This middle approach also had the advantage, according to Leshilo, of winning over the staff.

> Once there was a realisation that I was not some [Johncom] person out to destroy their legacy, what they hold dear, and force them in a direction they don't want to go, I think that things started changing a bit and we could work together. (Leshilo interview 2010)

> ... politics was allowed to maintain a strong foothold but you know, in amongst the mix of like celebrities and birthday announcements to get the community involved, that kind of stuff. So in the end it was a happy compromise, but not a particularly profitable compromise, cause if I was in charge, I would've kicked everybody's ass and made them do what I told them. (Coutts interview 2009)

The strategy that was followed at *Sowetan* was thus a process of trial and error, and grew out of the interaction and contestation of various players. Johncom had initially worked out a redesign that was tabloid, even though it might have been a different kind of tabloid to the *Sun*. However, in the end, the newspaper became a mix of tabloid and legacy elements. The tabloid aspects were more a function of the design, rather than the overall content.

Another point to note about Johncom's strategy was that the operational skills and managers Andrew Gill brought to the newspaper were significant in arresting the decline of the circulation. Gill said:

> The two easiest quickest ways to improve your circulation was management, which people had stopped focusing on because people had stopped caring, to be absolutely honest, and to revamp the product. The most important thing was a product revamp, not just in content, but in design and look. (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Managing basic print operations involved paying specific and careful attention to distribution, which is the basic foundation of circulation.

Also important was the relationship with advertisers. Thengisa managed to market the publication to advertisers through the changing management eras, under

both Nail and Johncom; advertising continued to come in even when circulation was at its lowest (Coutts 2004, 6). In fact, Saki Macozoma said in an interview in 2003, when the newspaper's circulation was in a dramatic slide, that their advertising income had increased and that *Sowetan* had doubled its profits to R14-million on the previous year.

It is not clear why the advertisers stuck with the product, but its status as an established brand appeared to be a factor, and before the *Sun* came along, it could provide a large bloc of black retail consumers. Gill noted that many advertisers wanted their products to be associated with a trusted publication, rather than sensationalism, so they continued to advertise in *Sowetan* even when the *Sun* was dominating daily sales (Andrew Gill interview 2010). This kept the newspaper afloat. The responsibilities that fall to management – advertising, distribution, trade marketing, and printing and pagination – are not debated in the same way as issues of readers and content, but are fundamental to the commercial health of the newspaper.

A feature that emerges from this case is that most of the key players in the redesign were former journalists, with the exception of the marketing department, although even Taryn Gill had previously written advertorial for a newspaper. This meant, as Andy Gill pointed out, that the Johncom executives brought an understanding of media to the business (Andrew Gill interview 2010). The perception, then, that commercial managers and journalists are from different backgrounds and two different breeds – business versus media – is not borne out in this case (or in other South African media companies).

This does not necessarily mean there were no differences between editorial and commercial departments at Johncom, but at *Sowetan* the differences were not that clear cut. The fact that the Johncom team was commercially focused did not necessarily mean they were not attached to certain normative ideas about journalism in the takeover process. Coutts and his team were keen to produce quality journalism in the tabloid mode; they were thus attached to the skills aspects of journalism, rather than a particular mode of journalistic content (tabloid, public service, consumer etc). The *Sowetan* journalists – and Leshilo – were attached to the newspaper's historical role and its cultural value.

Andrew Gill pointed out that journalists-turned-managers have little experience of management, which can be a problem (Andrew Gill interview 2010). Certainly, the strategic and change-management strategies described by organisational

consultants such as Kotter and Heskett (1992) and Schein (2010) were completely non-existent. Johncom did not draw on *Sowetan's* management knowledge or the newspaper's research when they first bought the newspaper, and the initial redesign was planned with no involvement of existing staff, although designers were drawn from the *Sowetan* newsroom later. This approach entrenched the insider-outsider culture at the newspaper (described in the next chapter), which I argue exacerbated the tensions and obstructed the changes Johncom wanted to bring to *Sowetan*. It also produced emotional challenges for the individuals involved in the change process, which arguably impeded a successful rejuvenation of the newspaper. This will be discussed in Chapter 9.

3 The commercial and the public interest in the relaunch

This chapter shows that, for many commentators, the solution for the *Sowetan* seemed to lie in reconciling commercial considerations with the newspaper's historical role as an institution of black public life. The *Sun*'s tabloid approach was cited as a potential solution, while others argued the newspaper should return to its traditional readership. This suggested that the relaunch would have to prioritise commercial imperatives over issues of the public interest (historically expressed through *Sowetan's* nation-building stance). However, the case revealed a more complex scenario. The commercial and public interest aspects of journalism did not manifest in the acquisition of *Sowetan* as a distinct opposition, in the way in which many critical political economists would characterise the problem.[15]

Certainly, Johncom bought for commercial reasons, with economies of scale allowing them to leverage their existing print and commercial operations in order to operate another title, and cut its costs. Johncom had no emotional investment in the cultural heritage of the *Sowetan*, which was understood as a "selling point" or "market", by which they meant the black demographic. The choice of reader – LSM 4-7 – was made for commercial reasons; the segment was growing and it was spending, which made it good for advertisers.

With the exception of Thabo Leshilo, who expressed a strong attachment to *Sowetan* as "Aggrey Klaaste's newpaper" (Leshilo interview 2010), the Johncom team did not demonstrate any attachment to the newspaper's legacy as a nation-builder and agent of struggle. Andrew Gill did see the *Sowetan's* community credentials as a significant factor in rethinking the newspaper's positioning and

content; Coutts was more excited by the possibilities in crafting a new tabloid approach. Although both men had previously been journalists, in the commercial position of making the newspaper viable, they considered commercial factors, rather than public interest factors, in redesigning the newspaper. Serving the reader in that context meant attracting them and keeping them by giving them what they wanted; and including community projects and service delivery issues in the content was done in order to achieve that.

However, this "commercial approach" did not consist of a set of standard practices that was both guaranteed to deliver success and undermine the public interest in journalism. In discussions around *Sowetan*, tabloid journalism was often characterised as a debased version of journalism, not there to serve the readers, but to attract a readership and make money. Commentators mostly characterised tabloid approaches as more commercially viable in the South African media scene, but inimical to the public interest. What emerges in the relaunch, though, is that there are many different versions of tabloid journalism, and also many different interpretations of what it means, in content terms, to serve the reader. The *Sun's* tabloid content included the use of stories of the supernatural and crime, but did not use semi-naked pictures of women. The *Sunday World's* approach was to focus on celebrities, particularly local home-grown stars such as kwaito musician Arthur, cultural trends, attractive starlets, and gossip. An emphasis on national politics was seen as running counter to a tabloid approach, but not necessarily serving the reader either. Both the *Sowetan* and the *Sun* identified service to the readers as an important element of their product.

The commercial success of 'going tabloid' is also not guaranteed. Success as measured by circulation appeared to favour the *Sun's* approach, but *Sowetan's* targeting of the middle LSMs, although delivering much lower numbers of readers, was attractive to advertisers, and they were able to generate good advertising revenue by delivering those consumers to the advertisers (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Further, there was not an inevitable dumbing down, and the owner of the newspaper did not simply push through its strategy. The conflict generated at the organisation through the change process (discussed in more detail in the next chapter) was, to some extent, instrumental in adapting the proposed changes. The management tactic was to adjust to arguments marshalled in favour of different approaches, if the circulation and advertising was steady. The story of the takeover shows that the

Johncom change team valued innovation and were not afraid to try something new to the media industry or to fly in the face of the received commercial wisdoms. There was also a sense of trial and error in the process, a willingness to adapt and experiment with the strategy. The commercial wisdom of the marketplace was not followed, and yet the newspaper recovered. It did not recover its leading position in the daily market, nor did it make a striking new start.

The case of the *Sowetan* thus shows the complex ways in which ideas of the commercial and the public interest are negotiated in a journalism organisation, and the ways in which journalists – in both management and editorial – make use of their professional imagination to navigate the uncertainties of the media business. This approach foregrounds the reader – and the relationship of the newspaper with the reader – as a central imaginative project around which journalistic practice is oriented.

Notes on Chapter 8

[1] Retail advertising comes from large department stores, supermarkets and other mass sales outlets.
[2] Gary Player was a white South African golfer who became a world champion during the apartheid era; Tiger Woods is a black American, also world class, from a younger generation of golfers.
[3] Every place (or vendor) that sells newspapers is recorded and monitored. Some outlets are contracted on a returns basis, which means that they only pay for the newspapers they sell, and return the unsold copies to the newspaper company. Small vendors may be sold a number of copies on a no-return policy. From tracking the numbers being sold and returned, companies can see where they are popular and where they are losing readers, and match that to the demographic of outlet. For example, if the numbers of newspapers sold at taxi ranks in squatter camps drops, and the numbers of papers sold in garage stores in affluent suburbs rises, it tells you something about how the readership is changing. At Times Media (formerly Johncom), considerable attention is paid to what the distribution is doing as a way to understand movement in the readership. "This helps us understand changing demographics in urban areas and offers opportunities to offer more innovation to advertisers by way of targeted advertising/sampling by region, micro region and even suburbs. It is a very important asset/tool for us." (Based on a telephone conversation with Susan Russell, publisher of the Times, Times Media, January 3, 2014)
[4] A session for staff held away from the office in order to brainstorm and reflect upon work issues.
[5] The *Sun*, by this stage, had run a number of such stories on its front pages.
[6] Kwaito is a township style of music, a local version of hip hop.
[7] Personal conversation, October 19, 2013, in Parktown North, Johannesburg.
[8] In 1991, AMPS put the *Sunday Times'* black readers at more than a million.
[9] In the interview, Tissong indicated that he was not exactly sure of the dates of the research and the reworking of the content, referring to it as the time Chris More was acting editor and before the *Sun* was launched. Looking at Appendix C, it seems likely the period he was remembering was the second half of 2001, when the circulation increased. The first half of 2002 showed a decrease in circulation, and the second half decreased further.
[10] More recently, other media houses have rejected SAARF's research, with two television broadcasters withdrawing from the organisation.
[11] Personal conversation, see note 7, above.
[12] Personal conversation, see note 7, above.
[13] "The man", kingpin or boss. A trendsetter.
[14] Personal conversation, see note 7, above.
[15] As McManus describes it, "two sets of norms": journalism norms, which represent citizens' interests and strive for public enlightenment; and business norms, which aim to maximise profits (1994, 24).

