

**Responsible watchdogs?
Normative theories of the press in post-
apartheid South Africa.
A discourse analysis of 102 newspaper
articles 1996-99**

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Abstract

This treatise is a study of articles in the South African press from February 1996 to April 1999 which concerned questions of the role of the media. Through a discourse analysis approach, the treatise identifies two main discourses in the debate: *the watchdog discourse* and *the nation-building discourse*. It is argued that those who propagate the watchdog discourse – mainly journalists and editors – favour classic libertarian press ideals, while those who propagate the nation-building discourse – mainly government representatives – favour social responsibility ideals. The analysis contains a number of examples of the tensions between the government and the newspaper industry based on disputes in the normative press models. Finally, the treatise challenges the assumed tensions that exist between nation-building and watchdog discourses, and discusses communitarianism as a model which maintains the interests of both the press and the government.

Table of contents

Abstract	2
Table of contents	3
Declaration	4
Acknowledgements	5
Acronyms	6
Definitions of concepts used in the treatise	7
Foreword	8
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1.1 Background for the treatise.....	10
1.2 Confining the study	11
1.3 Limitations of the treatise	12
1.4 How the treatise is structured	14
Chapter 2: Method and methodology	16
2.1 A brief history of discourse and discourse analysis.....	16
2.2 Defining discourse and discourse analysis	21
2.3 Locating discourse analysis in the methodological terrain: a social constructionist method.....	21
2.4 Applying discourse analysis to this project.....	25
2.5 Limitations of discourse theory and discourse analysis.....	29
Chapter 3: Normative models of the press	32
3.1 The relevance of normative press models	32
3.2 The libertarian ⁸ model	33
3.3 The social responsibility model.....	34
3.4 The communitarian model	34
3.5 Normative models of the press in the South African context.....	36
Chapter 4: Research and observations	38
4.1 The libertarian model: ‘the watchdog discourse’ (observations #1–34).....	39
4.2 The social responsibility model: ‘the nation-building discourse’ (observations #35–50)	63
4.3 The communitarian model: ‘the alternative discourse’ (observation #51)	76
Chapter 5: A new model of press ideologies in light of post-apartheid South Africa	78
Chapter 6: Conclusion	82
6.1 Main findings.....	82
6.2 Further studies.....	82
Endnotes	84
References	89
Appendix A: Example of a detailed discourse analysis with notes	98
Appendix B: Article overview	102
Appendix C: Hard copy of articles (only in printed version)	105

Declaration

I, Terje Steinulfsson Skjerdal, do hereby declare that the work presented in this treatise is my own. Any work done by other persons has been duly acknowledged.

The Graduate Programme in Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, Durban, and Oslo, Norway, January 2001.

Terje Steinulfsson Skjerdal

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Acronyms

ABASA:	The Association of Black Accountants of South Africa
ANC:	The African National Congress
BEF:	Black Editors' Forum
BLA:	Black Lawyers Association
Comtask:	The Task Group on Government Communications
DP:	The Democratic Party
FBJ:	Forum for Black Journalists
FXI:	The Freedom of Expression Institute
GCIS:	The Government's Communication and Information System
Idasa:	The Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa
IFP:	The Inkatha Freedom Party
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal
MP:	Member of Parliament
MPL:	Member of Provincial Legislature
NASA:	The Newspaper Association of South Africa
NGO:	Non-governmental organization
NP:	The National Party (changed name in 1999 to NNP, the New National Party)
PAC:	The Pan-Africanist Congress
SACS:	The South African Communication Service
SAHRC:	The South African Human Rights Commission
Sanef:	The South African National Editors' Forum
Sapa:	The South African Press Association
TML:	Times Media Limited
TRC:	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Definitions of concepts used in the treatise

- **Article:** Any written item in a newspaper which has a confined opening and an ending, composed by complete sentences. In this treatise, *article* is used in its broadest sense, including both op-ed articles, letters to the editor, news stories, etc.
- **Discourse:** The culturally agreed interpretation of social phenomena as it is communicated through language.
- **Discourse analysis:** The qualitative investigation of discourses on micro and macro levels of analysis in order to identify and contextualize the preferred meanings which are conveyed through these discourses.
- **Government:** The political leadership of the nation.
- **Newspaper:** Publication which comes out on a regular basis, usually at least once a week. A newspaper is printed on poor-quality paper intended for immediate consumption. A major part of the content should be of news value.
- **Press:** The newspaper industry at large. *The press* is used primarily to denote the intellectual environment which surrounds the newspaper industry, and to a lesser extent the particular institutions of the industry.
- **State:** The government at large, including its bureaucracy, diplomacy, governmental institutions, etc. This treatise uses *the state* particularly in terms of being the enacting body of governmental policies.
- **Subdiscourse:** Discourse which serves to support the main discourse. Subdiscourses usually take the form of premises which are part of a reasoning process towards the main discourse, however, subdiscourses are often troubled with public assumptions that are not sufficiently demonstrated.
- **Text:** Particular bits of speech or writing which are part of a larger discourse.

Foreword

Foreigners in South Africa frequently report that to their surprise, South Africa is not really one country, but two or more. They are surprised to learn that the 'new' South Africa is not a melting-pot which has forgotten all about apartheid. On the contrary, blacks and whites still live in different parts of the city, they watch different sports, they vote for different political parties – and they read different newspapers. It would appear that South Africa is not only a diverse country, but a fragmented one. A reading of any South African newspaper is a proof of this fragmentation.

My background as a journalist for various newspapers and publications in Norway led me to ask how South African newspapers viewed their responsibilities within the transitional period of the country. Are South African newspapers like their Western European counterparts impressed with libertarian ideals? Are they merely critical towards the government, or do they wish to cooperate with the government to convey information and promote nation-building? Is the government itself critical towards the press? I was delighted to learn that both the press and the government actively participated in this debate. A high number of articles dealt with the topic. I was also motivated by the fact that high profile South African public figures, like archbishop Desmond Tutu, President Nelson Mandela and Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, participated in the discussions. I soon began to collect articles on the topic, and this formed the basis for this treatise.

The findings in a 25% MA treatise are limited, but it is my hope that this effort can contribute to the critical thinking around press ideals in South Africa after apartheid. Also, the collection of articles contained in this treatise can be of help to others who wish to do similar studies.

Oslo/Durban, January 2001,

Terje Steinulfsson Skjerdal

Chapter 1: Introduction

«Show me a government that is satisfied with its press,
and I will show you an autocracy.
Show me a press that is satisfied with its government,
and I will show you a lifeless and ill-informed people.»

Ben Bradlee,
editor of the Washington Post at the time of the Watergate scandal,
at a gala dinner hosted for delegates at the Commonwealth Press Union
in Somerset West October 1996
(quoted in Streek, 21 October 1996)

Chances are, that in a democratic society, the press and the government have colliding interests. The government wants to see positive coverage of its achievements, though not through a curbed press, while the press aims at critical reporting on the government, though not through sensationalist journalism. Both institutions need to maintain their credibility. Editor Nigel Bruce of *Financial Mail* writes: «All governments have an uneasy relationship with the media, unless they are censored and restricted as they were under P W Botha» (Threatened by -, 14 June 1996). There are reasons to believe that the relationship between the government and the press is particularly interesting to study in a post-apartheid community like South Africa, where the media have been so widely criticized – and celebrated – for their role in the political transformation. An interesting question is whether the uneasy relationship between the government and the press in South Africa is a reflection of Western political models – in other words, whether the apparently quarrelsome government/press relationship is really part of a dominant discourse which seeks to legitimize the role of certain ideologies, among which *libertarianism* has been most predominant in contemporary Western press practice (Akhavan-Majid & Wolf, 1991).

This treatise argues that the dominating discourse in the public debate of the role of the South African press is the *libertarian press model* as it has emerged in modern Western societies. To the extent that the alternative *social responsibility model* is seen as an ideal for the press, it is limited to a few statements by media commentators and some politicians. Further, although freedom of the press is generally considered a fundamental value in democratic societies, it is rarely defined and given a more profound meaning. In line with this, this treatise seeks (1) to investigate and specify the values which are at the core of the dominant discourse of South African newspaper journalism; (2) to analyse these values as they appear in the context of the contemporary newspaper debate; and (3) towards this backdrop, to discuss whether *communitarian journalism* is a conceivable route for South African journalism.

1.1 Background for the treatise

This study started as an exploration of the public debate of the South African media. Many people, especially media professionals and politicians, frequently raise their voices to express what role the media should occupy in the 'new' South Africa. Clearly, most of the opinions in this debate have been concerned with the role of the media in relation to political interests, such as freedom of expression and media ownership, rather than professional journalism topics like code of ethics for the media or source criticism, which are perhaps more prevalent topics in politically more stabilized countries. It is likely that the big interest in the political role of the South African media is a result of the political uncertainty that has caused much public debate after the abolishment of apartheid in 1994. These factors combined – political uncertainty and emerging democracy – make an analysis of the public debate of the South African media timely and stimulating.

Why, then, study normative models of the South African press? Some would argue that there are more pressing concerns, such as the study of racism in the media commissioned by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC, November 1999). However, there are normative preferences which underlie all media performance, including coverage of racism or race-related issues. Only a sufficient agreement on normative models can inform a fruitful discussion on the performance of the media. It is therefore of interest to investigate whether journalists and government representatives agree on what role the media should play in a democratic South Africa, or whether the viewpoints of the two groups are so different that a more fundamental debate on normative ethics is needed.¹ Further, because of the racial divisions of South Africa's past, it is interesting to find out whether the different viewpoints (discourses) are determined by the traditional journalist/politician divide, or if there are other division lines (pertaining to race) which are more predominant. The apartheid past clearly forms a backdrop for the media debate: To what extent are the preferred normative models of the press a sheer reaction to the restrictions that the press had to come to grips with under apartheid? Does the new ANC government adopt a Western understanding of the press, or are these challenged? Does the South African government want a more liberal, a more cooperative, or a more close-knit relationship with the press than do their Western counterparts? All of these are questions which belong to studies of normative media models.

This treatise deals with the public debate, i.e. the debate which is openly enacted in the public sphere. However, the public sphere is not one big market place where ideas and opinions are openly exchanged in front of everyone's eyes, as the allegory would first imply.

The public sphere should rather be seen as *a number of arenas* with different attributes and different participants. This study is concerned with one particular arena of the public sphere: the newspapers columns. Newspapers have a number of characteristics which distinguishes them from electronic media and other media. Faithful newspaper readers are generally higher educated than the average citizen; the participants in the newspaper debate often hold high-profile positions in the private or civil society; and the format of the newspaper medium provides space for lengthy argumentation. These factors prove that the newspaper as a public sphere medium has its limitations, because the views expressed will not necessarily be the views hold by the population at large. However, the advantage of studying the newspaper debate is that the debate reflects the views of the policy makers and the so-called opinion leaders. To the extent that there is a publicly agreed media ideology, we can expect to find traces of this in the newspaper columns.

When politicians criticize the press, or when journalists criticize political interference with the media, they advocate a certain *normative model of the media*. A normative model, or theory, expresses what the media's role should be in relation to governmental institutions – to the state. For instance, a journalist would often argue for the need for clear boundaries between the media and the state, thus expressing a libertarian normative model, whereas a politician may argue for closer cooperation between the media and the state, thus expressing a normative preference which aligns the social responsibility model. It is the starting position of this study that all views expressed in the public media debate can be identified as declarations of normative theories. It is therefore necessary to analyse the debate in order to identify the dominant normative press ideals which are predominant in the South African media.

1.2 Confining the study

This study is comprised by an analysis of 102 newspaper articles which appeared in English-language South African newspapers February 1996 to April 1999. The articles have been selected from a total of approximately 6.500 articles contained in the «Media, post and telecommunications» clipping archive prepared by Die Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis, Universiteit van die Oranje-Vrystaat.² Also, the World Wide Web has been used to search for relevant material. The source of articles was initially planned to be limited to two newspapers only, *The Mail & Guardian* and *The Sunday Independent*. However, it soon became clear that it was more fruitful to draw from a broader range of newspapers, since the aim of the project was to map out the dominant discourses of the entire South African media debate. The debate is spread over almost all major South African newspapers, as the study

will show. Also, some articles are published in more than one newspaper (like the Sapa material), which makes it erroneous to focus on the newspaper (the production source) instead of the author (the creative source). A topical selection appeared to be more fruitful than a strict source selection.

The main criterion for selection is that each article should express an opinion on the normative role of the press in South Africa. Particular attention has been paid to articles which deal explicitly with the relationship between the state and the press, in terms of what obligations and freedoms the press should have before the state and vice versa. An effort has also been made to project the diversity of opinions that exists in the debate. In cases where several articles are found to express nearly the same view, and the source of opinion is the same, one or more articles may have been excluded from the analysis. However, caution has been made to ensure that the total array of articles reflects the overall debate on the topic.

1.3 Limitations of the treatise

A thorough analysis of an argument would have to include both written and spoken communication, as well as an examination of the events that preceded the argument. To this end, it appears that a newspaper article presents only a small portion of the total argument. For instance, when Deputy President Thabo Mbeki held a speech on the alleged poor training of South African journalists, only extracts of his speech were referred in the press (Fabricius, 25 July 1996). What if the deputy president gave crucial arguments in his speech that were excluded in the newspaper article? Should we not look up the archives of the Deputy President Office to obtain the full version of his address? No. This is exactly the value of discourse analysis. The analysis does not claim to be an exhaustive examination of the viewpoints by all parts. Rather, it examines the social discourse as it is *publicly known* and *publicly reinforced*. Since few people have access to the full length of Mbeki's address, it is not likely to inform the public discourse considerably. The focus of the analysis in this treatise is therefore on the published material only.

For similar reasons, this study does not entail newsroom practices. Certainly, conversations on journalism in the newsroom are relevant to the understanding of normative press discourses in South Africa. Also, a study of newsroom talk (which could also be a discourse analysis) could help us discern certain discourses as well as the flaws in these discourses. But again, it is the *public discourse* which is at stake in this study. How it originated, and whether there are gaps in the discourses from their birth in the newsroom to the printed version in the newspaper, is not scrutinized in this particular study. This is not to say, of course, that discourse analysis could not also include studies of newsroom practices

and incongruous readings (interpretations) on behalf of the consumer. In fact, a full understanding of discourses would have to include these areas of study.³ Yet this particular treatise is limited to mediated news discourses only, and it is therefore valid as an adequate study of public discourses.

A weakness of the treatise is that it is comprised by English-language material only. If the study claims to be a comprehensive treatment of the debate between the press and the government in South Africa, then it would have to include other language newspapers as well, such as Afrikaans (e.g. *Die Burger* and *Beeld*), Zulu (e.g. *Ilanga*) and Xhosa (e.g. *Imvo Zabantsundu*). That is true. However, I want to maintain that the most significant debate on the press is occurring exactly in the English press. This is because, first, a majority of the newspapers (confirmed by circulation figures) are English-medium, and second, the tensions between the ANC government and the media professionals must be debated on common language grounds, and English serves as this common medium. Supporting the latter is the debate prior to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission media hearings in September 1997, where black journalists directed their criticism towards the English press and only to a very little extent the Afrikaans press. I have previously suggested that this was partly due to the fact that the English press has a broader black readership and is therefore more obliged to this reader group than are Afrikaans newspapers (Skjerdal, 1997). Likewise, we must expect that the debate between the largely black government and the media industry takes place mainly in English-medium newspapers. Despite this modification, I would not argue that a government/press study is exhaustive without considering the debate which occurs in the languages as well. Perhaps other discourses could be identified in, say, *Die Burger*.

The chosen time span is always subject for critique in a research project. This study covers February 1996–April 1999. The critical question is: Are the findings relevant when the research results are published only two years later? In response to this I would like to mention two concerns. The first is that the years 1996–99 represent the period when the political situation had stabilized after the first free elections in 1994. Professional practice in both the media and the government was expected to follow democratic procedures, and we can expect that the same basic thinking informs the debate also in the following years.⁴ The second is that the apartheid era was still close enough to have an influence on the media debate. What makes this particularly interesting with regard to normative press models, is that both media professionals, politicians and academics frequently refer to the failures of authoritarian and communist ideologies when arguing for more democratic press models. It is then interesting to see to what extent the first few years after apartheid were still informed by the apartheid discourse (but then as an oppositional discourse). Perhaps South Africa's

history of heavy media restraints has led opinion leaders to uncritically accept the other extreme. No matter the conclusion, the findings will be relevant for other regions in the world where regimes transform into democracies. On a more personal note, I would like to add that the years 1996–99 are particularly interesting because some of the most well-known political figures of the world were directly involved in the debate, notably President Nelson Mandela, whose comments on the press in late 1996 and late 1997 caused much debate.