Chapter 9: The organisational culture of the *Sowetan*

The case of the *Sowetan* brought to the surface a range of issues that could not easily be explained as instances of journalism culture, but appeared entangled with the contestations around journalism that were taking place in the organisation. This alerted me to the problem of organisational culture as an aspect of journalism work, and its potential for influencing the version of journalism produced by a newspaper. Organisational culture as a phenomenon has generated an enormous scholarly area within business and management studies (see, for example, Schein 2010; Kennedy 2007; Cooper et al 2001; Handy 1993; and Kotter and Heskett 1992). Change and leadership are important areas of focus, as the scholarship is not simply designed to analyse organisations, but also to develop strategies for organisations to operate successfully and skills for the managers required to run such operations. Schein, for example, has been hired as an organisational consultant for a range of companies across the world, and his scholarship draws heavily on those experiences (see Schein 2010).

This chapter sets out some of the features that emerged in the case of *Sowetan* that could be described as organisational culture. Although the newspaper's organisational culture is not in all its elements journalistic, I argue that it is inseparable from the journalism culture of *Sowetan*, as it is imbricated in the production processes, structures, values and leadership practices of the newspaper. I take the view that the culture of an organisation is made up of a variety of constituent and overlapping subcultures; as Schein points out, in an organisation there may be many subcultures, micro-cultures associated with certain departments and work responsibilities (sub-editing may be one such area in journalism), and macro-cultures, which are wider than the organisation, such as occupational cultures, national and ethnic cultures. Schein characterises what goes on in organisations as "a set of interactions of subcultures operating within the larger context of the organizational culture" (2010, 55).

Thus, when I refer to organisational culture in this chapter, I do not understand it as a seamless web, but, like discourse in the Foucauldian mode, shifting, overlapping, filled with contradictions, connected to discourses outside of the newsroom itself and fundamentally embroiled with issues of power (Foucault and Rabinow 1984, 56). Where the contradictions and contests are so great that the

organisation is split into groups with their own subculture, the organisation could be described as having a fragmented culture (Schein 2010, 17). However, in the case of a long-standing organisation, the larger context of the organisational culture accommodates differentiated subcultures.

> Culture implies some level of structural stability in the group. When we say that something is "cultural" we imply that it is not only shared but also stable, because it defines the group. After we achieve a sense of group identity, which is a key component of culture, it is our major stabilizing force and will not be given up easily. Culture is something that survives even when some members of the organization depart. (Schein 2010, 16)

Thus the culture of an organisation is both shifting, contested, differentiated, but also held together by larger patterns of shared assumptions and group identity.

It is beyond the scope of this project to produce a complete, in-depth analysis of the organisational culture of *Sowetan*. I do not set out to make a definitive set of statements about the *Sowetan* culture, which would have required an intensive engagement with the organisation from the perspective of management theory from the outset. Rather, I seek to outline some issues that emerged as significant in the life of the newspaper, in order to examine their implications for journalism. I identify differences and map the ideas and practices associated with them. To do this, I make use of Schein's levels of analysis. I am aware that there are many organisational theorists who might bring other approaches to bear, but I needed to fix on one in order to demonstrate the potential usefulness of organisational analysis to understanding journalism practice. I selected Schein because he provides some useful tools for getting under the skin of an organisational culture, excavating certain aspects and making them visible for examination.

In the analysis, I found that individuals inhabited a range of positions, clustering towards one end of the debate or the other, rather than forming two blocs around two ends of a binary. I set some of these positions out here, understanding that many of the issues demand further exploration. I outline some of the features of the *Sowetan* that suggest the ways in which organisational culture can coalesce with the practice of media production, and construct a particular version of journalism in a newsroom. This has implications for understanding how the concepts of the public

and commercial operate in journalism work, and how journalism is constituted through the particularities of its organisation.

1 Analysing organisational culture

Schein argues that the concept of culture points to phenomena that are motivated or driven by underlying forces and ideas – what he calls the basic assumptions of an organisation (2010, 13). These basic assumptions are not simply values, he argues, because values are negotiable, whereas "basic assumptions are so taken for granted that someone who does not hold them is viewed as a 'foreigner' or 'crazy' and is automatically dismissed" (2010, 23). Understanding an organisation's culture requires one to read its manifestations. He recommends unpacking culture by understanding it on three levels: artefacts, which are the visible manifestations of the culture; espoused values, which are what the culture explicitly aligns with; and basic assumptions, those hidden non-negotiable shared ideas that underlie the operations of the organisation and its resistance to change. An analysis of an organisation must start by examining its artefacts and espoused values, and attempt to use them to unearth the deeper assumptions.

1.1 Artefacts of an organisation

Schein refers to the visible aspects of a workplace as the artefacts of the culture, for example, dress code, décor, food and behaviour – everything you would "see, hear and feel" (2010, 23). This could include architecture, clothing, ways of talking to each other and emotional displays, stories about the organisation, and rituals. "The most important point to be made about this level is that it is easy to observe and very difficult to decipher" (Schein 2010, 23). He notes that the outside observer's interpretations may depend on his or her own deeply held assumptions, and this may prevent the meanings of the artefacts from becoming clear. They must be further interrogated through discussion with insiders about the norms that guide their behaviour – the espoused values.

In my research, I asked interviewees what their impressions were on entering the *Sowetan* environment and what the culture of the organisation was like, two open-ended questions designed to evoke unsolicited associations with the newspaper. As set out in Chapter 2, I conducted in-depth interviews with eight journalists or media executives who were deeply involved in the newspaper. Starting with the interviewees' entry into the organisation was important, as they would have been, at

that point, outsiders who had yet to be socialised into the culture, even if they were later to be socialised into the organisation and accepted as insiders. What they observed would thus have been what was different from what they had previously experienced in the workplace, what was unique and particular to the *Sowetan*. The physical environment of the newspaper was mostly the first thing that interviewees referred to, and then, for some interviewees, issues of food and/or drink arose. Other associations that appeared when asked about the culture were references to significant groups, like Mwasa, in the organisation (some of which could be considered sub-cultures), the newspaper's history, its relationship to township life, its political positioning and its resistance to change. A number of journalists noted an explicit insider-outsider dynamic, which could prove impenetrable, even for some senior editorial managers.

1.1.1 The space

In 1980s and 1990s, the *Sowetan* was located in Industria, "among factories" (Siluma interview 2009), in a "neglected building" (Tissong interview 2009). It looked "like a warehouse", with broken-down furniture and typewriters (Tissong interview 2009). Musa Zondi noted that when he got there in 1991, he was surprised that there was no desktop publishing and the production still made use of cutting-and-pasting processes. In this era, the poverty of the environment was taken as an indication of the Argus Company's attitude to the *Sowetan* staff as second-class citizens – "we were the bastard kids" (Zondi interview 2009). This interpretation of why the offices were shabby is not surprising, given the legacy of the newspaper's relationship with the white owners (described in Chapters 6 and 7).

When Johnnic took over in 2004, there had been improvements in certain areas – for example, newer computer and photographic equipment, but the haphazard character of the place remained. Coutts noted that the canteen (called the "Azanian chalet") was considered unhygienic and blamed for stomach ailments, that the rest area (dubbed "Pelindaba" by the staff)[1] had vending machines for coffee and snacks that often broke down, and that the smoking area was "a space at the back of some toilets which houses the drains" (2004, 5). "It is partially covered, filthy and cold in the winter" (Coutts 2004, 5). This scenario, also, was not surprising, as the transition to Nail appeared not to have changed the fundamentals of the ownership issues (see Chapter 7).

Amidst the junkroom atmosphere, the legacy of the newspaper was proudly on display.

> Among the first things to greet a visitor are photographs of the founding fathers – Victor Selope-Thema,, Jacob Nhlapo, MT Moerane, Percy Qoboza, Joe Latakgomo and Aggrey Klaaste – and its cultural identity has to be taken seriously. (Coutts 2004, 6)

Coutts noted that the security in the building was inadequate, and things went missing. "Frequently opposition photographers and reporters [from other newspapers] can be found wandering about, particularly on deadline" (Coutts 2004, 5). This speaks to the ways in which the organisation was physically open to "walk-ins" – a feature of the relationship with readers pointed to by Len Maseko (Maseko interview 2010).

1.1.2 Food and drink

Issues of food and drink, unexpectedly, emerged in discussions of *Sowetan*. When Johncom took over the newspaper, Coutts noted in his early report that the organisation's canteen was considered problematic by the staff.