A possible critique of this study is that its findings appear to be obvious and therefore insignificant. It demonstrates that the watchdog discourse is a major driving force in the South African media debate – who wouldn't expect that? To this I wish to reply: The identification of non-negotiable libertarian ideals is perhaps not surprising given the heavily regulated history of South African media industry, but it is nevertheless significant. Most of all, it prompts one to question whether all libertarian principles are altogether healthy. Perhaps the fright of another authoritarian paradigm has caused opinions makers to fall in love with the other end of the continuum (if media policies operate on a continuum at all) and uncritically accept total independence of private businesses and unlimited individual freedoms. To this extent, this study motivates other areas of study, such as the usefulness of Western media models in radically changing political climates. It is not unlikely that parallels can be drawn to, say, the developments in China.

1.4 How the treatise is structured

The body of this study is divided into four parts: (1) Method and methodology; (2) The relevance of normative press theories; (3) Research and observations; and (4) A new model of press ideologies in light of post-apartheid South Africa.

The first part (chapter 2) concerns the choice of method. An in-depth study of this kind must aim at a more structured analysis than what a regular newspaper reader would exercise (although there is a certain element of analysis in daily newspaper reading as well). For the identification of normative press ideals, a discourse analysis approach was chosen as the primary method. This method attempts to do more than simply analysing the words of a printed text; it 'reads between the lines', as it were. Using discourse analysis in textual analysis also has its limitations, as it was initially developed as a method for the study of spoken language. Both the usage and the limitations of discourse analysis will be expanded on in part one of the treatise.

The second part (chapter 3) reviews normative theories of the press, particularly libertarian and social responsibility theories, since these traditionally have been regarded the

dominant models for the Western media. A more recent theory will then be introduced, the communitarian model.

The third part (chapter 4) concerns the discourse analysis itself. Since the analysis of the newspaper articles is the main focus of the study, it is embedded in the body of the paper rather than in the appendix. The analysis of the articles also contains findings and comments which are necessary to the understanding of the overall conclusions. The findings are grouped into a series of *observations*, which is also an attribute of the discourse analysis approach, since the totality of observations rather than a number of set categories makes up the conclusions. Corresponding with the normative press ideals as outlined in part two, the analysis of the articles will be grouped into three main discourses: 'the watchdog discourse', 'the nation-building discourse' and 'the alternative discourse' (the communitarian perspective).

The fourth part of the treatise (chapter 5) is where the differences between the various normative theories of the press are put into perspective. The traditional way to understand normative models is challenged in this concluding part of the treatise, and a new graphic model will be proposed. The model is formed like a diagram to illustrate that the obligations of the press should be seen in two dimensions, not one, as traditional media theorizing has it.

Chapter 2: Method and methodology

***Intention:** This chapter explains why discourse analysis was chosen as the primary method for the research project. A brief history of discourse analysis is provided, with particular attention to Foucault, Laclau/Mouffe, Fairclough and Van Dijk (the last two with specific reference to media discourse). Discourse and discourse analysis are defined for the purpose of this project. The methodological facets of discourse analysis are discussed, with particular attention to how they differ and correspond with interpretive methods. The relationship to neighbouring methods is explained (content analysis, textual analysis, rhetorical analysis and political analysis). Discourse analysis is arranged in four steps for the sake of this project, and each of the steps is clarified. Finally, the chapter ends with a critical discussion of the limitations of discourse analysis in terms of ontological, epistemological and methodological weaknesses.*

This treatise draws from various methods, but mostly from discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a method for analysing texts (both written and spoken) which is being increasingly employed in media studies. Through an in-depth study of words and linguistic symbols, the researcher hopes not only to identify power structures in the language, but to show what the text *does* – how preferred meanings are maintained and strengthened through the use of a particular language. This chapter aims to explain how discourse analysis can be used to unravel the hidden meanings in the language, to show which methodological school the method is derived from, and to make some critical comments about the limitations of this particular method.

2.1 A brief history of discourse and discourse analysis

Discourse analysis began as the discipline which attempted to break down the various elements of everyday language which constitute social discourses. The claim was that language served to uphold certain interpretations of how ideas and actions are generally understood. This led to the notion of *discourse*, which can be understood as the socially accepted interpretation of the world around us. Discourse is therefore more inclusive than ideology. Discourse, as David Howarth (1995: 115) points out, includes *all* types of social and political practice, not only ideologies in the narrow sense of the term, i.e. sets of ideas by which social actors explain and justify actions. Although discourse in everyday language can be used as an equivalent to ‘conversation’, most theorists use the term to include the unspoken or unwritten meanings that lie behind the uttered language. Discourse is defined

in a variety of ways among theorists, however (see for instance Widdowson, 1995). A brief survey of the theoretical roots of 'discourse' will clarify the use of the term.

Discourse is unequivocally connected with power. It is particularly Michel Foucault who has put forth hypotheses about power and knowledge and their relation to discourses. The dominating discourses are upheld by intellectual production and reproduction, and they change through various ages, claims Foucault (1972). Resisting the leading social scientific tradition of the day, Foucault moved his research focus from statements of truth to statements of discourse. Truth per se was no longer the chief aim of study, discourse was. Foucault thus confronted the common perception that creating knowledge is a matter of discovering the truth about ourselves and the world, rather than about constructing certain kinds of selves and social worlds. Challenging the established perception, Foucault maintained that controlling a discourse is a way of creating power.

Interestingly, Foucault does not conclude that every social expression belongs to the dominating discourses of the day; rather, there are also *non-discursive* conditions which are seminal to the existence of discourses. The non-discursive elements can be political events, economic phenomena and institutional changes which serve not only to give the dominating discourse autonomy, but to bring about a discursive change (Foucault, 1972: 162-5). This outset makes it meaningful to undertake a discourse study (such as a discourse analysis). The relations within concrete discourses are not completely arbitrary, as one perhaps would argue since there seems to be no natural bond between the discourse and its social specificities. Supporting this condition for research on discourses from a Foucauldian perspective, Jakob Torfing (1999: 94) concludes: «The relations and identities within a concrete discourse are strictly necessary: not because they are governed by an underlying rationality, but because they are part of a whole which stands in a relation of reciprocal conditioning with its parts.»⁵ Certainly, a Foucauldian understanding of discourse does not discourage the study of discourses, quite the opposite. However, a discourse study conducted in the tradition of Foucault must always include the notion of power.

A broad definition of discourse is offered by Ernesto Laclau (1988: 254): Discourse can be defined as «a decentred structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed». Together with Chantal Mouffe, Laclau developed a type of neo-Gramscian theory of discourse in the mid-1980s. Drawing on the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, Mouffe and Laclau see a mutual conditioning between hegemony and discourse; between moral, intellectual and political leadership, and preferred interpretations of particular social conditions. While hegemonic practice shapes and reshapes discourse, discourse provides the conditions for hegemonic articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). A discursive analysis, then,

must emphasize the construction of social identity through hegemonic practices of articulation, which of course stands in sharp contrast to essentialist conceptions of identity (Torfing, 1999: 41). For the media researcher, such an approach to discursive analysis is helpful as an ideological backdrop; however, the understanding of discourse is rather vague and borders to the definition of ideology. A more precise concept of discourse is needed. Both Laclau and Mouffe use discourse as a tool in their political criticism, but they never develop a method to analyse discourses in mediated articulation.

The application of discourse in media studies tends to be more concentrated than its broader counterpart in studies of philosophy and ideology. Nonetheless, also in media studies are discourse used analytically in many disciplines, for instance in cultural studies (Allan, 1998), sociocognitive analysis (Van Dijk, 1988b), conversation analysis (Greatbatch, 1998) and reception analysis (Richardson, 1998). Discourse analysis has also been employed on advertisements, teenage magazines and so forth, but most of the work in media discourse has concentrated on factual genres rather than fictional ones, and particularly news. As Peter Garrett and Allan Bell (1998: 4) remark, this emphasis on news reflects the status of news as the most prestigious of media genres, as well as its assumed importance in the exercise of socio-political power. It is therefore no surprise that discourse analysis soon became an exercise in media analysis. Garrett and Bell (1998: 6) report that some 40 percent of the papers published in the cross-disciplinary critical discourse analysis journal *Discourse and Society* deal with media data.

Two researchers have been particularly concerned with discourse analysis in relation to media studies: Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk. Both deal with text or discourse analysis on micro (vocabulary) and macro levels, and both focus on the interpretation and distribution of media texts, but, as Garrett and Bell (1998) point out, Fairclough and Van Dijk differ in their analysis of social practices. While Fairclough takes on a Foucauldian approach and concentrates on the relation of discourse to power and ideology, van Dijk focuses on 'sociocognition', by which we mean the mediation between discourse and society in cognitive structures and mental models. Consequently, Fairclough offers perhaps the most enriching approach to the intertextual aspects of social discourses, whereas Van Dijk offers a more satisfactory model on the studies of news and other media items as expressions of social discourses. Both approaches serve as a helpful backdrop for this study; Fairclough on the theoretical level, Van Dijk more on the methodological level. We will take a closer look at both approaches.

Building on Foucault, Fairclough developed his approach to media discourse through his concern with language, power and discourse. According to Garrett and Bell (1998),

Fairclough's early books (1989, 1992) focused on the place of language in relation to sociopolitical power and processes of social change, often with the use of media texts as examples, but not as the main focus for research. His more recent works, however, such as *Media Discourse* (1995b), focus directly on media texts and contexts. Both his early and later works are consistent in their use of *critical discourse analysis* as the proper term for this particular exercise of discourse study. In a later article, Fairclough (1998: 144) outlines and summarizes the three sorts of analysis that a critical discourse analysis should entail:

- Analysis of texts (spoken, written, or alike)
- Analysis of discourse practices of text production, distribution and consumption.
- Analysis of social and cultural practices which frame discourses.

Obviously, this approach to discourse analysis opens for a much wider range of study than just written or spoken media texts. In line with this, Fairclough claims that his version of discourse analysis is characterized by the combination of two commitments: an interdisciplinary commitment, and a critical commitment. His clarification of these two commitments is worth a lengthy quote:

The interdisciplinary commitment is to constitute CDA [critical discourse analysis] as a resource for the investigation of changing discursive practices, and thereby enable it to contribute to a major contemporary research theme in social science: the analysis of ongoing social and cultural change, often construed in terms of major shifts within of shifts away from modernity (towards 'late modernity' of 'postmodernity'). The critical commitment is to understanding from a specifically discursive and linguistic perspective how people's lives are determined and limited by the social formations we are blessed or cursed with; to foregrounding the contingent nature of given practices, and the possibilities for changing them.

(Fairclough 1998: 144).

The main contribution of Fairclough in discourse studies, as displayed in this quote, is his attempt to identify and analyse discourses in order to create awareness of the discursive ideological practices that both the media and other agents of change are in possession of. However, and this can only serve as an incomplete criticism as there is no space here to go deeper into Fairclough's actual use of discourse analysis, his critical approach tends to lack the analytical framework that a media researcher needs. His use of media texts as examples in both *Language and Power* (1989) and *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1995a) is no more than that – examples – and they appear to serve as 'proves' of his political argument rather than as independent objects for study. Further, Fairclough's analyses is in lack of a defined system of categories as objects for study. That is, he does not start with a confined category which delimits the particular study (such as 'race', 'libertarianism' or 'newsworthiness'), but elaborates on a theoretical agenda which could perhaps have been reached by means of a

number of methods and study objects (arbitrary texts). This is both a weakness and a strength, but if the aim of the research is to study a particular set of media texts in context, then Fairclough's approach would appear to be more helpful as a theoretical backdrop than a practical methodology.

Teun A. van Dijk's approach has, in contrast to Fairclough's, served as a practical model for the study of media texts. Van Dijk is particularly known for his systematic studies of news items, notably the Unesco-commissioned case study of racism in the press, in which newspaper articles from a high number of democratic countries were analysed (Van Dijk, 1984). A sketch of the applied model is outlined in *News as Discourse* (Van Dijk, 1988b), a book which is regarded as a primary theoretical contribution to the study of news. The book was accompanied by a series of case studies, *News Analysis* (Van Dijk, 1988a), where Van Dijk in simple terms explains the purpose of discourse analysis: «We try to show how the press, through subtle discursive means ... [legitimizes] national and international power structures» (p. x). It is clear that Van Dijk's initial assumption is the same as Fairclough's: Journalists are part of a cultural elite who maintains the dominant social discourses through media production. In order to reveal this 'plot', as it were, the media researcher needs a method which goes beyond the traditional approach of quantitative content analysis. This is what Van Dijk attempts to do through discourse analysis, a mostly qualitative method which analyses media texts. To reduce discourse analysis to the strict analysis of texts, however, is not what Van Dijk intends to do. An important aim of his approach is to unravel the totality of social and cultural processes that influences on news production, thus a thorough study must include a complex set of analyses with study areas such as internal institutional routines, news production as social interaction, external goals of the news organization, etc. In most instances, however, an exhaustive study of this kind is beyond the scope of the resources available. Van Dijk affirms, though, that even a narrow study of selected media texts can give valuable insight into the understanding of media discourses.

Van Dijk begins by asking the question: How are societal structures related to discourse structures? His argument is that they cannot be linked directly. If so, there would be no place for ideology, and there would be total agreement between all social actors. A brief observation of society will then suffice to inspire a study of discursive production. Van Dijk claims that societal structures can only be related to discourses through social actors and their minds. Mental models mediate between ideology and discourse. Three components then become necessary in discursive theory: social functions, cognitive structures, and discursive expression and reproduction. Towards this backdrop, Van Dijk differentiates between micro and macro level of analysis, which both are important for the understanding

of how discourses are produced and reproduced in a larger societal context. On the micro level, textual analysis operates on two planes: as isolated sentences (words, syntax, etc.), and as structures of sentences. On the macro level, one is concerned with conveyed discourses of meaning (Van Dijk, 1998a). In contrast to a traditional textual analysis, whose concern is on the micro levels alone, a typical discourse analysis seeks to use the micro levels as a basis for understanding the macro level.

It is important for Van Dijk, however, not to discard the disciplines which discourse analysis grew out of. These are structuralism/semiotics, conversation analysis, pragmatics, socio-linguistics, text processing in psychology and text linguistics (Van Dijk, 1998a: 3-7). It was only in the 1980s that these disciplines were joined in a systematic manner to study mass communication through discourse analysis. While traditional mass media research had focused on the economic, political, social or psychological aspects of the media, residing in the reliability of statistical treatment of the results rather in the understanding of media messages in their own right, the new interdisciplinary approach of discourse analysis attempted to study media messages as specific kinds of sociocultural practice. Van Dijk's work was seminal to the development of this interdisciplinary methodology.

2.2 Defining discourse and discourse analysis

It follows from the discussion above that this treatise favours an inclusive understanding of discourse and a more confined understanding of discourse analysis. Discourse in this treatise shall be understood as the culturally agreed interpretation of social phenomena as it is communicated through language. Discourse analysis shall be understood as the qualitative investigation of discourses on micro and macro levels of analysis in order to identify and contextualize the preferred meanings which are conveyed through language.

2.3 Locating discourse analysis in the methodological terrain: a social constructionist method

Discourse analysis belongs to social constructions methods. Social constructionist methods are characterized by particular research preferences which stand in contrast to other qualitative research methods, such as interpretive methods. These differences will be discussed here, as they also form a basis for specific research strategies that will be of use for the actual analysis later in the treatise. This discussion will commence from Terre Blanche and Durrheim's (1999) survey of social constructionism methods.

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) defines social constructionism as «the research approach that seeks to analyse how signs and images have powers to create particular

representations of people and objects» (p. 148). Types of research include hermeneutics, semiotics and discourse analysis, among others. Social constructionism has in common with interpretive methods that it is qualitative, interpretive and concerned with meaning. However, while interpretive research focuses on the subjective perceptions of individuals or groups, social constructionist research seeks to explain how these perceptions are derived from larger discourses. Interpretive research view the study objects as their own producers of thoughts and experiences. Social constructionist research, by contrast, view people as though their thoughts and experiences are produced on the social level rather than the individual (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999: 148).