> Lunch is taken [in the rest area] by most staffers, who source their food from a woman known as the "boot lady", who parks her car outside the canteen , and sells takeaway lunches at R14 a shot. Long queues consisting of senior management to cleaners, snake from her boot every lunchtime. (Coutts 2004, 5)

The actual food on offer was an issue, too. Mike Siluma, who started at *Sowetan* in the 1990s, said he had to get used to the canteen selling food that they thought "appeals to black people; steak and pap for lunch, which would just like put me to sleep" (Siluma interview 2009). Other food items that drew comments were chicken's feet ("walkie talkies") and cooked sheep's heads ("smileys" or "skop").[2] "The smileys were eaten on the desks. A computer covered in sheep's head grease has got to be a uniquely South African phenomenon" (Coutts interview 2010).

Taryn Gill explicitly referenced food as one of the reasons she lacked "street cred" at the Sowetan: "I didn't eat 'skop' on a Friday afternoon with the guys" (Taryn Gill interview 2009).

> Sheep's head is the thing! Like a delicacy at *Sowetan*. Thursdays and Fridays. … Fridays the *Sunday World* guys would all be lining up their sheep's heads. Oh! I used to want to die! (Taryn Gill interview 2009)
>
> I was all up for the shebeens and the *chisa nyamas*[3] and I would eat any offal they'd give me, but just not the sheep's head. (Taryn Gill interview 2009)

Invariably, those who remarked on the food were those who were newcomers, mostly not from African townships, and felt like outsiders. Food was thus a marker of who was a true *Sowetan* and who did not belong.[4]

Sowetan also had a strong drinking and partying culture.

> Ja, but it was a great place to be. I mean on Thursdays, we would "cook",[5] the subs, and then get plastered, completely plastered afterwards. I mean, it was not unheard of for people to walk out of *Sowetan* on Friday morning trying to find their way home. (Zondi interview 2009)

Coutts remembers:

> There was weird shit happening there. Like there was a shebeen at the back, and people were passing bottles through the fence and, you know, it had a particular culture. South African newspapers all of course have their own individual culture, but the *Sowetan* was particularly unique. The *chisa nyama*,[6] like up at the *Sunday World*, like the whole staff, nobody would do a damn thing unless everybody had their *chisa nyamas* at lunchtime on a Saturday. (Coutts interview 2010)

Food and drink was not the food of the company canteen, but street and home food, a marker of black "African" township culture, or working class life. The socialising that took place in the newsroom was the kind of socialising that would happen in neighbourhood spaces. There was an element of township allegiance and of 'authentic' African cultural practice associated with the food and drink.

Other cultural practices had become part of the rituals of the organisation. Siluma noted:

> The race thing, I think race, black culture, *ubuntu*,[7] however it's interpreted, plays a very important role ...

> that people feel that they've got to stand together kind of thing. Let me give you an example. At *Sowetan*, if one of the staffers died, the guys would want to write a story about this person. The person is just an ordinary journalist, [but] they would want to write – not on the obit page or whatever – on the news pages, they want to put it there. They want to put in a picture and they want to have a memorial service. No other newspaper that I've worked or been associated with does that. There's a big memorial service, all the people that have ever worked at *Sowetan* who knew this person from 15 years ago will come there. The boardroom's like choc-a-block with all these people, like the room would've risen from the dead or whatever. (Siluma interview 2009)

The ritual of honouring and memorialising the dead was on display when Aggrey Klaaste died, and the newspaper produced a special supplement, in which anyone who had known him could write their memories of him (see Chapters 6 and 7). As Siluma, points out, this approach to death is "a township thing", in other words, a cultural practice associated with "African" urban life. We see then that in the artefacts of the *Sowetan*, there is a strong identification with and reproduction of township life and cultural practice. The workplace is not treated as separate from the home and street life of the staff.

A curious aspect of the newspaper was the position of the drivers, as Coutts noted in his report.

> A serious problem on both the *Sowetan* and the *Sunday World* is that staff do not have drivers' licences. This may seem a minor thing, but creates enormous logistical difficulties and leaves the news desk entirely reliant on the transport department, which holds enormous sway over the activities of staffers. Staff often have to wait to share a car, cars are often not available, drivers object to taking staffers home at night because they live far away, and, in some instances, conduct interviews themselves, become argumentative with interviewees and decide whether a story is worth doing or not. There have been many run-ins between reporters and drivers. (Coutts 2004)

Such dynamics were very different from those in a hierarchical corporate culture. It speaks of a robust and egalitarian culture, in which reporters would not have more status than other staff.

This is perhaps not surprising, given the legacy of the *Sowetan*. As discussed in previous chapters, South Africa under apartheid was a capitalist state – but racial capitalism, in which race and class were bound together (Wolpe 1988). To be black, no matter how educated or skilled, was to be an underclass. The response to this situation by the union, Mwasa, was workerist – it based itself on the category of media workers, rather than journalists, i.e., everyone who was involved in a newspaper organisation would be eligible for the union (unlike the SAUJ, which represented journalists only). This was an explicit act of eliding differences of status and proclaiming that all were part of "the working class", as constituted by racial capitalism, rather than by work category. Reading the everyday practices of *Sowetan* journalists with knowledge of the organisation's legacy shows how class and race were entangled in the organisation. It implies that there was a need to employ certain township cultural practices as a form of "class" loyalty.

1.1.3 Practices of exclusion, acceptance and resistance

Schein notes that examining the socialisation of newcomers into a new organisation is often an effective way of discovering the culture of that organisation. Newcomers are essentially outsiders, and they may become accepted "insiders" after a period of socialisation. A question to the interviewees about their first entrance into the *Sowetan*, and when (or whether) they felt accepted, elicited some revealing impressions and stories. It also became clear from their accounts that sometimes outsiders were never accepted, even if they spent a number of years there. When the newcomers were bosses and managers who attempted to change the ways in which things were done, lack of acceptance could turn to active resistance.

Musa Zondi, who had been a trainee at the *Weekly Mail* and then completed a journalism diploma in Cardiff, Wales, came to the newspaper as a sub-editor in 1991. He said the *Sowetan* journalists weren't friendly to him initially. He remembered a petition being mounted in the newsroom against him because he complained to a journalist because she used the term "the deceased" in her reports, rather than the name of the dead person being reported on, which was standard practice at other newspapers (a relatively minor criticism). He came from a different ("more liberal") culture and *Sowetan* was more BC, so he found it difficult to adapt at first (Zondi

interview 2009). However, he joined Mwasa and that gained him some acceptance. He was also able to join the guys in drinking after the newspaper had been put to bed, and because of his township credentials, he easily fitted into the prevailing culture.

Mike Siluma, who spent five years at the paper, some as its editor, never felt accepted, as he was more in the UDF/ANC mould, and the paper was more BC (Siluma interview 2009). He was "not steeped in the Sowetan culture" (Siluma interview 2009). Unlike Zondi, he never really got to the point where he became part of the culture. Zondi said Siluma was not accepted because he was "Charterist, he wore specs, came from the *Star*, from the enemy, everything. But he was also not a ruffian; he was too much of a gentleman" (Zondi interview 2009). Here, the element of class – or, perhaps more accurately, status – seems to be in play.

When Andrew Gill arrived years later, by contrast, he felt his reception was warm. He attributed this to the fact that the newspaper had been directionless, and people were relieved finally to have a plan. The staff suggested that he "cleanse his office" of all the previous bad energy, and get in a *sangoma*.[8] Although this is not something that would be part of Gill's cultural background, he agreed. "We cleansed the room with the *sangoma*; we slayed a goat in the premises. And I was there. They didn't make me cut it, thank God, but I was right up there" (Andrew Gill interview 2010). Gill wore an *isibandla*[9] for some months after that.

Thabo Leshilo, even though he had been part of *Sowetan* as editor of *Sunday World*, was not as lucky. He said he knew it would be a challenge to take over at *Sowetan*.

> I knew that I was going to a place that had people in it who were my seniors at some point ... And I knew that it was also an environment that worked a lot on the rumour mill, and I did not expect them to rush, I didn't expect a welcome party for me, I mean, with dancing girls and arms outstretched.
>
> The first indication that the reception was icy was at four or after four, when all the editorial executives left or were leaving. On my first day ... I mean ... I didn't know about conference, I didn't know about leaders, how they [did] those things. I went out of the office and I said: "What's going on? Where you all going?" "Hey I've got a child to pick up", hey I've got this or that, hey I've got prior engagements and that was that ... (Leshilo interview 2010)

Two points are worth noting from Leshilo's account. The first is that he already understood there might be a problem, because he had been promoted over more senior *Sowetan* journalists; this indicates the extent to which seniority and long service was an important requirement for acceptance in the organisation. Along with the example of the drivers' power in the organisation, this shows that the standing of particular individuals in the culture was not based on formal job roles, but on other criteria, and they would actively assert their right to that status. The second observation is about the way in which the resistance to Leshilo was expressed – by withdrawing cooperation in the production processes of the newspaper, but doing so covertly, by making excuses for their absence. These acts of refusal – or even sabotage – were not confined to journalists, but were also part of the behaviour of the drivers.

Leshilo dealt with the situation by confronting it head on: he told his editorial managers that Johncom had wanted him to have completely new editorial leadership, and he had refused. However, he told them, "the option [of retrenchment] was still open" to him (Leshilo interview 2010). The threat kept them in line, but he thought they were won over eventually because they came to realise that he valued the legacy of the newspaper and believed in many of the same things that they did. He spent some years at the paper after that, and, according to Coutts, was a very popular editor (Coutts interview 2010). Leshilo's position as editor required him to mediate between the different visions for the newspaper and find a way forward, bringing the senior journalists along with him.

The stories told by the interviewees show a culture quite resistant to newcomers, where they had to earn the right to be accepted. This resistance was experienced as an almost physical entity. "It's like a train, trying to stop a train; you just couldn't stop the *Sowetan*" (Zondi interview 2010). Andrew Gill said: "It was an odd organisation to walk into, and as much as I tried to break it down, it really was difficult, just kind of a wall." (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

Taryn Gill's experience was extremely alienating. She had started by working at Thengisa, then moved into the *Sowetan* offices when Johncom took over. Initially, she had a good relationship with many *Sowetan* journalists. However, she began dating Andrew Gill, whom she subsequently married. When they made their relationship public, it generated a hostile reaction (Zondi interview 2009). On several

occasions, her tyres were slashed in the secured staff parking lot, and she found it increasingly stressful to work at the *Sowetan* offices.[10]

Andrew Gill said:

> *Sowetan*'s culture has a way of breaking you down ... I think it was the most stressful time of my life, running *Sowetan*. It was chaos. It was like my national service. That's what I call it. (Andrew Gill interview 2010)

As well as acts of exclusion against individuals, the culture was resistant to change generally. "People did not like somebody who came with different ideas of 'it's better'" (Zondi interview 2009). Certain acts triggered resistance.

> [Johncom] people came with this "we're going to take over, we're going to mess you up, we're going to sort you out, and we're going to put you on the right path" type of thing and then *Sowetan* people just went straight back into the laager.[11] (Zondi interview 2009)

The implementation of the redesign was held up by the quiet resistance of the editorial staff. Zondi noted that *Sowetan* was "like a civil service; the minister can say what he wants, your clerks there would delay and delay and delay."

The reluctance to change shown by *Sowetan* insiders is not unusual in organisations, which tend to resist new ways of operating (Schein 2010; Handy 1993; Kotter and Heskett 1992). Nor is it unusual for journalists to continue to operate in the same old ways despite new developments in their environment (Lauk 2009; Preston 2009). What seems particular to the *Sowetan* is the intensity of the resistance and the strategies employed to obstruct change. These included active hostility to outsiders, acts of covert sabotage and a "go-slow" mentality. However, the objections to certain changes were also marshalled through the arguments around certain key concepts, both journalistic and organisational, and the discourses tended to coalesce around certain values.

Almost all the "outsiders" (by whom I mean those who never became insiders) got to the point where the culture began to take its toll on them emotionally. Coutts felt that his role "selling" the new design to staff made him the scapegoat for people's resentment.

> Ja, I personally still to this day feel like I was the lightning rod, because in the end I got very badly alienated. There were days I was sitting … doing bugger all. Going mad. (Coutts interview 2010)

Siluma left the newspaper in 2000 because of the emotional cost. "It just was impossible [to change it]. I got to a point where I felt I don't need this in my life" (Siluma interview 2009).

1.2 Espoused values

The next level of cultural analysis in Schein's approach is to examine an organisation's espoused values, "publicly announced principles and values that the group claims to be trying to achieve, such as 'product quality'" (2010, 15). Here the espoused values relate largely (but not exclusively) to journalism. I argue that the journalism practised by *Sowetan* journalists was different in certain key ways to the taken-for-granted "professional" journalism espoused by the media executives brought in by Johncom to reposition the newspaper. This was not two totally separate and mutually exclusive journalisms, as what constituted the practice – reporting on news events, covering certain beats, interviewing sources, taking photographs, commissioning and producing opinion and analysis – was basic to all the journalists involved. However, the emphasis – in practice and content – on what was important, what aspects were valued, was different. Such differences were articulated around a number of terms.

In the previous chapter, we saw that ideas about the newspaper's *relationship with the reader* were central to the espoused values of the *Sowetan* journalists. The journalists presented themselves as representing their own township 'African' community (as in the "Soweto is everywhere" motto). In the following section, I attempt to map out more of the espoused values, and how they are connected and opposed to each other. Connected to the relationship with the reader was the value of *nation-building*, strongly espoused by many long-term journalists at the *Sowetan.* This value was often expressed in opposition to ideas of change brought in by the Johncom team, particularly ideas of *tabloidisation* or lighter non-political content. Many *Sowetan* insiders also espoused the value of *ubuntu* in workplace relationships and processes, which was often proffered in contrast to ideas of journalistic *professionalism*.

1.2.1 Ubuntuism versus professionalism

From an analysis of the interviews, both *ubuntu* and professionalism appeared to refer largely to practice within the newsroom. *Ubuntu* was espoused as a humane (African) way of dealing with one's fellows – a kind of communalism – while professionalism was about the skills and ethics of the craft of journalism. The two positions were often presented as oppositions, with some of the interviewees professing puzzlement at *ubuntu*; others claimed it as an important value. However, there were interviewees (notably Zondi) who managed to hold a middle position, appreciating both principles.

According to Len Maseko, *ubuntu* was related to nation-building in its early days, an approach that rose above the political differences of the 1980s and early 1990s.

> … "the power is in our hands" was the slogan and also preaching the value of *ubuntu*. Also there was a lot of internal, I would say, strife, and it was kind of trying to remind people that "we are one"; we cannot be killing each other and that this violence was playing into the enemy's hands. (Maseko interview 2010)

(We saw *ubuntu* linked to nation-building in Sebidi's article for *Sowetan* in the late 1980s, discussed in Chapter 6.)

Ubuntu expressed itself in practices in the organisation that were "tangible ways of helping each other", said Zondi.

> For example, my daughter, I took her to a crèche across the road from *Sowetan*. I didn't need to be there for her to be fetched. I mean if I'm out working, I just find a tickey box[12] and phone and say "So-and-so, can you please pick up my daughter?"
>
> Somebody physically walked across the road or [would] tell the driver and they'd go to fetch her, so she grew up at *Sowetan* and we called her a *Sowetan* baby and she wasn't the only one. (Zondi interview 2009)

Siluma noted:

> People … valued that deeply, that communal thing, which wasn't there in any other newsroom. Which is very important, I think, and it's linked to the *ubuntu* thing and to the blackness thing; it's quite strong and deep. (Siluma interview 2009)

However, many of the journalists coming in from other newsrooms found the environment "unprofessional". Mike Siluma enumerated inaccuracies in headlines and in stories, not doing enough research for reports, arriving late at events being covered, filing stories after deadline, and generally having a very "laidback" attitude, as the practices he found unprofessional. Coutts found "the standard of journalism" when he got there "absolutely shocking". "Reporters who write half-assed stories, stories barely literate some of them …" (Coutts interview 2010).

Leshilo also referred to standards being "lax", which was a "culture shock" when he came into the building as editor of *Sunday World* (Leshilo interview 2009). He recalls someone saying to him: "Don't judge us by white standards" (Leshilo interview 2009) and there was an attitude of antagonism towards people coming from the *Star* and the Argus Company.

The notion of being "professional", for the journalism newcomers, had to do with having certain skills, such as accuracy, reporting, and writing. It also applied to attitude and to discipline: the environment was not professional because it did not sanction certain sorts of behaviour, was lax, was not overly concerned with deadlines and did not strive to meet the same standards as other newspapers (in particular, the *Star*, for those who had come from the Argus/Independent Company). Historically, the *Star* installed 'professional' journalism in its journalists through a six-month training programme, managers disciplined and punished serious infractions, while the newsroom socialised journalists, as Breed has described (1997). However, Argus newspapers did not tell "the truth" of what was going in the country; its white newspapers ignored what was happening in black communities, and, when they finally began to cover them, were forced to rely on black reporters and photographers for access.

For the *Sowetan*, issues of accuracy, good writing, deadlines – all of which require some policing and – were less important than reporting on and representing its community. Zondi said that when he first joined the newspaper in the 1990s:

> It was a black newspaper and very proud of that. But this was also the time for Aggrey and his nation-building starting to generate ... it was a revolution in the way that people thought we're doing things, in the way that we were portraying ourselves as a newspaper, that

> we're not just a newspaper; we're part of the community. (Zondi interview 2009)

Tissong, who had joined a few years earlier, had a similar view of the journalism.

> We felt we were different because we were probably the only newsroom in the country [that] had deep roots in the townships and nobody had deeper roots in the townships than we had because our reporters and photographers lived in the townships, they grew up in the townships and they knew all the important contact people in the townships. So the kind of stories we were able to get at *Sowetan* from the townships was unique. Other newspapers couldn't access those kinds of stories because they were physically not there.

In the organisation, *ubuntu* was about communalism, tolerance and forgiveness, and having a happy work environment. Mike Siluma's attempts to demand more "professionalism" from his journalists led to complaints about him to Aggrey Klaaste, who was still in the building as editor-in chief. The discontent was characterised as Siluma "making the guys unhappy" (Siluma interview 2009). Zondi said that Siluma's attempts to improve the quality of journalism were not successful because they were not supported by Klaaste – Klaaste was too soft, in Zondi's opinion (Zondi interview 2009). As discussed in chapter 6, Klaaste had an open-door policy and anyone could go to his office to discuss issues on the newspaper and to make suggestions; he did not rule through sanction and disciplinary action, which would have been required in order to implement the changes in behaviour of the reporters.

Ubuntu practices sometimes extended beyond what others considered appropriate in the workplace. Mike Siluma saw it as a way to "get away with murder" (Siluma interview 2009).