The view of language is different in interpretive and social constructionist research. Interpretive research, in agreement with positivist sciences, views language as a window onto some other reality. Language can still be an object for study, but then with the aim of pointing to meanings outside of the language medium itself. Constructionism, by contrast, has as its very precondition that the world is constructed by language, and it warns that language is never neutral or transparent. Since language constructs reality, it can and should be a primary object of study, with the aim to interpret the social world as a kind of language. Social constructionist research acknowledges that it cannot neutrally reflect social reality through empirical facts. Language is thus accepted as 'the social construction of reality' (a term introduced by Berger and Luckman in 1967).

Blanche and Durrheim (1999) makes a point that constructionism must not be confused with linguistics. While linguistics dissects grammar, denotations and the technical structure of language, constructionism looks at broader patterns of meaning conveyed by the language. Useful in this regard is Saussure's distinction between 'langue' and 'parole'. Parole is of concern to the linguist, and deals with specific usages of words and expressions. Langue, on the contrary, is the overall system of language which knows no geographical barriers. Langue can constitute a discourse, parole can constitute a text. (The terms 'langue' and 'parole' were introduced by Saussure in his seminal work *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, 1971/1915.)

Discourse analysis is defined by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 154) as «the act of showing how certain discourses are deployed to achieve particular effects in specific contexts». The emphasis in this definition is on the *effect* of discourses, in line with the understanding that discourse analysis should not only identify discourses, but expose what discourses *do*. Methodologically correct, Terre Blanche and Durrheim do not call for a particular method on how to exercise discourse analysis. They declare: «To a large extent, discourse analysis involves a way of reading that is made possible by our immersion in a

particular culture, which provides us with a rich tapestry of ‘ways of speaking’ that we can recognise, ‘read’ and dialogue with» (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999: 158). It follows that cultural awareness is a prerequisite for recognizing and analysing discourses. Still, as discourse analysts we must maintain a critical distance to the text, we must «extract ourselves (to a degree) from living *in* culture to reflecting *on* culture» (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999: 158). Discourse analysis begins, then, with looking for clues in the text that help identifying specific discourses. The researcher then goes on to ask what these discourses do. In accordance with the discussion above, the social constructionist researcher is more interested in the effects of the discourse than with their truthfulness. Where the interpretive researcher asks for the more accurate meaning of the text, the social constructionist seeks to clarify which social underpinnings are active in the text to privilege one particular discourse above others. Social constructionism thus departs from interpretive methods both in ontology (whether the essence of the world is the language or a reality behind the language), in epistemology (whether our primary medium of knowledge is the language or our thoughts), and in methodology (whether we ought to concentrate our research on *langue* or *parole*).

Discourse analysis borrows from other research traditions as well. Four of them will be briefly mentioned here, as they are moderately used in the research project: Content analysis, textual analysis, rhetorical analysis and political analysis.

Content analysis is perhaps the most widely used method for analysing media texts in the communication sciences. This type of research is concerned with the frequency of words and expressions in selected texts, and the task for the researcher is to categorize and count the words systematically in order to reveal bias in the text material, for instance towards male domination. In Kerlinger’s (1986) words, content analysis belongs to the strain of research which seeks to analyse the communication process in «a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables». It is frequently assumed that content analysis is exclusively quantitative, but the method is used for qualitative purposes as well. Bernhard Berelson, in his classic «Content Analysis in Communication Research» (1952), in fact devoted an entire chapter on «‘qualitative’ content analysis». Moreover, the most well-known theorist on discourse analysis in actual media research, Teun A. van Dijk, has used content analysis extensively towards the formation of discursive hypotheses (see, for instance, Van Dijk, 1988a). In this research project, no tables on systematic content analysis will be provided, however, elements of content analysis will assist to identify discourses (such as the recurrent use of the expression ‘freedom of expression’ as an indication of libertarian preferences).

Textual analysis is a methodological umbrella which incorporates methods such as conversation analysis and discourse analysis. Textual analysis was formerly a linguistic approach which was concerned with the close study of written texts. As 'text' has taken on a broader meaning, however, textual analysis now includes the study of any written, spoken or otherwise mediated text. Textual analysis is concerned with the relation between the various elements of the text (i.e. sentences and flow of thought expressed through sentence construction). The method will be of use for this study primarily to show how certain sentence structures represent a discursive 'flow of thought' which appears natural to the reader.

Rhetorical analysis is concerned with the sequence of reasons that leads to an argument. The aim of rhetorical analysis is to assess the reasoning that the discussant uses to prove evidence for a particular argument. Both logos (the logical argument), pathos (the emotional argument) and ethos (the credibility of the discussant) can be part of a rhetorical analysis, as well as the flaws that the argumentation is troubled with. For instance, provided we are faced with the following argumentative line: «Media should serve as the public's watchdog. The media under apartheid were restricted by the government. Therefore, the media must not cooperate with the government in order to act as a watchdog in the new South Africa.» This is not a valid argument and should be criticized. The reasoning is false because the conclusion does not follow from the premises. Also, the conclusion is a statement of opinion and not a logical argument. The importance in rhetorical analysis is to acknowledge that every discourse will have subsequent reasons which favour that particular discourse. However, the reasons are often a collection of common sense statements and linked in a seemingly logical, but in fact prejudiced fashion. We hope to expose these argumentative flaws partly through the use of rhetorical analysis.

Finally, we will draw on political analysis, which is the field of study which investigates the operation of ideologies in day-to-day political practice. The field includes broad areas of study, from ideology studies to economic analysis. The application of political analysis in this study is twofold: First, with regard to press ideologies and their equivalents on the political spectrum (libertarianism, socialism/social responsibility and communitarianism), and second, with regard to what has been labelled 'political linguistic discourse analysis'. The latter is a type of discourse analysis which specifically studies the domination of communication through political language, or «how power, language, and ideology are related» (Hacker, 1996: 38). Of particular interest is propaganda, political metaphors and ideological generalizations through language. They can all be observed in the discussion around the role of the media in post-apartheid South Africa.

2.4 Applying discourse analysis to this project

Discourse analysis is not a fixed method – «there is no one thing called discourse analysis» (Parker et al., 1997: 198). In fact, discourse analysis is something the researcher *develops* rather than something she simply *does*. It is therefore difficult, if not contradictory, to map out techniques on how to exercise this method. However, it is helpful to outline some general guidelines which explain how the method is employed in the particular research project. The following outline not only serves to focus the research, it also helps the reader to control that the research is performed consistently and in agreement with discourse methodologies as they are understood in this project.

The study at hand seeks to answer the question: What are the dominating normative press ideals in post-apartheid South Africa? The first step in the analysis, then, is to *identify* discourses. At this point, it is important to delimit the research to normative press discourses, and not include various other political and journalistic discourses that are also part of the discussion. For instance, an article which addresses the issue of how the press should perform in the new South Africa (i.e. dealing with normative ideals for the media), may well refer to a certain understanding of apartheid which is not directly related to the media discourse as such. There are at least two discourses at play in a text of this kind: the normative media discourse and the apartheid history discourse. The latter of these, the historical discourse, should not be subject for analysis at the first step of the research process (when identifying media discourses). However, the historical discourse may be an important backdrop on later stages in the research, when attempting to understand the historical conditions which predicated a contemporary view of how the media should perform.

An example of this type of converging discourses is Jon Qwelane's article in the *Saturday Star* 13 July 1996, which demands that the press puts an end to its alleged unfair portrayal of then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. The first discourse is then a normative one, that the press ought to be more positive in governmental reporting. However, Qwelane continues to claim that the same press was «deathly silent» on the mischieves of the previous apartheid NP cabinet ministers. Thus we see the contours of a second discourse, one which seeks to interpret history. It is tempting, since the second discourse also deals with the role of the media, to analyse this discourse together with the normative one. However, it is important for us to restrict the focus of research on this stage to include normative press discourses only. Otherwise, we invite areas of study which were not intended to be part of the research project, and which inevitably will result in a superficial and ditto unsatisfactory report. Similarly, we must be careful not to shift the focal point to political discourses (such

as opinions on the role of Comtask), professional media ethics discourses (such as viewpoints on the Times Media Ltd. editorial charter), and other discourses which are all part of the broader discourse in the South African media, but which are not directly related to the discourses which we are analysing, namely normative press discourses. The holistic approach which discourse analysis caters for must not result in an infeasible attempt to do an exhaustive study.

The second step in the analysis concerns relating the discourses to normative theories of the media. The framework to be used here is the recognized normative theories of the press which are generally used when relating media policies to political preferences. These are in particular libertarian and social responsibility theories, and to a lesser extent Marxist, authoritarian and development theories. It is of course a potential weakness of the project that settled, and possibly outdated theories are used; however, it is certainly also a strength because the use of familiar theoretical frameworks makes it easier for the reader to critically assess the findings. Also, the study will conclude with an attempt to bring new insight to both the usefulness and limitations of traditional normative media models. It is thus not a threat to the integrity of the research to employ familiar categories. Indeed, discourse analysis occasionally suffers when the method does not encourage the use of particular theoretical models, and the research tends to end in general notions on 'ideology', 'hegemony' etc. with only vague linkages to the actual text which is researched. We hope to avoid this vagueness by using familiar normative media theories on this second stage of analysis.

Still, we are left with the core question: How do we identify libertarian and social responsibility discourses? Certainly, very few of the discussants apply these terms in the debate, let alone refer to theorists and academic research. This is indeed where discourse analysis comes to the fore. Simply put, discourse analysis attempts to read between the lines, and is not dependent on a certain terminology or certain expressions, which perhaps a content analysis or a textual analysis approach would require. Instead of looking for particular expressions which can be easily categorized, we will approach the entity of the text in such a manner that the intention *behind* the text is foregrounded. It is then necessary to take into account the cultural background which the text is derived from, as well as the context in which it is presented. For instance, the use of the term «freedom of expression» is likely to vary from one context to the next, from a parliamentary situation to a furious letter to the editor, and that is why a simple word count will not suffice in discourse analysis. Nevertheless, there are clusters of expressions that signify allegiance to one ideology above the other, and which tend to be socially (though not universally) agreed upon. These

expressions are of considerable importance at this stage of the research process, although they will never be treated as numbers prepared for accumulation. Some of the terms which will be paid particular attention to are (all are examples from the actual analysis):

- Libertarianism: «freedom of the press», «watchdog», «independent journalism», «fourth estate», «guardians», «liberal», «transparency», «separate», etc.
- Social responsibility: «responsible», «positive reporting», «information», «general good», «accountable», «trustworthy», «understanding», «transparency», «nation-building», etc.

Equally interesting is the identification of antagonistic expressions, expressions which the discussants wish to distance themselves from. Interestingly, media debates tend to attract what some rhetoric analysts call ‘negativism’, that is, the tendency to denigrate the opposing view rather than arguing positively for one’s own. This results in disapproving statements, which are of special interest for the discourse analyst. Examples of such statements are:

- Libertarianism: «state regulations», «intolerant officialdom», «sunshine journalism», «dictatorship», «patriotism», «nation-building»
- Social responsibility: «rights over responsibilities», «hate speech», «dictatorship», «self-reliant», «divided»

Thus, a terminology which is deemed positive for one theory, can be negative for the other (e.g. «nation-building»). Likewise, some terminology will be shared by several theories (e.g. «transparency»). The task for the discourse analyst is therefore not to categorize the terminology into fixed clusters, but to locate it in the overall discourse, taking into consideration the cultural and contextual conditions which the discourse is informed by. The second stage of the research is one of interaction between the specific analysis (of words, images) and the general contextualization (of meanings, discourses).

While the first two stages of discourse analysis operate mainly on the micro levels of analysis (cf. Van Dijk, 1988a), the third stage moves onto the macro levels. Van Dijk (1980) introduced the term ‘semantic macrostructure’ to capture the link between the elements of the text (expressions, sequence of sentences) and the overall themes that the text conveys. Without these structures, the reader would not be able to put the text (the article) into its cultural context. It would be like reading an article with so many unknown abbreviations that the meaning of the text was lost. The grammatical meaning is intact (micro level), but the overall meaning is foreign (macro level). Semantic macrostructures, then, connect words with their physical environment. Unless we arrived at this stage in the research, we would

only be doing linguistics for the sake of linguistics or psychological examination. Specifically, this third stage in the research process asks: How does the discourse produce and reproduce a certain understanding of the world around us? The analysis has then moved from the passive identification stage to the active *doing*-stage, cf. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999): «Doing a discourse analysis, however, involves more than simply identifying discourses, and we should proceed with understanding what the text is doing» (p. 163–64). At this stage, we intend to show that the discourses reproduce a certain understanding of the preferred relationship between the media and the state.

Analysis at the third stage must combine insights from discourse theory, media theory and political theory in a critical manner. There are namely reasons to believe that people do shortcuts when relating one discourse to the next. For example, it is frequently assumed (as we shall see in the analysis later) that a free press cannot exist under governmental supervision. This assumption contains at least three discourses: a media discourse, a political discourse and an historical discourse. The media discourse says the people is best served when the media is free to criticize the government. The political discourse claims that the government is likely to have objectives which contradicts those of the media. The historical discourse is still perhaps the corner stone of the theory: It says that history ‘proves’ that governments constantly seek to concentrate as much power as possible. What if, however, the political and historical discourses are based in the accumulated anxiety of the social memory rather than in practice; and similarly bad: What if there is no relation between these discourses at all? The discourse analyst seeks to clarify the conditions which nurture certain discourses above others, and to show that there may be shortcomings in the assumed relation between the various discourses. However, it is not the task of the researcher within a constructionist paradigm to assess the discourses according to truth standards. Whether one discourse reflects reality better than the other, does not belong to the exercise of discourse analysis.

A fourth stage of research, which is really only a continuation of the third, is to revisit the discourses which were assumed to be informing the cultural accumulated knowledge, and to ask whether these discourses really are the best way to understand the cultural synthesis. Perhaps, and this will form the concluding part of this treatise, a new understanding is needed in terms of how the discourses are related to each other. Perhaps libertarian media discourses are a predetermined outcome of a post-apartheid society which has experienced the oppression under other discourses. Perhaps the assumed fallacies of social responsibility discourses and communitarian discourses are so visible in an emerging democracy like South Africa that they in reality only serve to strengthen the superiority of

the libertarian discourse. These are questions which will be addressed on the final stage of analysis, although it would be contradictory with the philosophy of discourse theory to claim that a study of this extent can reach at final answers to any of these questions.

2.5 Limitations of discourse theory and discourse analysis

Despite its holistic features – or perhaps because of its holistic features – discourse analysis has its limitations. Within media research, we can hardly talk of any tradition of discourse analysis. It is yet to become a developed method for media analysis, and it lacks a reference system which can serve as a guide to research procedures. Also, there are potential inherent fallacies within discourse theory which need to be addressed. In this critical assessment, we shall discuss discourse analysis from three theoretical perspectives: ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Firstly, with regard to ontology, i.e. the view of the nature of reality, discourse theory struggles particularly with two fallacies: idealism and relativism. As noted above, social constructionism elevates language to the primary component of reality. The world is a construction of the words and expressions we choose, as it were. Such a view can lead to idealism, which refers to the tendency to reduce everything to the world of ideas. A possible result is the trivialization of social phenomena which hardly can be thoroughly researched through the analysis of language, such as hunger and human oppression. Needless to say, an ontology which downplays the reality which exists beyond language mediation runs the danger of belittling social and natural misfortunes. A human tragedy is not only a matter of unfortunate discourse, of course. Some Marxist scholars have been particularly hard on this critique, as they uphold that the world is defined by economic forces rather than by discourses (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999: 168). It would be detrimental to let discourse theory slip into idealism.

Another potential fallacy of discourse theory, which also belongs to the ontological criticism, is the tendency to subscribe to some sort of relativism. Relativism is a philosophical conviction which grows out of an empirical social fact: pluralism. Since there are so many ‘truths’ coexisting, and since each of them seem to be the result of a personal conviction, it appears to be impossible to decide which one is better. It is easy to see that discourse theory, which is concerned with the construction of discourses rather than establishing the truth within those discourses, easily can be trapped in reducing the world to merely accounts and constructions with no moral obligations. Further, if our interpretation of the text material is as relative as the texts themselves, then we are rendered morally indifferent to our research as well. To avoid this misuse of discourse theory, the researcher needs to clarify her

perception of language as the chief component of reality. Perhaps a more fruitful ontology would rest on the notion that one's preferred *view* of reality hardly has any impact on other coexisting realities. Such an ontological view would not come in conflict with discourse theory.

Secondly, with regard to epistemology, i.e. the theory of how we achieve knowledge, discourse theory is troubled with its privilege of discourse mediation over other social activity. The external world cannot be accessed independently of language, and our knowledge of the world comes through the active use of language, says social constructionism. However, although language is more than a passive reflection of the external world, it does not follow that all knowledge is purely a reflection of linguistic mediation alone. This fallacy of some social constructionists is what Baerveldt and Verheggen (1997) call 'aboutism', i.e. the phenomenon that social constructionism tends to limit itself «to what is said about human feeling, thinking and acting» (p. 5). To avoid this pitfall, we must be clear on the difference between knowledge, truth and discourse. We must not mesh truth and discourse, and assume that discourse analysis is the only method to study epistemology. We must rather acknowledge that there are both individual and social epistemologies, i.e. epistemologies that are both concerned with single and multiple agents, and discourse analysis is mainly concerned with the study of social practices of multiple agents (social epistemology). We therefore maintain that what we do in media discourse analysis, is to study the dominating discourses of larger social groups, and our epistemological preference is not based on a belief that discourse is a reproduction of individual or social *truth*. We will keep the measures of truth outside of this study, yet – and this is the main point of this epistemological clarification – we are not consequently discarding truth as a meaningful standard in other types of research. Thus, this paper maintains that veritistic epistemology (the epistemological tradition which puts a heavy emphasis on truth analysis; Goldman, 1999) is not necessarily contradictory to discourse theory.

Third, discourse analysis has several methodological weaknesses. The most important of these will be mentioned here; however, methodological weaknesses will also be returned to where appropriate on any stage of the study. For a start, discourse analysis requires selection at two levels: a selection of the right articles, and a selection of the right clues which are paid attention to in each article. How can the reader know that the selected articles are not included on purpose to back the researcher's argument? Unfortunately, there is no practical way to examine this, since as many as 6.000 articles were surveyed in the selection process. One must to a large extent rest on the integrity of the researcher. In the

analysis of each article, however, it is easy to read through the article to inspect whether the selected – and omitted – phrases and discourses are relevant for analysis. Nevertheless, and this is a serious criticism of discourse analysis, because the method lacks a tradition of systematic academic practice, it can easily be exploited to carry out the researcher’s political or personal agenda. It can even be argued that discourse analysis is more open for such exploitation than research traditions like content analysis or semiotic analysis, since it relies on the subjective identification of the link between words and discourses. Needless to say, one can find an almost unlimited number of discourses in each communicative act. It is therefore also easy to find confirmation for one’s own view. Unfortunately, there has been a tendency within discourse analysis to accept that since the study in any case will be finite, one has to concentrate on material which points towards a well-established conclusion. That is of course unreliable research. The discourses which can be identified under one subject heading (say, normative press theories) can be numerous and contradictory, but the study is not invaluable for that matter. The researcher must be open for contradictory findings, and that principle is particularly important to keep intact when applying subjective approaches such as social constructionism.

Another methodological error is to use the discourses as examples rather than the object for study. In an argumentative paper, one should be free to use discourses as examples of a certain reasoning. But a discourse analysis is analytic and not argumentative. Thus, the starting-point should be the researched text material, not a particular theory.

Then there is the tendency to confuse discourse analysis with truth verification, as discussed above. To avoid this, the researcher must use a language that corresponds with the nature of discourse theory, thus escaping such terms as «the fact is», «this discourse can be proven false», etc. However, this is not to say that the researcher cannot point to inconsistencies within the discourses. It belongs to the third and fourth stages of the process to address the relationship between the various discourses, including inconsistencies. Still, discourse analysis is not sufficient to answer questions such as: «Has this discourse validity?» or «Is this discourse healthy?» («Are libertarian press models good for South Africa?»))

It should be clear from this discussion that discourse analysis has its limitations, and these limitations are perhaps more evident than what the holistic approach of social constructionism seems to be. A discourse analysis does exactly that – analyses discourses – and other research projects will have to address other areas of study, like political and philosophical issues.

Chapter 3: Normative models of the press

Intention: This chapter introduces normative models of the press and outlines the libertarian model, the social responsibility model and the communitarian model.

3.1 The relevance of normative press models

Normative press models seek to define what the press *should do* in society. Rather than providing a descriptive account of the performance of the press, or criticizing the press, a normative press theory attempts to argue for a certain press system as the prime arrangement. A normative press theory rarely correlates with actual conditions – that is indeed why the theory is *normative*. As such, a normative press theory should not be judged as to what extent it corresponds with the actual socio-political environment, but rather on a fundamental ideological basis, much the same way as one would argue for a political system that is not currently in rule.

Tradition has it that each normative press theory is linked to a certain political system or a political ideology. For instance, the social responsibility theory is related to Western social democratic ideals, whereas the libertarian press theory is related to classic liberalism. Normative press models must therefore not be disconnected from the socio-political conditions they grew out of. This is evident when studying libertarian press ideals in South Africa, because their popularity can be seen both as a reaction to the authoritarian traits of apartheid and an aspiration for Western liberal thinking.

The most well-known attempt to outline normative models of the press was done by Frederick S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in their seminal «Four Theories of the Press» (1963; first edition 1956).⁶ Siebert et al. suggested the authoritarian theory, the libertarian theory, the Soviet theory and the social responsibility theory as the chief normative models of the press.⁷ Denis McQuail (1983) later suggested two additional models: the development model and the democratic-participant model. Various other models have been suggested (Merrill, 1975; Altschull, 1984), but they are all variations of the disputations between libertarian, social democratic and authoritarian political systems. Most recently, communitarianism has motivated new models of the press in terms of public journalism, participant journalism etc.

The main contestation in democratic media systems appears to be between libertarian and social responsibility preferences. This treatise concludes that these two models frame the South African media discussion as well. In addition, there are some calls for communitarian

ethics within the media, thus communitarianism is added as the third perspective in the following briefing of normative press models.

3.2 The libertarian⁸ model

It is frequently reported that the Western private media are libertarian, meaning that they enjoy full independence from the government. This model is therefore also called the free press model. The model rests on the idea that each individual should be free to publish anything he or she likes, as long it does not infringe on the freedom of others. Its history is usually traced back to 17th century philosopher John Milton, who asserted that competition between choices would eventually bring about the best possible order, both for the individual and society at large. This 'free will' principle applies to the press as well. A full-grown libertarian system encourages the press to challenge official government policies. As Siebert (1963: 70) summarizes, there should be no restrictions on import or export of media messages across the national frontiers. Moreover, journalists and media professionals ought to have full autonomy within the media organization.

Several media scholars point out that it is no accident that the American society has become the norm of libertarian media practices (Skogerbø, 1991). A libertarian media demand full freedom of expression and no bans on hate speech etc., which in its ultimate sense is probably not practised anywhere but in the USA. Also, most Western countries (except the USA) have some kind of state or public broadcasting system which is not congruent with classic libertarian principles. The newspaper industry, on the other hand, usually functions according to libertarian principles. Libertarianism is often associated with free 'marketplace' ideologies (cf. Adam Smith, 1776), but it must be carried in mind that the media are a totality of form and content. It is not enough to consider the newspaper *industry* (the form), one must also consider the newspaper itself (the content).

On an historical note, when libertarianism defeated authoritarianism as a model for press policies in the late 1700s, it was a most expected outcome of the Enlightenment. The philosophy of the Enlightenment, with its positive view of human nature and human freedom, had direct influence on the thinking of the role of the press in society. At the heart of Enlightenment philosophies are three assumptions, according to Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney (1998): (1) Human beings are rational creatures who can set aside base emotions and choose between right and wrong, true and false. (2) True liberty is defined as individual freedom from government intrusion. (3) There is such a thing as truth, and it is discoverable through a process of reasoning. The latter also includes the central idea of competition; only

through free competition of ideas can truth come to the surface. The libertarian press model is thus deeply rooted in a certain human and moral philosophy.

3.3 The social responsibility model

The social responsibility model is less based on a certain political ideology than libertarianism is. Siebert (1963), writing in the American tradition, gives credit to the US Commission on the Freedom of the Press (known as the Hutchins Commission, 1947) for the advent of the social responsibility model. The model grew out of a dissatisfaction with the libertarian press, and the commission criticized contemporary American media for disjointing media messages from their context and giving people what they wanted for their personal gain rather than what they needed for their societal commitment. The commission called for a 'socially responsible' press. In the years to follow, the social responsibility model came to be much more prevalent in Western European countries than in the USA.

The social responsibility model, as outlined by McQuail (1994), emphasizes that the media have obligations to society. The news media should be truthful, accurate, fair and objective (to the extent that objectivity is attainable). In conflict with libertarian ideals, the government has the right to intervene in the public interest under some circumstances. Nevertheless, the social responsibility model encourages the press to be critical towards its government, like its libertarian counterpart. The most significant tension between the two models is perhaps their view of the role-division between the press and the government. While libertarianism champions distinct roles between the two institutions, with the press serving primarily through its watchdog functions towards the government, the social responsibility model is not foreign to the idea that both the press and the government have a nation-building function, thus cooperation between the two institutions is sometimes desirable and necessary.

Philosophically, the social responsibility theory has a less positive view of mankind than does libertarianism. Social responsibility ethics assume that the human being is a composition of its particular cultural background and preferences, and the human free will does not guarantee ultimate good for everyone. The liberty concept in social responsibility is rooted in *society*, not only in the autonomous human being.

3.4 The communitarian model

Communitarianism is a fairly new philosophy, but as Amitai Etzioni (1998) points out, the term was coined already in 1841, and communitarian thoughts are found as early as in the writings of the ancient Greeks. Communitarian principles are *inter alia* found in Catholic

social thought and among early sociologists such as Ferdinand Tönnies and Emile Durkheim. More recently, a group of political philosophers in the 1980s – Charles Taylor, Michael J. Sandel and Michael Walzer – challenged individualist liberal opposition to the concept of a common good and thus formed the basis for a new communitarian philosophy. The efforts culminated in «The Responsive Communitarian Platform: Rights and Responsibilities» (1994), which was signed by a number of American academics and public figures.

Communitarians assume a common ground across all societies and all ages, namely the community. The community ought to secure the proper balance between common good and individual autonomy, avoiding a society which leans towards social anarchy or conformism. Etzioni (1998) maintains that there is a difference between what he calls the old and the new communitarianism. The old stressed the opposition between the private sector (the commercial market) and the public sector (the state/government). However, this dichotomy left out a major realm: that of society, and the importance of social bonds and the moral voice. Consequently, the public debate has been concerned with issues of economy and the role of the government in relation to the individual, ignoring the informal web of social relations. The new communitarianism, argues Etzioni, must look beyond the modern conception of the public sphere. This is particularly important in a diverse country like South Africa, where large portions of the population are left out of the public debate since the 'codes' of the public sphere assumes education and training in public behaviour, so to speak. We can speak of a loss of the public sphere which has motivated the communitarian alternative.

The media soon became an inherent part of the communitarian project. It was concluded that the press had failed its societal duties, and a new journalism based on local participation was framed (Christians et al., 1993; Merritt, 1995; Rosen, 1996). This type of journalism is called public journalism, civic journalism, responsible journalism, communitarian journalism, etc. Public journalism is firmly based on normative ethics which rejects both libertarian normative ethics based on the autonomous self, and post-modern relativist ethics based on an understanding of opposing discourses at any given time. Public journalism advocate Jay Rosen (1996) brings the point further and asserts that the classical terms of accuracy, objectivity and fairness have robbed journalists of their potential to influence society (read: the community) in a positive and holistic manner. There is a pressing need, he argues, to «getting the connections right ... particularly the primal connection between journalism and the public» (Rosen, 1996: 134).⁹

Communitarians also wish to have a say in the manner the media are structured. It is clear from a number of studies and reports that various media institutions are tied together in conglomerates and cooperative networks (Herman, 1995; Curran & Seaton, 1991), and also that information in the world is unequally distributed (MacBride Report, 1980).

Communitarians claim that such findings prove that information systems are not only undemocratic in themselves, but also serve to threaten democracy at large. On the basis of this argument, Christians et al. (1993) claim that «the inclusiveness of community clearly implies institutional and intellectual restructuring» (p. 75).

Although public journalism was a reaction to particular US American struggles with democracy, communitarians claim that this kind of journalism can be exported to other parts of the world as well, since the communitarian fundamentals are assumed to be universal (Black, 1997).

3.5 Normative models of the press in the South African context

Normative press models are often associated with functionalist approaches to journalism and media studies, which see the media as essentially self-directing and self-correcting. The functionalist paradigm has been heavily criticized from different academic traditions for its attempt to uncritically adopt positivist research traditions in the human sciences. This, in part, is one of the reasons that normative media theories only to a limited extent have been applied to the South African context. The neo-Marxist school and the alternative-left practical school (media units at University of Natal and Rhodes University, among others) have approached media studies from the critical tradition and have been sceptical to the functionalist school (De Beer & Tomaselli, 2000). Therefore, when Arnold S. De Beer applied the four press theories to South African conditions in a paper characteristically called «The press in South Africa: A functional paradigm» (1989), he induced a fierce academic dispute on the overall subject of media research approaches (Tomaselli & Louw, 1990; De Beer, 1990). The dispute did not concern normative press theories as such, but comprehensive approaches to understanding media and their political environment.

An earlier attempt to criticize normative press models within the South African (apartheid) context was performed by P. Eric Louw (1984). Louw referred to Siebert *et al.* and identified the libertarian press theory as the favoured model among liberal journalists in South Africa. His concern was in particular that the libertarian model falsely gave the impression that journalists were able to stay objective and provide an unbiased view of South African society (Louw called this «the myth of the unbiased journalist»). He also criticized some of the economically inspired myths of libertarianism: the myth that a private

enterprise press is an uncontrolled press, and the myth of consumer sovereignty over the news. Louw concluded that the liberal press, through the libertarian press theory, «serves the *status quo*» (Louw, 1984: 36). Louw's criticism is relevant for the contemporary South African media as well, which we shall return to in the following research section.

Chapter 4: Research and observations

***Intention:** This chapter contains the actual article analysis. The discussion is divided into two main discourses ('the watchdog discourse' and 'the nation-building discourse') and one alternative discourse ('the communitarian discourse').*

The article analysis contained in this chapter is organized according to the two main normative models of the press: libertarian models and social responsibility models. The findings suggest that the models can be translated into a 'watchdog discourse' (libertarianism) and a 'nation-building discourse' (social responsibility). The first emphasizes *rights*, the second *responsibilities*. As expected, representatives of newspapers and the media industry are more likely to promote the rights of the press than are politicians. Therefore, the watchdog discourse is dominated by press representatives. The second discourse, nation-building, is equally dominated by government representatives. However, there are interesting exceptions in the composition of advocates on both sides, which will be commented on.

In addition to libertarianism and social responsibility, communitarianism is added as a third perspective, suggesting that it represents a press model which departs from the two dominating models. Only one article is found to be containing a fully communitarian perspective (Lansink, 7 May 1998). However, there are articles which promote ideas that *include* communitarian thinking (for instance Makgoba, 22 November 1996, and «Freedom and →», 20 October 1996), but which are categorized under social responsibility (the nation-building discourse) as they are mainly proponents for this model.

Effort has been put into making the findings readable. Therefore, rather than being analysed one by one, the articles are arranged according to their topical relevance. The topics follow a reasonable flow under each main heading (the watchdog discourse, the nation-building discourse, the alternative discourse). The analyses of the articles are in turn categorized into 'observations', which are stated at the end of the corresponding analysis. Each observation is directly linked to the particular article(s) under scrutiny, however, *the observations are worded in such a way that they represent statements which are valid for the entire treatise*. The purpose of the article analysis is not to provide a thorough analysis of each article, but to point to findings which are of interest to the treatise (cf. the methodological underpinnings of discourse analysis, which are topical-oriented rather than exhaustive). Some articles have extensive comments, others are used as mere examples. Some are relevant

for more than one topic and are referred to repeatedly. In cases where there are many examples of the same observation (for instance the use of the 'watchdog' metaphor), only a selection of the articles are referred to.