> The culture of the organisation was *ubuntu*-based, meaning people got away with all kinds of things that they would never get away with on the *Sunday Times* or at the *Star* … at the time the *Star* and the *Sowetan* were owned by the same company. So under the cloak of *ubuntu* and stuff, people had lots of places to hide and not do what they were employed to do, or actually what the readership of the *Sowetan* was expecting them to do. So, ja, that's one of the first things that I noticed; people

> were very laid back and there was no urgency. (Siluma interview 2009)

Taryn Gill noted that sometimes the managers at *Sowetan* would overlook serious ethical offences, even though it was damaging the paper's reputation. "And … management apathy towards that type of really mischievous and fraudulent behaviour was like 'We *Sowetans* look after our own'" (Taryn Gill interview 2009).

Ideas of race, class and hierarchy appeared entangled in these ideas of *ubuntu* and professionalism. Siluma, Coutts, Leshilo and Zondi, black journalists who had been trained at white readership newspapers and worked there – sometimes in senior positions – brought ideas of journalistic standards that they considered to be universal, and expected *Sowetan* journalists to operate in similar ways. However, many Sowetan journalists saw these as "white" standards, and that they were being told what to do people coming in from historically white media companies or newspapers.

The can-do corporate "professional" approach of Johncom was also experienced by the *Sowetan* staff as deeply threatening, as rumours of their plans and proposed retrenchments circulated in the period before the official handover.

> [T]here was all this talk about dead wood; we're going to sift off the dead wood. Some of it [was] urban legend, of course, I'm sure some of it was never said, but as far as *Sowetan* people were concerned it was said by certain people at [Johncom]. (Zondi interview 2009)

The "dead wood", in Johncom's discourse, referred to journalists who were not able to live up to the professional standards expected of them – accuracy, good writing, producing good stories, meeting deadlines.

The espoused values of professionalism and *ubuntuism* that played a role in the relaunch of *Sowetan* were thus deeply linked to the cultures in which journalists were socialised, and the legacies of racialised media operations and political and social resistance. The notion of *ubuntu* and the practice of tolerance of fellow journalists at the expense of efficiency can be traced to the culture that evolved with Klaaste as leader, as Chapter 6 shows. By the time Johncom arrived, Klaaste and many other *Sowetan* seniors had left, but the attachment to ideas and practices of *ubuntu* was still strong. However, the term was a sliding signifier; used in the 1980s by Klaaste to promote and explain nation-building and to forge unity among warring political

movements, articulated in the 2000s by *Sowetan* journalists as a counter to the incoming corporate, with its retrenchments and demand for professionalism.

Schein (2010, 26) makes the point that espoused beliefs can be in conflict with the basic assumptions of the culture. We see this at work in relation to *ubuntu* – espoused as a set of values of tolerance, in practice it applied only to insiders. Outsiders and new managers were not received with understanding and tolerance if they triggered the hostility of the staff, or if they were unable to participate in certain cultural practices that had nothing to do with journalism. What appeared to motivate *ubuntu* was whether or not you belonged as an insider, and whether you were able to belong was linked to issues of race, class and township culture. *Ubuntu* could also be used to justify resistance, and some of that resistance would have been to a more disciplinary management regime that demanded professionalism.

However, applying Schein's cultural analysis requires us to look for the roots of espoused values in the early establishment of the organisation. The first owners, the Argus Company, had little interest in promoting black aspirations and provided fewer resources, less training and remuneration to its black journalists than to journalists in other newspapers. Complaining of a lack of professional skills in this context seems expedient, and extending *ubuntu* only to the insiders and antagonism and hostility to outsiders resonates with Zondi's statement that "we were the bastard kids, so you know we looked after each other" (Zondi interview 2009). Thus the *Sowetan* long-timers would be more likely to invest in the 'caring' approach of *ubuntu*, rather than the 'non-caring' skillset of professionalism. *Ubuntu* could thus be said to have developed as a strategy of resistance in the racialised and hierarchical stratified newsrooms of the black press, and an alternative to the "cold" corporate culture of white owners.

1.2.2 Nation-building versus tabloid journalism

Linked to the *ubuntu* value was a set of espoused values around nation-building, which was set up in opposition to discourses promoting tabloid journalism at the time of the takeover by Johncom. Coutts referred to this binary in his report, when he noted that journalists who were proud of the paper's history as an agent of struggle were most likely to oppose any tabloidisation of the *Sowetan.* "Papers such as *Sunday World* and *Daily Sun* are regarded as papers that produce what white people think black people should read" (Coutts interview 2010). Although certain media scholars have shown that, in South Africa, new tabloid media does not necessarily mean there

is no commitment to the public interest in the form of "service journalism" (see Steenveld and Strelitz 2010), at *Sowetan*, tabloidisation was interpreted as making content lighter, more celebrity-oriented, more sensational, and was seen as a shift away from serving the community.

This conflict of values did not break down into a simple divide between insiders (nation-building) and outsiders (tabloid). Among the incoming media executives, there were a range of positions; the two approaches could also not be seen as mutually exclusive. For example, Leshilo still felt that there was room for *Sowetan* to be a campaigning voice for black South Africans. He felt that there were large parts of the country that were not properly covered, and that the only time they were reported on was when there were protests or killings (Leshilo interview, 2010). Gill also acknowledged the importance of reporting on the community and being close to it. The Johncom redesign thus included inserts designed to keep the community focus.

Tissong felt that the campaigning approach of nation-building was still relevant as long as there were serious problems in the society, such as education and health.

> I don't think nation-building would have lost its impact because if you look at the kind of areas that *Sowetan* was focused on in terms of its nation-building programmes, education was key. Education in South Africa now is in a disastrous mess, which means that *Sowetan's* nation-building programmes around education would have still been relevant. (Tissong interview 2009)

Tissong argued for the importance of engaged reporting, where the newspaper would go beyond reporting on a failing school, but actually investigate why it was failing, and facilitate projects to help it improve. This kind of "activist" reporting, Tissong argued, was the unique selling point of nation-building and what distinguished *Sowetan* from other newspapers. Thus Tissong's view, though congruent with an 'old *Sowetan* journalist' who had been at the newspaper from 1988, was argued as a commercial selling point, not simply a public interest one.

We saw in Chapter 6 that Klaaste promoted the philosophy of nation-building through columns and other analysis pieces. Nation-building also grew to include projects to help black communities, which Klaaste would often personally spearhead

(Tissong interview 2009). These would be reported on in the news pages of *Sowetan*. For Tissong, nation-building was synonymous with the journalism of the newspaper. Siluma, on the other hand, made a distinction between nation-building and journalism. Nation-building comprised, for him, the columns and opinion pieces, as well as the engagement with projects. But, following the division made in newspapers between opinion and news reporting, he saw nation-building as separate from the reporting, which he felt was poor, and was directly linked to the lack of professionalism of reporters. "There was no vision for the journalism. Nation-building was stronger. *Sowetan* was more famous for nation-building than for journalism" (Siluma interview 2009).

In the battle between the two terms – tabloidisation and nation-building – tabloid journalism was seen by senior *Sowetan* journalists as being imposed on a black newspaper by a white company, which was not concerned with the good of the community. Nation-building was seen as serving the black community, but in a way that was different from the service journalism of the *Sun*; it included a vision of the readers as part of a nation, and spoke to them as the citizens and public of that nation. There was thus a different mode of address to readers in nation-building. To Johncom newcomers and the marketing people, nation-building was associated with the old "freedom-fighting" mentality, whereas tabloid journalism was what the changing readership wanted – "funky", "sexy" copy that reflected the new aspirations of individual readers (Taryn Gill interview 2009).

Many of the journalists in the newsroom were caught between these two positions, not entirely sure which way to go. They were aware that the newspaper was in trouble, and needed a strategy for survival. As Coutts wrote in his initial report on the newspaper:

> Production staff are highly aware of the need to present a more interesting newspaper, and believe any resistance to this needs to be closely interrogated in terms of survivability and credibility. (2004, 6)

It seems that the types of journalism associated with professional skills – accuracy, meeting deadlines, good writing, well-researched stories – and with tabloid modes of journalism were not part of the espoused values of the *Sowetan* journalists, for whom the element of representing the readership (imagined as nation) was uppermost, and in

which they had historically excelled. On the other hand, the idea of professionalism was strongly espoused by the journalists coming in from other news media. Certain individuals, such as Thabo Leshilo and Musa Zondi, valued both professional skills and the campaigning aspects of serving the community that nation-building embodied, thus providing the potential for an adaptation of the espoused values of organisation. Certain groups within the newspaper – or subcultures – also seemed to inhabit different positions in relation to the espoused values, as indicated by Coutts' reference above to the production staff.

1.3 Basic assumptions at the *Sowetan*

Schein has argued that basic assumptions are formed during the early days of an organisation as a result of the group's external challenges from its environment, and the ways in which it establishes internal integration in order to function (2010, 18). The organisation's early tactics often develop through the initiative of a leader or a leadership group, but if they are successful, they will become taken-for-granted and passed on to newcomers in the socialisation process (Schein 2010, 21). The culture may shift over time, but certain elements are passed on and persist.

Although it is difficult to extract with certainty the pattern of shared assumptions underlying the artefacts, espoused values, and subcultures of the *Sowetan*, as outlined above, the analysis suggests certain underlying values. Firstly, the long-time *Sowetans* identified strongly with township culture, a community "macro-culture" outside the organisation, from which most of its journalists came and from which the readers were drawn. Race, ethnicity, and class (conceived of in terms of status rather than relation to the means of production) were thus significant elements of the organisational culture. Expressing a township working class culture through certain things (food, drink, *ubuntu* practices, long service etc) became a marker of authenticity, a true Sowetan. Outsiders who did not come from the township needed to demonstrate their acceptance of 'African' culture, as in Andrew Gill having his office cleansed by a sangoma, or Taryn Gill going to shebeens and eating street food, to be accepted. Those who came from a township background, but acted in ways more consistent with what was seen as a white suburban culture, were treated as outsiders.