4.1 The libertarian model: 'the watchdog discourse' (observations #1-34)

The 'watchdog discourse' is by far the most dominant discourse treated in this study. It is characterized by the duty of the press to criticize the government, almost to the extent that the press and the government should encourage rivalry. Keywords used to recognize the watchdog discourse are for instance 'critical journalism', 'freedom of the press', 'individual rights' and 'independence from government intervention'. Our examples of watchdog metaphors start with a public statement made by Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Tutu, through his position as the chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and an international symbol of democratic transformation, has frequently lent his voice to opinions on the welfare of the new South Africa, including the situation of the media. In his words (and with a little wit), «we need a sycophantic kowtowing, lick-spittle media as much as we need a hole in the head» (Streek, 10 October 1996). This comment is typical of the liberal view of the media. The understanding is not only that democracy cannot exist without a free media, but also that society should actively prevent close ties between the media and the state. Tutu goes on to share his own experience, and he ensures that he feels free to criticize the ANC government, and that they accept his criticism. To understand this particular discourse, we have to take into consideration the occasion on which the speech was delivered, namely a gathering of the Commonwealth Press Union editors' forum. It is likely that the Archbishop primarily felt a need to assure the editors that he favours a free press, and second, in line with his reconciliation function, aimed to convince the editors that the ANC government is not so poor at receiving criticism as the public has it. Tutu's speech therefore serves as a correction to the mediated perception that the present South African government contravenes the proper state/media relationship. However, our concern is to identify the normative discourse behind this dispute. Interestingly, despite the differing view of the government's performance with the media, the normative model that informs the debate is clearly the watchdog model. In Tutu's words: «Our democracy would soon become moribund and would disintegrate without a vigilant and free press» (Streek, 10 October 1996). The reasoning behind this opinion is worth paying some attention, as the referred article contains an interesting public assumption which is restated by Tutu: «Everywhere in the world those in power [are] always tempted to dabble in the abuse of power.» This statement assumes that those in power (the government) are the 'bad guys' and constantly

seek ways to gain more power, while the media, performing the watchdog role, are the 'good guys'! Interestingly enough, the reporter chose to use the statement from Tutu with no quotation marks, as to assume that this is a statement of truth. This observation indicates that the watchdog discourse sometimes assumes subdiscourses (that is, discourses which serve to back the main discourse) which are built on generalized public assumptions rather than on socio-historical facts, and these subdiscourses are sometimes even likely to contradict empirical research.

- **Observation #1: The general assumption is that democracy cannot exist without a free press.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Streek, 10 October 1996; Leon, 15 February 1996; Nyatumba, 20 November 1996; Mulholland, 11 January 1998)

- **Observation #2: The watchdog discourse is sometimes accompanied by subdiscourses which are built on unproven public assumptions.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Streek, 10 October 1996; Bunsee, 11 September 1996; «Free press -», 19 November 1996)

The political leadership in South Africa has proven great interest in the government–press debate, even with the direct participation of the former State President, Nelson Mandela. His involvement is worthwhile to give some attention since it outlines the main disagreements between the government and the press. It also demonstrates that the government finds it difficult to escape the watchdog discourse when taken to task on the issue of press freedom.

The allegation put forth by the ANC leadership¹⁰ is that the press has not managed to adjust to the conditions of post-apartheid South Africa. President Mandela induced two such attacks on the press during the 1996–98 period in particular. The first occurred in October/November 1996 when he criticized unnamed senior black journalists for being lapdogs for their white owners («Mandela summons -», 21 October 1996, «Mandela accuses -», 12 November 1996; «Black journalists, 13 November 1996). The second attack took place at the 50th ANC congress in Mafikeng December 1997, where Mandela repeated his criticism of black 'token' appointments and also suggested that the so-called white media were part of a counter-revolutionary force («How the papers -», 18 December 1997). Both occasions prompted heated debates between journalists and government representatives, and interestingly, between blacks journalists and the ANC.

President Mandela's critique can be summarized as attacks on the alleged failures of the media to transform themselves to the conditions of the 'new South Africa'. However, the

critique was directed at black journalists in particular, and there are indications that the president expected a better understanding for his concerns by black journalists than by white journalists. For instance, black *City Press* editor Khulu Sibiyi reported the following after having met with Mandela to discuss *City Press'* critical attitude towards Mandela's support of Justice Ismail Mahomed for the position of Chief Justice: «[Mandela] was very upset – he thought I should have understood the circumstances much better, especially as a black journalist» («Mandela summons –», 21 October 1996). From this and other examples, it appears that the political leadership demands a certain sympathy from black journalists that it doesn't demand from white journalists. This observation complicates the discourses considerably: Does the South African government demand one standard – one normative model – for black journalists and another for white journalists?¹¹

Worries within the media industry itself raised this concern with President Mandela and the ANC leadership. The outcome of the debate was, in short, a reinforcement of the watchdog discourse. Mandela was asked to specify who he had in mind when he accused some senior black journalists for having a secret agenda, but declined to name any («Mandela accuses –», 12 November 1996). Similarly, he declined to specify which media he had in mind when he a year later accused the so-called 'white media' to be part of a counter-revolutionary force (the accusation was uttered twice, first in a TV interview and subsequently in the Mafikeng speech; «How the papers –», 18 December 1997). On the contrary, Mandela assured that the ANC was committed to a free press and urged South African journalists to «continue being the watchdogs of the country's infant democracy» (Burbidge, 19 November 1996). Said Mandela, «We don't want you to be an ANC mouthpiece. We don't want you to be lapdogs. All I want for the Press is to be robust and fearless in protecting our democracy» (Burbidge, 19 November 1996). This was quoted from a meeting with 22 senior black journalists and editors. The overall indication is that Mandela reinforced the fourth estate paradigm (the watchdog discourse), since he both affirmed the critical role of the press and indicated that the press and the government should not confuse each others' duties. However, Mandela also maintained that the press is controlled by «conservative whites» (O'Grady, 19 November 1996; also repeated in his Mafikeng speech, «Black editors tokens», 18 December 1997). This allegation indicates a peculiar discourse which sees the entire media as one unit with common goal and interests. Within this discourse, it becomes legitimate for the government to attack the media on a general basis, claiming that the *entire* media industry has a secret agenda which seeks to «undermine and destroy the democratically-elected government» (Mandela in Durban 13 November 1996; «Black journalists –», 13 November 1996).

An interesting aspect of Mandela's attack is that it contains an alternatively libertarian discourse. Mandela's message in both instances at hand was that the press should not align itself with conservatism (through «the white press»). This, no matter the validity of Mandela's accusation, is another way to speak for the integrity of the press, although it refers to integrity from private ideological forces, not governmental. The discourse is therefore, again, a reinforcement of the libertarian understanding that the press ought to disband itself from ideological alliances.

- **Observation #3: When taken to task on the issue, the government ends up reaffirming the watchdog discourse.**
(Articles supporting the observation: Yengeni, 15 November 1996; «Free press», 19 November 1996; Makhaye, 20 February 1998)
- **Observation #4: The government tends to see the press as a homogeneous industry with common goals and interests.**
(Articles supporting the observation: «Phosa says -», 30 May 1996; Niehaus, 15 November 1996; Yengeni, 15 November 1996)

Another central government spokesperson on media policies, namely Posts, Telecommunications and Broadcasting Minister Jay Naidoo, strongly supported the independence of the South African press. Addressing reporters at a national media seminar, he said: «What is needed in South Africa [...] is a fiercely independent press committed to thorough, impartial, accurate reporting» («Media answerable -», 22 October 1996). Furthermore, Naidoo confirmed that the watchdog metaphor is relevant when describing the normative role of the press. In the same speech, the minister acknowledged that tensions between the state and the media are healthy for South Africa's democracy. The remarks of Naidoo are not untypical of what seems to be the official government attitude towards the commercial media, including the press.

- **Observation #5: The government frequently acknowledges that it must expect to be watched by the press.**
(Articles supporting the observation: «Media answerable -», 22 October 1996; Makhaye, 20 February 1998)

Prior to Mandela's first attack on the press in 1996, there was a meeting between himself and the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef), in which the two parties agreed to meet

every three months to improve communication between the press and the government. Sanef chairman Thami Mazwai led the meeting on behalf of the editors. His assurance after the meeting is in line with libertarian thinking on the role of the media: «This relationship [between the press and the government] will never be cosy. We are not going to abdicate our responsibility to our readers to tell them what the government is doing in an objective manner as possible» («Mandela editors –», 2 November 1996). It is particularly important for a black journalist like Mazwai to assure that the press is not associated with the ANC government.

- **Observation #6: The press is constantly wary that a closer relationship with the government must not ease the role of critical reporting. The independence of the press is a non-negotiable principle.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «Mandela editors, –», 2 November 1996; Nyatumba, 20 November 1996; «We're watchdogs –», 26 January 1998)

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, government attacks on the press give the press an opportunity to remind politicians and the public of its boundaries, and the climate between the two institutions becomes only less cooperative after such confrontations. This is illustrated by the fact that all newspapers which commented on Mandela's attack on the press at Mafikeng agreed that the attack was unjustified (the newspapers include *Business Day*, *The Citizen*, *The Star*, *The Natal Witness*, *The Mail & Guardian*, *Cape Argus* and *The Cape Times*; quoted in «How the papers –», 18 December 1997; see also Sole, 25 January 1998; and «Press freedom –», 27 January 1998). For instance, *The Natal Witness* commented that «it is churlish, and even suggestive of a totalitarian mindset, to equate normal democratic criticism with disloyalty and subversion» («How the papers –», 18 December 1997). The implicit accusation is that the government suffers from a lack of understanding of what the role of the press is all about in a democratic society. This accusation, or discourse, is actually based on the view that the ANC government is a liberation movement which still needs time to learn democratic principles, as illustrated by two comments which succeeded Mandela's attacks on the press in 1996 and 1997. Both comments suggest that the government is out of line with healthy democratic principles.

The first comment was penned by Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) chairman Raymond Louw. A sharp critic of media politics, Louw called Mandela's attack on black journalists «the most serious allegation yet levelled against the SA press by a political leader» (Louw, 19 November 1996). Louw found it 'bizarre' that a state president could produce

such allegations against the press, as it was inconceivable that former freedom fighters would suddenly be hostile to the ANC government. Interestingly, Louw suggests that the best way to explain Mandela's attack on the press is that the ANC has not yet fully transformed itself from a liberation movement to a democratic government. The organization still carries with it authoritarian features, argues Louw, and that is why direct attacks on the press are allowed. The underlying assumption is that the codes of democracy, including press freedom, are not inherent to someone coming from an oppressive background. Democracy must be learnt before it can be practised, and the ANC's history as a radical liberation movement (according to Louw, «by its very nature authoritarian»; Louw, 19 November 1996) is an obstacle for adopting a full understanding of democracy. Consequently, state attacks on the media are generally deemed authoritarian and a threat to democracy.

- **Observation #7: The press regards state attacks on the media as authoritarian.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Louw, 19 November 1996; «Free press», 19 November 1996; «How the papers –», 18 December 1997)

In scrutinizing Louw's discourse – and his reasoning here is similar to many others who comment on the relationship between the government and the press – we note that the words *democracy* and *democratic* are often used to endorse libertarian press models, and likewise, to disapprove social responsibility press models. However, such a selective use of *democratic principles* could be heavily criticized in other discourses, as *democracy* usually pertains to the principle that the people should have the right to vote for an agency (a government, an organization). But press houses are rarely democratically elected; it would even be in conflict with libertarian principles to overrule economic laws through 'one person, one vote' principles. The use of 'democracy' to support libertarian discourses, as illustrated by the comment at stake, is therefore an example of selective use of positive connotations.

Although freedom of the press is generally seen as a necessity of democracy, the reasoning behind the link between 'democracy' and 'free press' remains unexplored. An editorial in *The Natal Witness* serves as an example («Government and media», 30 November 1996). The assumption is that a true democracy inevitably entails a free media. The editor writes: «The best way the media can serve democracy is to adopt the role of a constructive adversary». Furthermore, «in a democracy the people must constantly watch the government they have created, and the media are the eyes of the people» («Government and media», 30 November 1996). The understanding is that the media are teaming up with the people, in

opposition to the government. This corresponds well with the fundamental idea of democracy, 'people's rule'. The press thus uses a non-controversial common good, democracy, to argue for its independence from the government.

However, how is the link between freedom of the press and democracy justified? An editorial in Sowetan gives a common response to this question, typical of the media profession: «The media are an important element of any democracy – the mirror by which society sees itself and the source of information for citizens» («Comment», 20 November 1996). Two responsibilities are outlined here, both of which pertains to the overall advancement of society. First is the assumed role of the media as a mirror of society (see also Nyatumba, 20 November 1996). The idea behind this statement is that society cannot assess itself without the media, and that the media reflect reality as it is. The idea is questionable for various reasons, notably because the media interpret reality according to social conventions rather than simply mirror it. The second outlined responsibility of the media and the free press is that of information. It is generally agreed that the government should depend on the press as a channel of information (consult for instance GCIS's strategy of newspaper announcements; www.gcis.gov.za). However, the emphasis on the press as a conveyor of democratic information must be questioned in a country where only 14 percent of the adult population reads newspapers on a regular basis (Fallon, 21 April 1996). A message communicated through the newspapers will only reach a small segment of the population. It is therefore doubtful to assume an unqualified link between freedom of the press and democracy.

- **Observation #8: Libertarian discourses are often linked with the use of 'democracy', but the link is rarely explained.**
(Articles supporting the observation: Fallon, 21 April 1996; Louw, 19 November 1996; «Comment», 20 November 1996; «Press freedom», 27 January 1998)
- **Observation #9: The press frequently emphasizes its role as a defender of democratic communication. The role is rarely questioned, even in a society like South Africa where the population has diverse media habits.**
(Articles supporting the observation: Fallon, 21 April 1996; «Threatened by →», 14 June 1996)

The second comment which questioned the ANC's democratic competence after Mandela's attacks on the press, is by Wilmot James, executive director of Idasa (The Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa). James (8 January 1998) strongly objects to

President Mandela's one-sided attack on the media. His argument is that Mandela treats the entire media industry as if it was one undifferentiated mass with common interests. Responding to Mandela's critique that the press is threatening democracy, James argues that the press is doing exactly the opposite, namely legitimizing the democratically elected government. But, «What the media has not done,» writes James (8 January 1998), «is approve of every aspect of government's wide-ranging policies». The latter is seen as a strength of the press rather than a weakness. However, although the press has succeeded in criticizing the government, James suggests that this is a criticism that operates only at the surface level. On the deeper level, the newspaper industry has aligned with the ANC government to legitimize a capitalist hegemony. This is inevitable, contends James, but the implication is that if the normative role of the press is restricted to the watchdog metaphor of libertarianism alone, it is perhaps failing to strike at more profound issues. The Idasa director is here entering a more substantive critique of press/government relationships, but he doesn't develop his argument further. The overall observation is that commentaries which touch on more fundamental issues with regard to the normative role of the press, are almost non-existent in the material that is examined in this treatise. Instead, the debate, both from media and government representatives, is concerned with specific issues rather than underlying ideological dilemmas. It is then no surprise that also the fourth estate role of the press is seen in this light, implying that the press should watch over the government in day-to-day performances (delivery, corruption, etc.) rather than criticizing more profound ideological concerns.

- **Observation #10: The watchdog metaphor is almost exclusively linked to the assumed role of the press to criticize the government on day-to-day performances rather than ideology.**

(Article supporting the observation: James, 8 January 1998)

A typical debate between the press and the government opens with a general attack on the press by a politician and is followed by a response from a press representative who argues that the attack was unjustified and that it is not the task of the press to praise the government. An example of this is the dispute between Trade and Industry Minister Alec Erwin and Financial Mail editor Peter Bruce in October 1998. The minister directed a general attack on the media in which he claimed that the media were «overwhelmed by cynicism» and had failed to come to terms with the past («Media overwhelmed -», 14 October 1998). Editor Peter Bruce of *Financial Mail* was quick to respond that transformation has indeed

taken place in the media and that the government should not expect the media to applaud all its actions. «We are not praise singers and neither do we have a role to play in so-called 'nation-building',» writes Bruce, and continues, «our role is to act as watchdog» (Bruce, 15 October 1998).¹² As expected, the editor refers firmly to the duty of the press to inspect the government. By referring to this duty – which no one will dispute – the editor draws a simplified picture in which the options are either full criticism of the government or no criticism at all. The latter option is equated with the nation-building role, which Bruce strongly rejects. As a rhetorical device, the debate is then left to either/or positions where there seems to be no middle ground. The government comes out unfavourably in this dichotomy. However, also the government, in this case represented by Trade and Industry Minister Erwin, uses rhetorical devices to gain support for its negative attitude toward the mainstream media. The rhetoric of the government representative is one of generalizations, for instance in not specifying 'the media' when he claims that «the media [have] failed to develop a new psyche» («Media overwhelmed –», 14 October 1998). This generalization ignores the so-called 'black empowerment' in the media industry, or the fact that different newspapers take different positions on the actions of the government.