The assumption that township identity was something to be defended actively makes sense in considering the roots of the newspaper in the apartheid system and the

white-owned commercial black press, and the adherence of the newsroom to BC ideas. In the face of the persistent oppression of black people in South Africa, the refusal to grant them rights in the society, and the attempts to wish them away into tribal homelands, the journalists took an active pride in black urban culture – and brought certain cultural practices into the organisation. They made township working class life visible, and demonstrated loyalty to it.

Another underlying paradigm was a mistrust of owners and managers, and resistance to them. The legacy of this conflicted relationship went back a long way, to the newspapers that pre-dated *Sowetan*, and the resistance of Percy Qoboza, editor of the *World*, to the white editorial managers installed by the Argus Company (as previous chapters show). The *Sowetan's* first owner, the Argus Company, invested in black newspapers for commercial reasons, had demonstrably little concern for the political aspirations of *Sowetan* readers, and provided few resources for black journalists. The hostility towards management was more intense than a simple antagonism by journalists towards the commercial aspects of journalism, but a rebellion against the exploitative nature of the company. The Mwasa strike against the company in 1980, and the ensuing detention and banning of Mwasa members by the state, contributed to the struggle orientation of the journalists, with the white press being seen as part of the problem.

The two paradigms set out above seem to pre-date the nation-building ethos that became part of the discourse of *Sowetan* journalists. Chapter 6 shows that the move to nation-building was actively driven by Aggrey Klaaste and installed through his leadership. Despite the opposition of many of his senior staff, nation-building became a crucial element of the culture as Klaaste won them over to his vision by persistent engagement on the issues. He drew on elements of Black Consciousness, such as self-reliance and community-building, to make his case, providing a way in which *Sowetan* journalists could reframe – or expand – their imaginations of their role as "cadres with a pen" (Maseko's characterisation, in interview 2010).

At the heart of the nation-building and representational ethos of the newsroom was the imagined relationship with the reader, as Zondi characterised it: "our readers, our people, our black people" (Zondi interview 2010). The journalists shared in the lives of the readers through living and working in the township, through the reactions of existing readers to the newspaper, and through their imagined role of representing them (as discussed in Chapter 6). With nation-building, this was not just opposing

apartheid and revealing the abuses of the state, but taking up a leadership role in relation to the community: as Tleane put it, "moving black people from gutter journalism to something deep, something more analytical" (Tleane 2004, 6). This particular journalistic role tended towards campaigning and advocacy journalism, rather than impartial reporting, towards a skill at understanding and articulating readers' aspirations, rather than producing a perfectly written news report. Thus a re-positioning of the newspaper towards different readers, with different content, was never going to be simple.

Ubuntu was a value that was publicly espoused and linked to nation-building – to go back to Maseko's comment, above, in a time of great political division in black communities, *ubuntu* was a unifying notion. However, in Maseko's characterisation, people needed to unify because division played into enemy hands. This suggests that the need to stand together against a common foe was encoded into the notions of *ubuntu* at work in the organisation. *Ubuntu* was also an idea that was explored in columns and opinion pieces in *Sowetan* of the 1980s, in relation to nation-building and citizenship. It is not clear to me whether *ubuntu* was a basic value of the organisation, rather than an espoused value, or whether that assumption is more accurately articulated in Musa Zondi's characterisation: that we ought to look after each other, because the company (and the state) are not going to do so.

In contrast to the pattern of assumptions that lay beneath *Sowetan* culture, Johncom's values were tied to ideas of professionalism and the desire to produce a good product – by which they meant one that was successful in the market. The Johncom executives embarked on the takeover with the idea that *Sowetan* was a newspaper with a lot of "dead wood" – by which they meant incompetent journalists. They also planned retrenchments, because adding *Sowetan* to their existing newspaper business meant they could incorporate certain posts into their advertising, circulation and other commercial departments.

In the interregnum between Johncom buying the newspaper and coming in to manage it, *Sowetan* staff members were fully apprised of the Johncom attitude (Zondi interview 2009). In addition, the new owners did not consult the established *Sowetan* staff and management about their plans for changing the newspaper, sending a signal that they did not consider their perspective to have value. As Zondi put it, Johncom executives' attitude was that they were going to "sort out" the inadequate *Sowetan*

(Zondi interview 2009). This would have entrenched the position by *Sowetan* journalists that "we must look after ourselves, because no-one else will".

For the Johncom newcomers, the attachment to the elements of professionalism – accuracy, meeting deadlines, well-written copy, impartiality – was such that the lack of such skills in certain *Sowetan* journalists negated any potential contribution such journalists might make, such as familiarity with the community from which the readers came, and their ability to report on it. The occupational norms of the outside journalists thus had an extremely strong hold on them, suggesting that the underlying assumption was that certain basic reporting skills were non-negotiable.

2 Impact of organisational culture on journalism work

I have argued that organisational culture is a constituent part of journalism work, despite journalism's occupational orientation. This chapter has attempted show how organisational culture is entangled with journalism practice; it gives some sense of the artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions of *Sowetan* journalists in order to demonstrate how such cultural elements can fuse with and construct the journalism practised in an organisation. Some basic conclusions emerge from this exercise.

The first conclusion is that organisational culture, if not understood, can impede the production process, with implications for the quality and viability of a newspaper. As Soloski (1997) argues, the unpredictability of the news environment means that journalists need considerable autonomy to make decisions in reporting and processing news. This means that they can sabotage the process through acts of resistance (see Breed 1997), as Leshilo found on his first day, when the editorial managers were not available for news conference. The production process can also be hamstrung by a lack of agreement on what journalists are doing. For example, if journalists use one internalised idea of who the readers are to guide their reporting, a conflict around this can significantly retard the production of content. Repositioning an established newspaper is thus a tricky business for the organisation, and managers of this process may encounter serious obstacles if they do not have change strategies.

The significance of "authentic" township culture in the organisation, and its impact on notions of *Sowetan's* role in the community and the newspaper's relationship with readers, shows the ways in which a macro-culture can construct the journalism of an organisation. It could be argued that *Sowetan* is an exception, given its legacy as *the* black readership paper and the intensity of its struggle experiences.

However, the attachment to a certain mode of professionalism by the incoming journalists indicates a basic assumption that was established during their early socialisation in other newsrooms. This shows that journalism is not understood in the same way across different media, and may vary to the point that a set of shared values and practices is not possible. My case shows that there is not one occupational standard with a few variations, but versions of journalism that may prove incompatible with each other.

This analysis also demonstrates the importance of the editor as the leader of the organisational and editorial culture. Klaaste's successful transformation of the journalism of the *Sowetan* towards a nation-building focus – and his ascension to 'founder' status – was not matched by the editors who followed. Leshilo managed to stem the readership decline and get *Sowetan* staff behind him by articulating a compromise position, but his tenure was not long enough to fully assess whether he could have achieved an all-embracing transformation. His own assessment is that his attachment to the legacy of "Aggrey Klaaste's paper" enabled him to be accepted and to achieve stability at *Sowetan*. This resonates with Schein's argument that culture cannot be changed by substituting one set of assumptions for another.

> Note that the solution has to keep each cultural assumption intact. We cannot, in these instances, simply declare one or the other cultural assumption "wrong". We have to find a third assumption to allow them both to retain their integrity. (Schein 2010, 31)

Finally, organisational culture enables us to make sense of the passions that are ignited in newsrooms in times of change. The cultural approach foregrounds issues of identity, recognising that individuals socialised in particular communities develop self-concepts in their working roles that are important to them. The shared identity of *Sowetan* journalists, intensified through the trauma of the newspaper's history and the huge success of its transition years, was deeply felt and actively defended. This suggests that journalistic identity in certain contexts has the potential to generate considerable resistance to the power exerted by both commercial and political actors.

Notes on Chapter 9

[1] Pelindaba is a nuclear facility outside Pretoria
[2] For more information on South African street food, see http://www.squidoo.com/south-african-street-foods.
[3] *Chisa nyama* is a barbecue – grilled meat, in other words.
[4] It is interesting that the sheep's head was a detail in a controversy at *City Press*, nearly 10 years later. Staff complained of lack of transformation in the newsroom, and the need for a black 'African' political reporter, but also that they did not get *skop* for lunch on deadline day.
[5] Zondi means by this that the copy editors on the production desk would work under pressure on the last edition of the week, and then stay to drink afterwards.
[6] See note 3, above.
[7] African humanism. See Chapter 6 for discussion of *ubuntu*.
[8] Traditional healer or 'witchdoctor".
[9] A bracelet considered to have protective powers.
[10] Zondi interpreted this hostility as a reaction to Taryn's "dating the boss"; thus, a form of disloyalty.
[11] Laager … a circle of ox wagons, which early settlers in Southern Africa would form in order to defend themselves from attackers. A common South African colloquialism.
[12] A public coin-operated phone.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

I began this project by asking how the commercial and the public aspects of journalism intertwine and are negotiated in a once successful newspaper fallen on difficult times. To investigate this question, the research examined the journalism values and practice that were activated in the 2004 relaunch of the *Sowetan. Sowetan* had served the urban black communities of the townships for more than two decades, representing them through the struggles of the apartheid era and the early years of 'the transition'. This legacy and culture made the organisation a very different environment to the newsrooms of Johnnic Communications (Johncom), the media company that bought it.

As the previous chapters describe, the Johncom relaunch team had to deal with a newspaper that over a decade of editorial and management shifts, had lost half its readers and its sense of what it was. In essence, the problem for both the newcomers and the established *Sowetan* journalists was to decide on the identity of the *Sowetan.* Its legacy as a respected institution of the black public was a potential advantage, but, because of the enormous shifts in South African society and its media, *Sowetan* could not simply go back to what it once was.

The process of re-imagining the newspaper, and the conflict over what it should become, manifested key (and contested) elements of journalistic practice that are usually implicit in media production. It focused attention on issues and processes that are taken for granted in a going concern. These centred on normative conceptions of the role of the media in society, ideas about commercial operations and tactics, and the ways in which readers and publics are constructed. The selection of this case as a research project allowed me to excavate a range of ideas about the commercial print media in South African society, and to illuminate certain values and practices in the media organisations of Johncom and the *Sowetan*. The thesis thus uses the case of the *Sowetan* to make explicit ideas, processes and practices implicated in the production of journalism and its place in public life.

At first glance, the solution for the *Sowetan* seemed to lie in bringing commercial realism to normative ideas of the newspaper's role in South African society. Media commentators pointed to the success of the *Sun*, a new tabloid focused on crime, scandal

and stories of the supernatural, as an indication of what the *Sowetan* needed to be in order to survive, while others bemoaned the newspaper's move away from its historical roots of reporting on black township communities. The public discussion about the *Sowetan* suggested that the relaunch would be a struggle to reconcile the parent company's commercial interests and the newspaper's public interest commitments, and that the strategies employed in rethinking the product would largely centre on that problem.

Using in-depth qualitative interviews with a range of media executives and journalists, I expected to map the ways in which this conflict played out in the organisation, and the normative and commercial ideas that would arise in the process. Specifically, I was interested in how individual journalists and media executives (at both Johncom and *Sowetan*) negotiated the opposing demands that seemed to be integral to the project of saving the newspaper from commercial ruin. The Johncom executives were charged with bringing a newly bought newspaper in line with the parent company's vision for it in the market, whereas the *Sowetan* journalists had a long attachment to the newspaper's role as an institution of black public life. However, the interviews revealed a much more complex scenario, which complicated the Johncom-*Sowetan* opposition. There was certainly contestation, and commercial and normative approaches to journalism were embroiled in it, but the fault-lines cut across those ideas in ways that belied conceptions of the commercial-public interest as the primary opposition in journalism production. In addition, the organisational culture and identity of the *Sowetan* emerged – like a Behemoth - as a key factor to be negotiated.

Thus, the contestation in the organisation over the changes could not be described simply as a conflict between commercial realities and the public interest, with journalists defending the normative and Johncom media executives pushing commercial solutions (as certain critical political economy approaches might suggest). Despite the history of the newspaper as an institution of an oppositional black public, the conflict also did not break down simply according to race (white managers versus black journalists). Although these factors played into the conflict, it is more accurate to describe it as a conflict between *Sowetan* "insiders" and the "outsiders", who incarnated different cultures. The organisational culture of the *Sowetan* included elements that appeared to be unrelated to journalism, as well as elements that were journalistic.

The elements of the organisation's culture (or artefacts, as they have been described by Edgar Schein) included such things as the location of the newspaper, the office fittings and equipment, food, drinking habits, race, gender, where staff lived, and length of service. The journalistic aspects of the culture included the ways in which people practised journalism, their expectations of each other within the work environment, their imagined readers, and their understanding of their (and the newspaper's) relationship to those readers. The "real *Sowetan* journalist" was thus implicitly defined as a black "African" reporter, who was authentically of and for the township, working class rather than new black elite. The outsiders (whatever their ethnic background) tended to identify as journalists in a more generic professional mode, an occupational culture that was transferable across the newspapers of the so-called English press, and installed through the media companies training arm. Despite the ability of some staffers to move between the two groups, the differences between the cultures proved difficult to reconcile.

The legacy of the newspaper was a foundational component of the organisation's culture, and constructed it in two ways. First it conditioned the habits, processes, practices and values of *Sowetan* journalists, which persisted through two decades due to the socialisation of new staff and the dominance of the newspaper's union, Mwasa. Second, *Sowetan*'s role as an advocate of and for black township dwellers during apartheid emerged as a key imaginary for *Sowetan* journalists and media executives, to which they were passionately attached. The legacy was grounded in the history of the newspaper and its forebears, the *World* and the *Post*, early black consciousness influences, and the role of Mwasa as the organising union. This evolved in the era of nation-building, a key project of the newspaper in the late 1980s, promoted by its legendary editor, Aggrey Klaaste. Legacy and leadership thus emerge as key aspects of journalistic socialisation and the carrier of journalism practice. The legacy functions both as an organising force (through habituating certain practices) and as imaginary, because the history is invoked in ways that condition and construct journalism practice.

The case of the *Sowetan* is not easily understood by relying on the existing literature on journalism work. As I have shown in Chapter 4, organisational analyses that draw on the field of Organisational Studies are rare in Journalism Studies. Organisations

are conceived of largely as instances of media production or journalistic professionalism; in other words, locations in which an occupational work culture is practised. There is an underlying assumption of broad similarities in journalism across news organisations, which I argue is based on the specificities of the American case. I propose that the seminal early studies (Breed, White, the American Journalist) were formed by their location in the US, where there was (and is) a strong emphasis on professional modes of journalism and a surprising uniformity across university journalism programmes and organisations, maintained by practitioner/teacher accreditation bodies. However, in countries like South Africa, where journalists historically came into journalism through a variety of routes and where media were previously fractured into different ethnic presses and had different relationships to the society and the state, the assumption of professional uniformity across organisations cannot be applied.

Studies in the field of organisational psychology offer analytic concepts that have a great deal of explanatory value for journalism scholarship. In particular, Edgar Schein's work using organisational culture as a concept – with a model for analysing it at various levels – is illuminating. Schein (2010) also offers persuasive accounts of how culture evolves and how leadership and culture are intertwined. Other consultants and scholars have examined the impact on organisations of major shifts in context, and the importance of managing external change. Kotter and Heskett (1992) and Pascale (1991) have demonstrated that organisations resist change, and that in order to effect it, deep cultural paradigms must be broken and transformed. There is a substantial literature on this problem for organisations, some of which I discuss in Chapter 4. I argue that the understanding of journalism cultures would be enriched by such scholarship which would be an important counterweight to theories in the field of Journalism Studies that focus on journalism as a general occupational culture to the exclusion of particular organisational cultures. I attempt to demonstrate the value of such approaches by applying Schein's strategies to analysing organisations. The resulting data makes visible the ways in which journalists are socialised in organisations, and how journalism they practise is constructed in and by those environments.

Another key conclusion of the research is that commercial "realities" – often set up in opposition to the normative public role of media, by journalists, media executives,

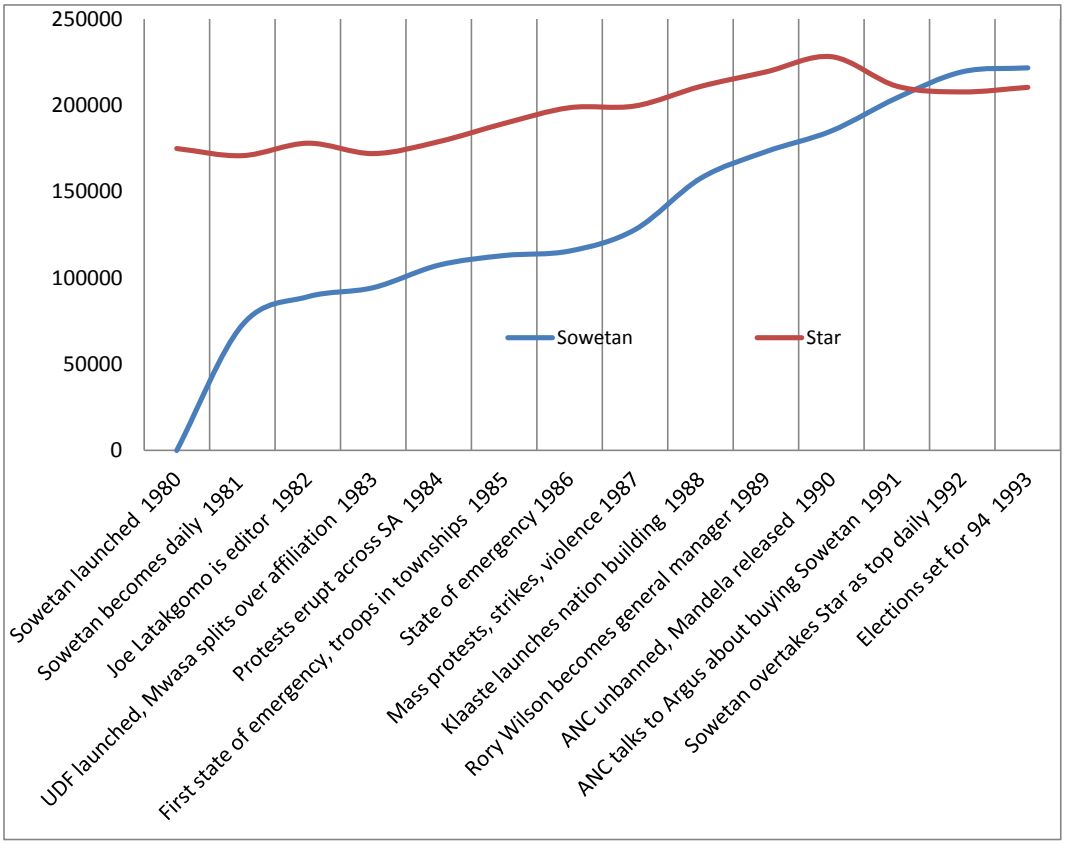
and media critics – are highly arguable. Basic commercial imperatives exist, such as a dependence on advertising. However, there is a range of options and strategies to choose from in order to meet commercial demands, and which of these will be successful is not guaranteed. What media managers choose to go with is a product of trial and error. The case of *Sowetan* shows that commercial strategies could not be said to be automatically successful or to operate at the expense of service to a community. The opposition between public interest and commercial imperatives, described by critical political economists, is thus based more on the traditional convention in news media of separating commercial and journalism functions. The task for media management is thus a highly demanding one, in which solutions are not self-evident, and requires risk-taking, rethinking and readjustment, and, in certain cases, creativity and innovation. The 'divide' between 'media managers' and 'editors' is a porous one, as all these executives must manage the interrelationship between 'commercial' and 'editorial' imperatives.