- **Observation #11: The press tends to dichotomize the positions on media politics. Within this either/or discourse, the only alternative to the watchdog role seems to be uncritical reporting.**

(Article supporting the observation: Bruce, 15 October 1998; Mulholland, 31 January 1999)

- **Observation #12: The government appeals to generalizations when criticizing 'the media', thereby giving the impression that there is a fundamental defect inherent in the media industry.**

(Article supporting the observation: Ramathodi, 6 April 1998; «Media overwhelmed –», 14 October 1998)

Many commentators speaking on behalf of the media contends that it is healthy for democracy to nurture an adversarial relationship between the media and the government. Stephen Mulholland, former managing director of Times Media Limited (TML), writes: «There is very little that can be more dangerous to the survival of democracy than a cosy relationship between government and the media» (Mulholland, 11 January 1998). Only in rare instances, claims Mulholland, can it be justified that the media should cooperate with government, such as in «clear cases of the national interest». The nation-building process,

which some politicians have called for the media to take part in, is in other words not a 'clear case of national interest' in Mulholland's view. What this discourse reveals, is that liberal commentators like Mulholland do not see the South African nation-building process as a process everyone agrees on, thus the media should have a critical rather than supporting function in this process. This view contradicts government officials and some media professionals, as we shall observe later. Also, to prove the unhealthiness of a close relationship between the media and the government, Mulholland refers to the conditions under apartheid. He compares the attitudes of Mandela and Mbeki with those of former president PW Botha, who demanded a 'patriotic press'. This comparison between the present government and the apartheid government is common when media representatives argue against the media politics of the new government. This is another indication that the strong call for libertarian media politics in South Africa is a reaction to the apartheid discourse.

- **Observation #13: The strong call for an entirely independent press in South Africa must be seen towards the backdrop of the apartheid years.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Molefe, 23 February 1996; Mulholland, 11 January 1998; Van der Walt, 17 June 1998; «Landmark ruling», 6 October 1998)

- **Observation #14: The common perception among journalists is that an adversarial relationship between government and the press is healthy.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Mulholland, 11 January 1998; «We're watchdogs -», 26 January 1998)

It is interesting to note that the libertarian understanding of media politics in post-apartheid South Africa is informed by the media debate in the USA. One example is the commentary by Stephen Mulholland (11 January 1998) which is referred to above; «Attacks on the media a sign of democracy in SA». In illustrating the dilemma the newspapers are facing when criticizing the government, Mulholland refers to the Watergate scandal, which put in danger economic benefits that Washington Post had from the US government. The Washington Post still chose to pursue the Watergate investigation, which to Mulholland is an example of a brave and critical press. That is the kind of press Mulholland wants for South Africa. His normative models are drawn from the USA, and this is not the only instance in which American libertarian media models are applied directly to South African conditions (e.g. Leon, 15 February 1996; Rickard, 18 February 1996; Nyatumba, 20 November 1996). The US parallels are sometimes used as 'evidence' of how advanced media economies should function - without further substantiation. For instance, in an argument for full freedom of

speech, Carmel Rickard (18 February 1996) writes: «it is now a well-established principle in the US that a democracy cannot flourish unless its citizens are free to criticise officials». It can be argued that this discourse entails an underlying 'the US knows best, we should look to them' attitude. (Yet omitted from the argument is that the USA is the only country in the world which does not prohibit 'hate speech'; Louw, 15 April 1996.) It is difficult to say why American libertarian discourses seem to have impacted the South African media debate more than Western European ones, but one theory is that discourses tend to be simplified over distance and time, and that those which 'win' are those which appear most consistent (extreme liberalism rather than qualified liberalism) and are most concordant with other dominant discourses. The latter would imply that any discourse which would appear 'progressive' (contra-apartheid) tend to be predominant over discourses which could be deemed reactionary in any way. But this theory is only a suggestion.

- **Observation #15: The strong libertarian preference appears to be informed by US American media discourses.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Leon, 15 February 1996; Rickard, 18 February 1996; Nyatumba, 20 November 1996; Mulholland, 11 January 1998)

On the basis of the last observation, it is no surprise that Ben Bradlee, editor of the Washington Post at the time of the Watergate scandal, was invited to speak at a Commonwealth Press Union dinner in Cape Town in October 1996. According to the media report, Bradlee was uncompromising in his view that the press and the government should remain adversaries forever: «Show me a government that is satisfied with its press, and I will show you an autocracy. [...] Show me a press that is satisfied with its government, and I will show you a lifeless and ill-informed people» (Streek, 21 October 1996). This quote summarizes most of the opinions which are analysed in this treatise, especially from a journalist point of view. Only isolated comments oppose this view.

- **Observation #16: It is a journalistic truism that the relationship between the press and the government should always be contentious.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Streek, 21 October 1996; «Government and media», 30 November 1996; «Black editors →», 19 December 1997; «Entrenching →», 4 May 1998)

(Article contravening the observation: Lansink 07-05-98)

A critical question to the last observation would be: Can the press not be critical and constructive at the same time? Libertarianism as understood in the dominant South African media discourse says *no*. A press that tries to be 'constructive' or 'positive' ends up neglecting its critical role, and the inevitable result would be uncritical 'sunny-skies journalism'. This view is held by for instance William Saunderson-Meyer (7 February 1998), editorial writer of *The Saturday Paper*. In common libertarian manner, Saunderson-Meyer maintains that it is a misunderstanding to think that the commercial press should solve the problems of society. He concludes: «The media does get in the way of society solving its problems. But that is inevitable. Politicians also get in the way; so does organised religion, the aged, the unemployed, big business and every entrenched sector of society, which is jockeying for advantage. It is the nature of society» (Saunderson-Meyer, 7 February 1998). Almost with a social Darwinist twist on normative media theories, Saunderson-Meyer here presents a discourse which assumes that an unleashed media will inevitably lead to a better society. In his view, it is only a matter of removing the obstacles which organized civil society has put there, one of them being the false encouragement to do 'positive' reporting.

- **Observation #17: Most journalists are convinced that positive and critical reporting are mutually exclusive.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «A free press -», 17 March 1996; Saunderson-Meyer, 7 February 1998)

The media industry frequently refers to libertarian self-justifiable principles when arguing for a free press. An example drawn from an editorial in *City Press* (17 March 1996) will suffice. The editorial blames the ANC government for not understanding the need for «a free and robust press». The necessity of a free press is called a «self-evident truth». No further argument is given as to why a free press is important. The argument that *City Press* uses – an argument based on a call for common sense (self-evidence) – is one of the two most common ways of arguing for press freedom and freedom of expression. The other argument is a pragmatic one: A free press is important because it ensures the spread of information that the authorities would otherwise hide.

- **Observation #18: In lack of arguments, the press tends to assume that the freedom of the press is a self-evident truth.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «A free press -», 17 March 1996; Louw, 15 April 1996)

Frequently, the media industry gives the impression that the government not only encourages positive reporting, but also actively opposes press freedom. In an editorial named «A free press has to tell it how it is», *City Press* (17 March 1996) claims that the ANC would like to see an uncritical press. But, says the editorial, «Sunshine journalism will not help this country». The assumption is that the government prefers an uncritical media which shuts up when things go wrong. To this end, *City Press* (as do other newspapers) builds its argument for a free press on a popular assumption that is probably not grounded in actual circumstances. Even though the press industry contends that the government 'muffles the watchdog' (Lidovho, 22 April 1998), there are many indications that the government favours an open dialogue discourse, even an explicit libertarian discourse, as demonstrated earlier.

- **Observation #19: In order to give the impression that they have an important role to play in the democratic South Africa, the newspapers frequently draws a picture of the government as being against press freedom.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «A free press -», 17 March 1996; Lidovho, 22 April 1998)

In line with all of the above, the press has turned to strong reactions whenever there have been attempts of government intervention with the media. One such instance, which did not at first appear as a direct intervention of the media industry as such, was the South African Human Rights Commission's (SAHRC) plan to investigate racism in the media. On request from the Black Lawyers Association (BLA) and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa (ABASA), SAHRC decided to undertake a study of racism in the media (SAHRC, November 1999). The initiative was immediately attacked by a range of media professionals - as well as politicians of the opposition parties - who claimed that the investigation was in essence a threat to press freedom (Bruce, 20 November 1998; «Feebly disguised -», 20 November 1998; Banda, 17 November 1998; Louw, 17 November 1998; «Free press -», 17 November 1998). Former TML managing director Stephen Mulholland compared the proposed investigation into the media with conditions in Zimbabwe, and said the investigation could proclaim «the beginning of the end for press freedom in SA» (Mulholland, 31 January 1999). The racism inquiry itself is beyond the study of this treatise, but the heated debate prior to the inquiry serves as an illustration of the anxiety on behalf of the South African media to let the government overstep its domain. The bottom line is clear:

The newspaper profession forbids any act by the government that could possibly represent a threat to press freedom.

- **Observation #20: The newspaper profession categorically criticizes all initiatives by the government that could possibly infringe on the freedom of the press.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Louw, 17 November 1998; Bruce, 20 November 1998; «Feebly disguised –»; 20 November 1998; Mulholland, 31 January 1999)

The initiative to reconstruct government communications between 1995 and 1998 is another example where the tensions between the press and the government came to the fore. The Task Group on Government Communications (Comtask), which was set up in 1995 and produced its report in 1996, found that there was a fruitless relationship between the press and the government. The government complained that its message didn't get adequate media coverage, and the news was often distorted. The press in turn complained that government communications were incomplete and untransparent. This led Comtask to suggest a number of recommendations which could improve communications between the press and the government (Communications 2000, October 1996). However, many media representatives saw the recommendations as a threat to the freedom of the press. Chris Moerdyk, for one, was highly critical of a more government-oriented press. Moerdyk (12 October 1996) concludes: «Credibility would come into question and resistance and criticism would increase. The impartiality that is needed to support credibility would probably not exist.» Moerdyk is here pointing to the criterion of political impartiality, which is generally accepted in the contemporary libertarian press discourse. However, this is also an example of discursive changes within a political tradition. Libertarian ideas as they were expressed and enacted in the 19th century did not include the principle of political impartiality. A politically aligned press was in fact the order of the day in late 19th century and onwards. It is only in recent decades, as European and North American press houses have loosened their political bounds, that political impartiality has become a libertarian ideal. What seems as inherent principles within a discourse (e.g. the libertarian), can therefore be subjective interpretations of that discourse under specific social and cultural conditions. The principles of a free, libertarian press are therefore not so unchangeable as they may first seem. The discourse changes.

- **Observation #21: In the media debate, it is often assumed that the libertarian tradition contains 'natural' and unchanging principles. However, the libertarian**

discourse is subject to change, as are other discourses.

(Articles supporting the observation: Louw, 15 April 1996; Moerdyk, 12 October 1996)

It is well-known that the South African government during the apartheid years passed a number of laws which restricted the freedom of the press (Merrett, 1994). Only to be expected, the media industry demanded these laws abolished after the fall of apartheid. Particularly criticized was Section 205 of the Criminal Procedures Act, which concerns the right of the state to claim that journalists disclose their sources. The section was attempted used even after the democratic government came in power, as the police tried to force journalists to disclose important information relating to the shooting of Hard Livings gang leader Rashaad Staggie in 1996. It was therefore no surprise when one of the first concerns of the new SA National Editors' Forum (Sanef) was to remove Section 205 («Editors ask Mandela →», 29 April 1998). The discussions around Section 205 illustrates how democracy and total independence of the media are seen as indispensable. President Mandela confirmed this view in a meeting with 20 editors and reassured that the media is a «pillar of democracy» («Editors Forum →», 29 April 1998).

The discourse of the total independence of the press appears to be self-evident, but it is indeed a discourse which has grown out of a particular culture – the modern Western society. It is difficult to defend rationally why the press should be treated differently from all other societal institutions when it comes to concealment of information. Why, for instance, can the court demand that an NGO disclose source information, while the press is expected to protect the same information? This reflects the Western understanding of liberal democracy, where the media have attained a peculiar position as an institution which is separate both from the general public and state institutions. This division of responsibilities within the public square appears to have been elevated to a type of natural law, which is confirmed in the talks between the media and the presidency on Section 205 on the Criminal Procedures Act.

- **Observation #22: High on the agenda for journalists in post-apartheid South Africa is the dismissal of laws which restrict freedom of the press. Press freedom takes the form of natural law.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «Editors Forum →», 29 April 1998; «Editors ask Mandela →», 29 April 1998; Lund, 14 August 1998; «In the interests →», 22 February 1999)

In a comment on International Press Freedom Day 4 May 1998, ombudsman for *The Star*, John Patten, reviews the transformation of the press after apartheid. His chief concern remains, four years into democracy, that newspapers are yet to gain full independence from the government. Especially, he says, the newly appointed black editors are grappling to detach themselves from the government. For example, editor and Sanef leader Thami Mazwai censured *The Sunday Independent* when the newspaper revealed a Denel arms contract with Saudi Arabia in August 1997 (see Edmunds, 25 July 1997). The editor put political correctness above press freedom, which led to his resignation as the chairman of Sanef. The lesson, indicates John Patten, is that the transforming South African press suffers from a misunderstanding of what press freedom entails, both on behalf of the government and the press itself. The ombudsman thus confirms the watchdog discourse, and implies that libertarian principles and democracy are interchangeable.

- **Observation #23: The perception among some commentators is that the government, but also to a lesser extent the press itself, does not comprehend what an independent press entails.**

(Article supporting the observation: Patten, 4 May 1998)

It appears from the analysis so far that discussions on the freedom of the press tend to have the interests of the media as their starting-point, neglecting the interests of the government. (To the extent that the interests of the government are referred to, they are usually assumed to be a threat to an open democracy.) However, there are also a few examples of media commentators who do not explicitly defend one of the sides and denounce the other. For instance, journalism professor Guy Berger (7 March 1996) discusses the disputes between the government and the press with reference to the 'Zuma affair', where Health Minister Nkosazana Zuma denounced the press openly in Parliament after she faced harsh criticism for her handling of the AIDS play *Sarafina 2*. Berger's conclusion is that in a democracy, the press and the government have different roles to play, and both roles have to be respected and understood. On behalf of the press, Berger underlines that a critical press is the best way to serve a democratic government: «Ironically, negative press coverage, when it occurs, can often be a truly positive thing. Highlighting problems in government is arguably one of the major contributions that the press can make to a new South Africa» (07-03-96). He goes on to state that politicians fail to see the purpose of the press, stressing only one-sidedness, conspiracy and distortion. Similarly, the press tends only to take notice of the negative criticism from the politicians, stressing only attacks which are an onslaught on press

freedom. On the contrary, the journalism professor sees the relationship between the press and the government as a symbiosis. The two institutions appear to be enemies, but are actually dependent on each other. It is no coincidence that this observation comes from a commentator on the sideline and not from one of the contestants in the stormy debate between the press and the government.

- **Observation #24: Although there can be vast disagreements between the press and the government, they live in a symbiotic relationship in which they both are dependent on each other.**

(Article supporting the observation: Berger, 7 March 1996)

Criticism on the government's media performance comes not only from the media industry itself. As one would expect, the political opposition joins the industry in this criticism. For instance, after Northern Province Premier Ngoako Ramatlhodi criticized the press for negative reporting on the so-called McBride affair (Ramatlhodi, 6 April 1998), Nanga Lidovho of the PAC lamented his disappointment with the ANC's inability to take criticism. In a critical comment, Lidovho accuses the ANC leadership for not having understood the role of a critical press. «The media is a watchdog in the employ of ordinary citizens and it will be a disservice to the country were the media to be what Ramatlhodi envisages», writes the former PAC secretary for legal and constitutional affairs (Lidovho, 22 April 1998). Lidovho thus affirms both the watchdog role of the media and the impression that the media side with the people to 'protect' them from the government.¹³

- **Observation #25: The political opposition joins the newspaper industry in accusing the ANC for not having understood the role of a critical press.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Bunsee, 11 September 1996; «Free press -», 17 November 1998; Lidovho, 22 April 1998)

Libertarianism is closely linked with 'the philosophy of the markets', as indicated in the previous chapter on the background of the libertarian press theory. The free flow of economy and information is seen as the guardian of a free, liberal society. Interestingly, the discussion in South African newspapers reflects exactly this unqualified belief in 'the philosophy of the markets', which assumes that economic models are easily transferable to media practice. We have already seen that the media industry is alert whenever the government is likely to delimit any aspect of press freedom. How this view is grounded in classic liberal market

thinking, became clear with the discussion on the Green Paper on Broadcasting. The proposed regulation gave the Newspaper Association of South Africa (NASA) an opportunity to raise concerns about the government's attitude towards the watchdog role of the press. Chairman Hennie van Deventer explained that a free society needs a vigorous free press, and that «without an unrestricted flow of information and ideas, there can be no informed public opinion and no informed decision making» (Integrated Communications, 10 March 1998). Again, the perception is that the commercial press is determined to guarantee an 'unrestricted' information flow. The sound belief in free enterprise once more confirms the world view which underscores the libertarian press model.

Libertarian practices, materialized in commercialism, are sometimes used by the press to explain or excuse why the government does not receive more positive reporting. The key word for the press is 'news value', maintains *Financial Mail* in an editorial (14 June 1996). The editor defends the press' right to go by what is newsworthy rather than by what is seen as important by public authorities. In his words, «the print media evaluate what is to be published on the basis of its news value, not on whether it promotes patriotism» («Threatened by Mbeki -», 14 June 1996). Commercialism and free enterprise are thus viewed as compatible with democratic press practices. This observation seems to represent the general attitude among media representatives.

- **Observation #26: The newspaper industry assumes the libertarian view that the 'free flow of information' is best secured through free enterprise.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «Threatened by Mbeki -», 14 June 1996; «NASA pushes -», 10 March 1998)

A critical reading of the libertarian discourse must point out that there are incidents where press responsibilities collide with commercial interests. It is therefore surprising that a considerable part of the discussion, like the items referred to above, seems to ignore this dilemma of the libertarian media discourse. Ivan Fallon, on the other hand, who is editorial director of Independent Newspapers, brought up the dilemma in a lecture delivered at Rhodes University 18 April 1996. (The lecture was referred in *The Sunday Independent* 21 April 1996 and is therefore part of the public discourse which is analysed in this study.) Fallon is straightforward and maintains that the press do not have a responsibility to cover every deed of the government. He says: «Newspapers in fact are commercial, profit-making concerns, just like any other businesses. They have their own constituencies and their responsibility is to them rather than to an abstract group of potential readers whom the

government needs to communicate with» (Fallon, 21 April 1996). Fallon here makes clear that newspapers are primarily accountable to their owners, not to the government or society at large. This illustrates one of the difficulties when the government wants the media to inform on state projects and so forth, namely that the post-apartheid media industry is driven by commercial interests rather than idealism. Ironically, one can suggest that it is the government and not the media which encourages idealistic values in a liberalistic society.

- **Observation #27: Notwithstanding its frequently expressed commitment to democracy, the media's duty to enhance democratic communication often comes in conflict with its commitment to owners.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Fallon, 21 April 1996; «Threatened by Mbeki –», 14 June 1996)

An excerpt from Times Media Ltd.'s proposed editorial charter clearly illustrates how the media industry exports libertarian ideology to media thinking. At the same time, the charter illustrates the tensions within libertarianism:

1.2 Each newspaper shall not be bound to or unduly favour any commercial, political, social or personal interests. It shall exercise and be seen to exercise independent judgement on public affairs to advance the general good of South Africa and its people.

2.2 The basic principle to be upheld is that the freedom of the press is indivisible from and subject to the same restraints as that of the individual and rests on the public's fundamental right to be informed and freely to receive and to disseminate opinions. Each newspaper shall uphold the highest standards of integrity and of professional, independent, honest and responsible journalism.

(From the proposed Times Media Ltd. editorial charter; *Business Day* 11 July 1996)¹⁴

The charter clearly underlines the importance of editorial independence, be it commercial, political, social or personal (1.2). This is in line with libertarian principles: No infringement should be made on individual freedoms. Interestingly, when transferred to newspaper businesses, individual freedom is in reality exchanged with corporate freedom. In order for individual freedoms to be exercised on a corporate level, there must be a great sense of consensus in the practice of news production.

- **Observation #28: South African newspaper businesses have, like their Western counterparts, exported the libertarian principles of individual freedom into corporate freedoms.**

(Article supporting the observation: Times Media Ltd. editorial charter, 11 July 1996)

'Freedom of speech' or 'freedom of expression' is generally considered one of the most predominant traits of modern democracies. It is therefore no surprise that freedom of speech is one of the most quoted arguments in favour of a free press in post-apartheid South Africa. Exactly what this right entails, is less clear. Representatives of the press and of the opposition uses 'freedom of speech' to connote a number of rights, even to the extent that this right becomes an end in itself. For instance, PAC administrative officer Bennie Bunsee proclaims that «it is press freedom that will guarantee ultimate freedom» (Bunsee, 11 September 1996). Bunsee demands that the government scraps Section 205 of the Criminal Procedures Act, and reinforces the impression that the party in power, the ANC, is not all for freedom of the press: «However much it might irk the ANC government that the media does not truthfully portray its achievements, let it acknowledge the absolute right of the freedom of speech and the media» (Bunsee, 11 September 1996). In typical manner, the PAC officer meshes the two concepts of the freedom of speech and the freedom of the media/press into one without distinction. The freedoms are portrayed as prerequisites for 'truth' and 'democracy'. The overall observation is that the libertarian assumption of an imminent link between press freedom and access to truth has gained dominance.

That unconditional freedom of speech is considered a fundamental right in the new South Africa, became especially clear in the debate concerning the proposed ban on hate speech in the new constitution. Raymond Louw of the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) displayed one of the most uncompromising attitudes with regard to absolute freedom of speech. He argued that «freedom of expression is the most important of all human rights» (Louw, 15 April 1996). His argument must be seen towards the backdrop of apartheid, where ban on hate speech was used to curb the right of the citizens to express criticism with the oppressor. DP leader Tony Leon argued likewise, and supported the FXI's liberal stand on issues of freedom of expression¹⁵ (Leon, 15 February 1996). Both Louw and Leon advocated a classic libertarian philosophy, which assumes that moral good can only be secured through liberal individual freedoms.

- **Observation #29: 'Freedom of speech' and 'freedom of the press' are used in favour of a libertarian media model. However, the concepts are rarely defined.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Leon, 15 February 1996; Louw, 15 April 1996; Bunsee, 11 September 1996)

The limits of freedom of expression was tested March 1999 when *Ilanga* editor Amos Maphumulo attacked whites and Indians in an editorial¹⁶. The editor accused whites of nurturing Indians, who would in turn incite violence between the ANC and the IFP. The editorial concluded that what South Africa needs, is another Idi Amin who could deal with the Indian population. Not surprisingly, the editorial was condemned by all political parties and newspaper commentators, and Maphumulo eventually had to leave his editorial position at *Ilanga*.

The subsequent discussion was also an indication of how freedom of expression is interpreted five years into South Africa's democracy. Characteristically, the discussion turned out to be another evidence of the dominance of libertarian understanding of human freedoms. A typical comment to this end is Nicola Jones' defence of full freedom of expression (Jones, 5 April 1999). Jones, who is a communications lecturer at the University of Zululand, admits that full freedom of expression will lead to some harm, however, the firm conviction is that only through a competition of different opinions will the greater good prevail. This line of thought questions the new bill of rights, which – although ensuring freedom of expression – prohibits the advocacy of hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion. The argument of Jones and other media commentators is based on two conditions that are genuinely libertarian: First, the conviction that the greater good is best secured through individual freedom, and second, that the state is in principle a threat to individual freedom.

- **Observation #30: 'The strong emphasis on freedom of expression in the public debate is a clear pronouncement of libertarian preferences.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Leon, 15 February 1996; Jones, 5 April 1999)

Several editorials elevate the principles of press freedom to an end in itself. A characteristic example is taken from an editorial in *Weekend Argus* («A celebration –», 16 March 1996). The editorial celebrates the openness of the new South African press, where everybody can freely express their views. The specific issue is a debate surrounding the controversial viewpoints of Jon Qwelane, one of the *Argus'* columnists. White readers have accused Qwelane of racism and distortions of the truth, and the newspaper has been encouraged to dismiss him as a commentator. However, the *Argus* assures that its columns will remain wide open for Qwelane and other writers who may not agree with the majority of the newspaper's readership.

In its argumentation, the newspaper expresses two familiar views on democratic openness: that freedom of speech stands in contrast to apartheid South Africa, and that this freedom has become an end in itself. That freedom of speech «stands in stark contrast to the dismal years of apartheid repression» is a non-controversial statement. Underlying this statement is the conviction that it was a deliberate strategy by the previous government to suppress freedom of speech in order to control the formation of opinions. More interesting, however, is the way the Weekend Argus implies that freedom of speech is an end in itself. In the newspaper's opinion, it is less important that the allegations that are printed are valid than that the people are given the right to come forth with the allegations. Writes the editor: «What is of far greater importance [than the validity of the allegations] is the fact that Mr Qwelane's detractors, as much as Mr Qwelane himself, are free publicly to express their views» («A celebration -», 16 March 1996). This statement represents a remarkable shift in the legitimacy of the press. While social responsibility models of the press teach that the press and other media are means towards wider societal goals, libertarianism declines to give such justifications. To the libertarian, the existence of the press is based on the conviction that a free press represents a good in itself. A libertarian stance on press freedom thus sometimes results in the lack of justification apart from the libertarian principle itself.

- **Observation #31: Freedom of the press often becomes an end in itself within the libertarian paradigm.**

(Article supporting the observation: «A celebration -», 16 March 1996)

Drawn further, a popular version of the libertarian standpoint disregards good and bad as a basis for ethics. Jeanette Minnie, executive director of the FXI, represents an extreme when she replies to the ANC initiative to ban hate speech: «One cannot deal with freedom of expression in this way. Fundamental to understanding freedom of expression is to realize that it is not made up of different parts – such as good speech and bad speech. It is both, and if you believe in it, you have to allow both» (Minnie, 17 March 1996). The practical implication in this statement is that one is no longer able to decide on what is good and what is bad. Since there is no longer any foundation for universal ethics, it becomes increasingly difficult to agree on a common ground for punishing evil deeds. «Goods» and «bads» are seen as negotiated entities within the social discourse, and only actions rooted in the individual can be universally justified. Any infringement on the right of the individual to express personal opinions is seen as an infringement on human kind itself. Ultimately, this

view represents an extreme individualism, that is, the individual has become the measurement of all things.

- **Observation #32: Some defenders of press freedom draw the libertarian discourse to extreme individualism, in which the individual becomes the only trustworthy measure for ethics.**

(Article supporting the observation: Minnie, 17 March 1996)

Very few of the articles scrutinized in this study comments directly on 'responsible journalism' or similar journalism practices which challenges libertarian journalism. Those who do, are overwhelmingly negative. Journalist Kaizer Nyatsumba (20 November 1996), for one, rejects the practice altogether. His well-argued article deserves attention as it outlines the general sceptic attitude towards 'responsible journalism'. He writes: «Responsible journalism [is] the kind of journalism which would see our publications transformed from being *newspapers* to being propaganda organs of the ruling party and Government» (Nyatsumba, 20 November 1996). According to this definition of non-libertarian journalism, journalists are no longer entitled to criticize government. Unnecessary to say, no media theorist will agree on this one-sided definition of responsible journalism (Lambeth, 1992; see discussion below). Nyatsumba is more subtle, however, when he attributes to responsible journalism the idea that the media should «build rather than destroy». This constructive role of the media is at the core of social responsibility theories of the press, in contrast to libertarian theories which reject any nation-building responsibility. Nyatsumba is utterly clear in his preference for libertarian journalism as he continues:

The role of the media is the exact opposite of the view taken by adherents of that brand of «responsible journalism». The media's role must of necessity be to empower the public to make informed decisions by providing it with accurate and reliable news; to serve as custodians of the country's constitution and as a watchdog over Government; to insist on the public's constitutionally entrenched right to know; and generally to serve as the eyes and the ears of the public.

(Nyatsumba, 20 November 1996; also repeated in Nyatsumba, May 1998)

Nyatsumba here expresses great confidence in essential libertarian thinking. The perception is that the government is less suited to inform the public than the media. Only the free media, the thinking goes, can be trusted to communicate «accurate and reliable news». The implication is that the government is more likely to distort information than the media. This is in line with classic libertarianism, which conveys a sceptical view of the state. On the

contrary, since the press is commercial rather than governmental, it gains greater reliability than the state. In order to argue for this positive view of the media and the press, Nyatsumba rhetorically paints an image of the media as being on the public's side (its role is to «serve as the eyes and the ears of the public»). Again, the argument can only be valid if one holds together libertarianism's negative view of the government and positive view of the public. The positive view of the public is rooted in a positive view of the individual; only the individual's possibility to make the right choices will lead to advancement of society.

- **Observation #33: The argument for an independent press is firmly rooted in libertarian philosophy which implies a positive view of the individual and a negative view of the state. 'Responsible journalism' is portrayed as a threat to the independent press.**

(Article supporting the observation: Nyatsumba, 20 November 1996)

In line with the observations above, the national leadership of South Africa does not want to be associated with measures that oppose a critical media. To this end, there have been instances when the government finds itself misrepresented by the press. For instance, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki was quoted in *The Sunday Independent* as saying that the democratic press «should perhaps not be so critical of our democratic government» (Seleoane, 21 September 1997). The quote was a misrepresentation of Mbeki's view, contended information director Thami Ntentsi (28 September 1997) in a letter to the editor, as the deputy president was clearly in favour of a critical press. What Mbeki did say, however, was that the press should proceed from «a false position that [it] had a principled responsibility to report government activity negatively» (Ntentsi, 28 September 1997).

It is thus important for the deputy president to disapprove of the right of the press to be *negative* while approve of the right to be *critical*. While the indirect criticism embodied in the referred statement is that the press has not grasped the difference between reporting negatively and reporting critically, the issue at stake is probably where the government and the press draw the lines between the two kinds of reporting. The government is likely to deem some reporting as negative whereas the press would view the same reporting as critical, since there are overlaps between the two terms depending on the view of what is inherently destructive to the public debate. 'Negative' is associated with attitudes which are inherently destructive, for instance a reporting style which aims to harm the government. 'Critical' points to the attitude of not accepting an issue at surface value, however, a scrutiny into the issue may lead to either approval (positive response) or disapproval (negative

response). Both 'negative' and 'critical' involve value judgements and therefore represent sites of contention between the government and the press.

All this said, the distinction between 'critical' and 'negative' can be present in both libertarian and social responsibility theories of the press. The final observation which is categorized within the watchdog discourse therefore represents a transition to the next section, which will deal with social responsibility preferences.

- **Observation #34: The official view of the government is that it approves of critical reporting while disapproves of negative reporting. However, the government is likely to disagree with the press on what is critical and what is negative.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Mbeki, 8 April 1996; Ntentsi, 28 September 1997; Ramatlhodi, 6 April 1998)

4.2 The social responsibility model: 'the nation-building discourse' (observations #35-50)

We have so far been concerned with articles that primarily express a watchdog approach to the media. Advocating libertarian ideals, most of the participants in the debate emphasize that the media ought to strive for a critical role. As we move to the second main category, the social responsibility model, we shall see that the critical role is not altogether suspended, but it is less emphasized. Advocates of social responsibility emphasize that the press is part of a larger societal complex; it is not seen as a separate institution, as libertarianism does. In the context of contemporary South Africa, the social responsibility role of the media is one of *nation-building*. There are some media representatives who acknowledge the nation-building aspect of the media, but government officials are far more active in stressing this duty. The following section starts with the dissatisfaction that the politicians express in this regard, and continues with an analysis of how politicians and media representatives argue that the South African press has a role to play in the nation-building process.