In addition, the research suggests that, when moving a newspaper away from the legacy around which it was organised and managed, the change should include a very specific focus on organisational culture. This includes implementing processes to achieve the buy-in of journalists with the new conception of content and readership, not by forcing them to replace their basic values with new values, but by finding a third set of assumptions, which incorporates both the old and new. Without change management of the organisational culture, a newspaper may find itself embroiled in conflict, and bogged down in resistance, with a potential impact on both its journalism and its commercial viability.

Finally, the case of the *Sowetan* throws into question the idea that there may be a broadly universal journalism culture. It is beyond the scope of this research to locate the journalism of the *Sowetan* in typologies of journalism produced in global surveys of journalism cultures, such as the Worlds of Journalism survey or research of the kinds of journalism that emerge in different countries and contexts. It could be argued that the *Sowetan* is so idiosyncratic as to be outside of the scope of the professional journalism culture that dominates in the United States and other Western nations; in other words, that it is an exception. However, the attachment of *Sowetan* journalists to their understanding of journalism values and practice suggests rather that forms of journalism

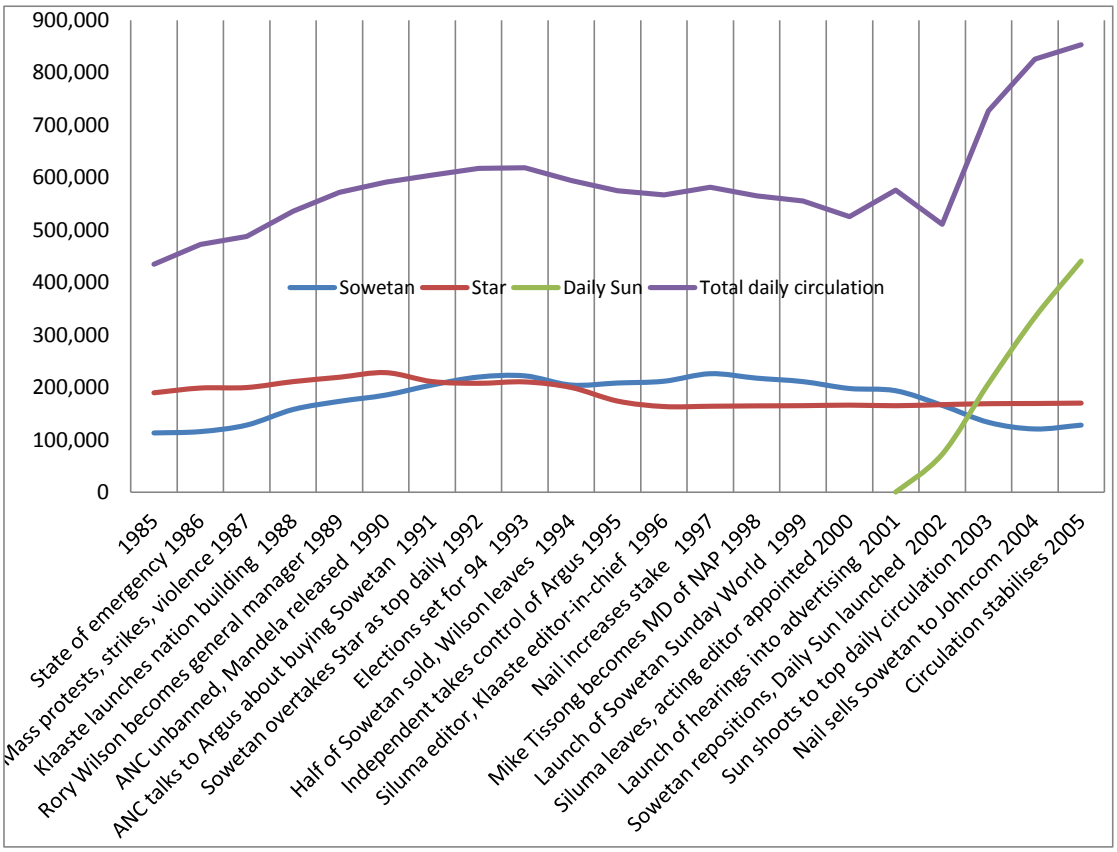
evolve in particular contexts to diverge from ‘professional’ modes, even to become quite idiosyncratic. These forms of journalism may make use of similar journalism terms – such as ‘serving the reader’, ‘public interest’, and ‘journalistic professionalism’ – but understand and practise them quite differently. In such organisations, the responsibility to the public is imagined and practised in very different ways, but it remains a defining and significant attachment for the journalists, who will passionately defend their values and practice.

Appendix A: *Sowetan* and *Star* circulation 1980 - 1993



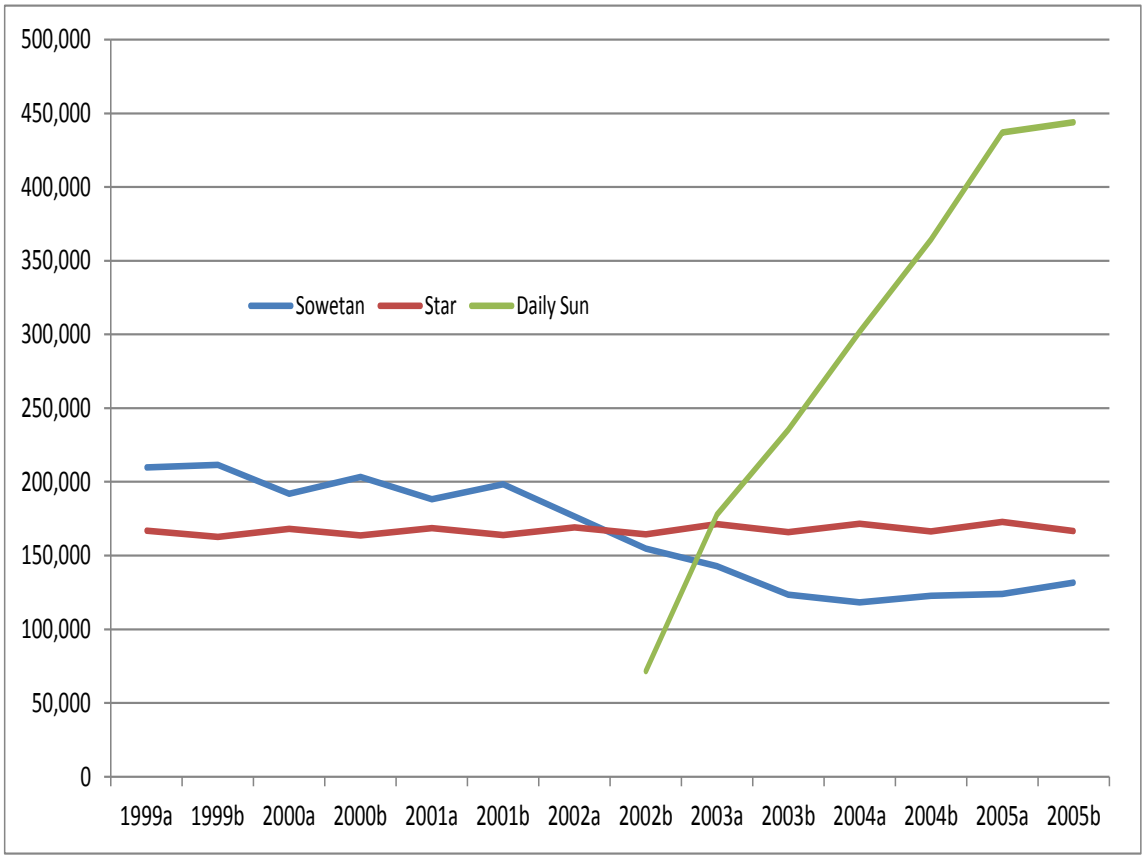
The above graph was constructed from figures provided by Times Media Research. The four quarterly ABC (Audit Bureau of Circulation) circulation figures were added up and then divided by four to get the circulation average for the calendar year.

Appendix B: Circulation of *Sowetan* 1985 to 2005



Graph above is based on figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABCs). The total daily circulation refers to the combined circulations of daily newspapers that are currently being published.

Appendix C: *Sun*, *Star* and *Sowetan* circulation battle



Graph above is based on circulation figures from the Audit Bureau of Circulation.

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