Our examples begin with Mpumalanga Premier Mathews Phosa, who publicly expressed his outcry over what he thought was poor performances by the press. At a business conference in Swaziland 29 May 1996, the premier was asked why journalists preferred to highlight negative developments rather than cooperating with government initiatives. Phosa replied: «The press are all bastards who make money out of our names and activities. They never let facts stand in the way of a good story and always concentrate on the negative issues» («Phosa says -», 30 May 1996). Mathews Phosa's censure represents a common prejudice towards the press: that the press always report on negative issues rather than positive ones. It is not the task of this treatise to decide on the extent of negative

reporting in the South African press, however, when the press is officially criticized for massive negative reporting, the criticism is seldom accompanied by factual data.

Similar criticism from local government officials was raised in Eastern Cape, where ANC MPL Nat Serache and others claimed that the press was boycotting activities of the local government. Among the negative reporting was an article in the Weekend Post which listed MPLs who regularly missed committee meetings without good reason. Such reporting, claimed Serache, did not belong to the duties of the press. As expected, journalists reacted strongly to Serache's criticism, arguing that it was exactly one of the newspapers' duty to inform the electorate on the performance of elected representatives (Roberts, 31 May 1996). The incident is a characteristic clash between the press and politicians, though politicians increasingly seem to agree that the press does have a right to investigate matters that may threaten political life. Incidental outbursts from politicians such as this one in Eastern Cape in 1996 appear to be more and more isolate – perhaps because of an increasing agreement on the necessity of a free press.¹⁷

- **Observation #35: A common perception among government officials is that the coverage of the government is overwhelmingly negative.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «Phosa says –», 30 May 1996; Roberts, 31 May 1996; Ramatlhodi, 6 April 1998)

Not only is the press negative towards the government, it is also against transformation, is a common attitude on behalf of government officials. ANC KwaZulu-Natal spokesman Dumisani Makhaye points out in a letter to the editor that transformation is the trademark of the ANC, while the press works against it. He maintains that it is the ANC's gratitude that South Africa now enjoys freedom of the press. Makhaye says that freedom of the press is «part of greater freedoms that we were ready to sacrifice our lives for» (Makhaye, 20 February 1998), thus implying that it is absurd to argue that the current government could possibly be against press freedom in any form. On the contrary, it is the press itself which represents the greatest threat to media freedom. The press, claims Makhaye, is against the transformation process in the country: «Unfortunately, the bulk of the mainstream media stands in direct conflict with [...] the process of decolonisation and deracialisation» (Makhaye, 20 February 1998). To this end, Makhaye argues that the ANC has become the primary target of the press.

It is outside the scope of this treatise to decide whether this description holds water or not; however, it will only be mentioned in passing that prior to the 1999 elections, most

newspapers and editors which endorsed a political party came out in favour of the ANC (*The Mail & Guardian, Business Day, Sunday Times* and *The Sunday Independent*; see Vanderhaeghen, 15 May 1999). Most likely, this is an indication that newspapers which are seen as targeting the ANC, in reality only act out their roles as critical analysts of government policies.

- **Observation #36: The ANC leadership alleges that the mainstream press is against transformation. However, the allegations are general and not accompanied with evidence.**

(Article supporting the observation: «Media in –», 8 February 1998; Makhaye, 20 February 1998)

Among the efforts of the first democratic ANC government was to replace the old South African Communication Service (SACS) with the new Government Communications and Information System (GCIS). The official restructuring took place on 18 May 1998. A report produced by the Task Group on Government Communications (Comtask) paved the way for the new governmental communications office. The report is relevant for the government's view of normative press models, as it expresses dissatisfaction with the South African newspaper industry. The government was unhappy «with its treatment at the hands of the mainstream commercial media»; it had become «the victims of journalists driven by a perhaps subconscious instinct to indulge in ANC-bashing» (Sawyer, 7 October 1996). On this basis, Comtask recommended less concentration in media ownership and more professionalism in the media.

Political correspondent Clive Sawyer comments on Comtask and suggests two reasons behind the appointment of Comtask: Firstly, the failure of the government to inform the South African public on its activities, and secondly, the unhappiness with the way the government is treated by the mainstream commercial media. The second concern was put on the agenda after the government faced negative coverage on certain issues, such as the unsuccessful aids play *Sarafina 2*, which, according to many commentators in the media, revealed how amateurish the new ANC bureaucracy was. From the ANC's point of view, the *Sarafina 2* coverage was typical of the negative image that the media created of the government. In line with this, Comtask concluded that the perspectives of the government did not get enough coverage, and that reports were often «superficial and distorted, and important government communication was often selectively ignored» (Communications 2000, August 1996). The task group also found, however, that the frustration of the relationship between the government and the media went both ways. The media complained

about government information, claiming it was incomplete and non-transparent. Comtask therefore called on both the media and the government to improve their respective standards.

- **Observation #37: The restructuring of the government information system was partly explained as a result of the government's frustration with the press. The government wanted to see more positive coverage on its work.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Sawyer, 7 October 1996; Moerdyk, 12 October 1996)

Joel Netshitenzhe became the first executive officer of the new GCIS. His view on government communications brought about a new understanding of the role of the media in the democratic South Africa. He argued that the media cannot be seen apart from the broader transformation process. This, of course, is not contradictory with the view of many journalists (as observed in section a), but the significant difference is that journalists tend to argue that the transformation takes place through *conflict*, while the GCIS executive officer maintains that the same transformation can take place through *consensus*. By the consensus approach, Netshitenzhe argues for the harmonization of government and media interests to improve mutual understanding. Journalists should approve of their role as active participants of change, argues the GCIS head (Netshitenzhe, 22 March 1998). The consensus approach has many similarities with social responsibility models of the media. Netshitenzhe does not scrap the critical obligation, but contends that criticism and consensus can coexist.

- **Observation #38: As opposed to the conflict approach, the consensus approach suggested by some government officials requires the press to harmonize transformation efforts with the government.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Mkhondo, 15 July 1997; Netshitenzhe, 22 March 1998)

In contrast to the watchdog discourse, the nation-building discourse tends to suggest that the responsibilities of the press and the government are ultimately the same. The institutions work together towards the same goal, and are seen as cooperatives rather than competitors. The South African government frequently conveys this understanding of the role of the media. For example, on one occasion President Nelson Mandela directly intervened after a critical editorial appeared on an op-ed page in *City Press* in October 1996. It was editor Khulu

Sibiya of *City Press* who wrote the editorial, in which he criticized Mandela's public support of justice Ismail Mahomed for the position of Chief Justice. The editor was subsequently called to ANC headquarters by the president himself to discuss the editorial. According to Sibiya, President Mandela was «very upset – he thought I should have understood the circumstances better, especially as a black journalist» («Mandela summons –», 21 October 1996).

The interesting observation here is that it seems that the ANC leadership expects a more positive treatment by black journalists than by white journalists. This is further indicated by Mandela's own choice of words when he said he called Sibiya in «as a brother». Together with similar observations, notably in Thabo Mbeki's (21 October 1996) speech to black and white editors, this reinforces the view that the government wants to convey the impression that the press and the state are in reality team-mates. A convention of this team image is that it is only to be expected that the government calls on the media profession to discuss a common strategy. However, the government is drawn between two forces on this issue. It also wants to favour an independent press, which, according to Mandela, is «a pillar of democracy» (the same assurance has been given to Sanef; «Mandela editors –», 2 November 1996). There is only one way to harmonize these attitudes towards the press: In the government's view, there is no contradiction between an independent press and a press that can meet with the political leadership to discuss its own role.

- **Observation #39: The government is more likely than the press to neglect a clear division of responsibilities between the two institutions.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «Mandela summons –», 21 October 1996; Mkhondo, 15 July 1997; Mazwai, 29 May 1998)

It becomes increasingly clear from these observations that the government wants to have a say in the role of the South African press. A particular concern of the government is to point out that the freedom of the press comes with responsibilities. The press seems to forget this, says the government and appears to give journalists a lesson in proper codes of ethics. What these reactions show, is that the government has clear preferences in terms of normative press models. We shall look at one example where ANC officials denounced the press on a particular issue, but which was actually a profound attack on the media's watchdog role.

During the autumn of 1996, *The Star* carried a short series of articles which looked critically at the ANC leadership. This led ANC MP Carl Niehaus to write a letter to the editor in which he argued that the articles were based on misinformed opinion and distorted facts,

and that they were only intended to smear the image of the ANC. He wrote that it is «the lifeblood of a democracy» that the press is given the right to criticize the government. However, he continued, «this right is accompanied by responsibilities» (Niehaus, 15 November 1996). A similar view was expressed by ANC MP Tony Yengeni in response to the same *Star* articles. Yengeni made the point that the press seems to be very good at criticizing others, but very poor at being at the receiving end of criticism. In his words, «the SA press believes they are the only watchdogs and nobody else should play the role of watchdog over them» (Yengeni, 15 November 1996).

What this reversed watchdog metaphor signals, is that the public debate in South Africa is expected to be of such openness that no one is above criticism, neither the government nor the press. This belongs to the general discourse of democratic rights, namely that the right to criticize others should not be questioned. It is the argument of the ANC, however, that the press has not understood that the criticism must go both ways.

- **Observation #40: When commenting on press standards, the ANC leadership affirms the right of newspapers to criticize the government. However, it is usually pointed out that the freedom of the press also comes with responsibilities.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Niehaus, 15 November 1996; Yengeni, 15 November 1996)

The arguments for a nation-building agenda on behalf of the press have so far been derived from the government and its officials. However, not only the government and politicians argue that the media should have a role beyond the watchdog role. Constitutional Court president Arthur Chaskalson, who played a pivotal role in the formation of the new South African constitution, advocated a two-dimensional obligation of the media. In a speech to the Commonwealth Press Union's Rainbow '96 conference in Cape Town, the Constitutional Court president unravelled the concept of 'the freedom of the press'. Although he affirmed that «a free press is an indispensable pillar of democracy», the judge went on to argue that the principle of the freedom of the press is not as straightforward as many media people would like it to be (Chaskalson, 17 October 1996). On the contrary, the rights of the press must be balanced towards other rights and interests, such as privacy and defamation. Chaskalson concludes that «rights are never absolute and press freedom is no exception to this rule» (Chaskalson, 17 October 1996).

Chaskalson's problematization of the freedom of the press illustrates a general challenge whenever an individual right is made a universal principle, namely that

individuality can never be non-negotiable in a democratic society. This is evident when the judiciary assesses the freedom of the press, for instance during the writing of the constitution. The government must necessarily keep all rights and responsibilities in mind when making the law, while the press can allow itself to elevate one right above all other rights.¹⁸

- **Observation #41: Some of the tensions between the press and the government on issues of press freedom can be explained by the fact that the government must consider a complexity of democratic rights and responsibilities while the press can focus on one right alone.**

(Article supporting the observation: Chaskalson, 17 October 1996)

The government's view of the press depends on the occasion on which the view is expressed. As shown in the first section, there are occasions where the government affirms the watchdog discourse, as least partly. On other occasions, the government emphasizes the social responsibility role of the press. These views need not be contradictory, they are rather proofs that discourses operate on various levels. It is the argument of this treatise that the underlying discourse of the government emphasizes the nation-building role of the press, even when watchdog functions are paid attention to. When Deputy President Thabo Mbeki spoke at the founding meeting of the South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef), he wisely paid attention to both functions of the press (Mbeki, 21 October 1996). However, the underlying discourse remains one of nation-building.

In his speech, the deputy president addressed the issue of freedom of the press and how the press has a role in the wider development of society. Although the speech was delivered on an occasion where words of encouragement were more appropriate than words of criticism, it did express the general understanding on behalf of the ANC leadership what the role of the press should be in relation to government. Mbeki had two messages in his speech: that press freedom is not under threat in South Africa, and that the press should take part in fighting for non-racialism (the latter is of course a direct response to the occasion, which is the merger between white and black editor forums). Notably, Mbeki put great emphasis on the concept «one nation» in his speech, thus denoting that the press has responsibilities also in this regard. The nation-building role of any public or civil institution, including the commercial media, is therefore inescapable. Interestingly, Mbeki spoke in first person («we») when referring to the forming of Sanef, as if politicians belong to the same team as editors. For instance: «Sitting together in Sanef as black and white South Africans *we*

have the rare possibility to influence one another» (italics added). This confirms what we have observed earlier; that from a politician's point of view, it is less important to draw a sharp distinction between the press and the political environment.

The deputy president gave similar views on another occasion, at a banquet to celebrate the 120th anniversary of The Cape Times. In that particular speech, Mbeki advised journalists to contribute to the overall nation-building enterprise. Among the important issues in this enterprise is the construction of a «common sense of patriotism» (Mbeki, 8 April 1996). This resembles Mbeki's later appeal for an African renaissance, which encouraged African patriotism. Mbeki says the press must understand its role in this process of nation-building, or continent-building. In his words, the media should «become an important element in the engine that will take us till our destination» (Mbeki, 8 April 1996). Put differently, the ANC leadership sees no contradiction between an independent press and a press which is part of the nation-building process. Specifically, and in tune with Mbeki's call for a reconciliation process in the country, he advises the press to be «one which is capable of moving away from stereotypes and one which is not embarrassed to be passionately and uncompromisingly in favour of some things, especially our new-born democracy» (Mbeki, 8 April 1996).

The appeal for a more nation-minded press sometimes includes direct attacks on libertarian values. ANC parliamentary caucus Baleka Kgositsile thus provoked the media industry when he said in an interview: «If the media wants to be seen as being truly committed to the process of transforming parliament into an effective tool of social change, it must desist from being a perpetual messenger of bad news» (Mgxashe, 25 February 1996). Intensely provocative, Kgositsile's statement is another confirmation of the nation-building role that the government wants the press to have. Kgositsile draws the nation-building role to the extreme that only good news has a legitimate place in the media. This is perhaps the scenario journalists fear when they are being presented with the nation-building agenda. When the press is included in this agenda, the nation-building discourse appears to strongly contradict libertarian ideals. This explains in part the South African press' hostility towards the social responsibility model.

- **Observation #42: Politicians are more likely to emphasize the nation-building role of the press than the press itself.**

(Articles supporting the observation: «Govt, media -», 28 May 1996; Mbeki, 21 October 1996; Netshitenzhe, 22 March 1998)

- **Observation #43: In contrast to most media representatives, the ANC leadership sees no contradiction between an independent press and a press which is part of the nation-building process.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Mbeki, 8 April 1996; Mkhondo, 15 July 1997)

It is imperative to the ANC that all groups are committed to nation-building. The perception is that South Africa is under transition to a 'new society' where democracy and equality is becoming the norm. These ideas are profoundly outlined in ANC's statement on ethical transformation, in which the media are also asked to take part. The statement presents both a criticism and a challenge to the media industry: «Some newspapers appear to find it easier to play a destructive role in the transition process. Can all the media have a constructive role in nation-building?» (ANC Commission for Religious Affairs, 17 October 1998). This rhetorical question leaves no alternatives to the media, as no responsible organization would wish to be destructive rather than constructive.

- **Observation #44: The official view of the ANC leadership is that the media are constructive only if they actively commit themselves to nation-building.**

(Article/document supporting the observation: ANC Commission for Religious Affairs, 17 October 1998)

How does the social responsibility model of the media correspond with African philosophies? Some have addressed the question, like Thabo Mbeki through his African renaissance concept, as we have already mentioned. Another central figure in the public debate 1996–99 who had strong opinions on the question, was Prof. William Makgoba. Makgoba took a different route than most other academics in questions of the press and the government. Like the national leadership, Makgoba urged the press to take part in the nation-building process.

In a *New Nation* article, Makgoba outlines two roles of the press in this process: its role as an educator and its role as a democracy builder. According to Makgoba, «the media should take lead in debates and in challenging our emerging democracy to be forward-looking and nation-oriented» (Makgoba, 22 November 1996). The nation-building agenda is thus of utmost importance to Makgoba, as he has expressed in various other contexts (Makgoba, 1997). Within this line of thought, it is insufficient to outline the normative role of the press without referring to overall social goals. The overall social goal for Makgoba is what is vaguely defined as the 'African spirit', which leads him to argue that even the media

should promote «the community spirit that is so characteristic of African societies» (Makgoba, 22 November 1996). How this is done in practical journalism is somewhat unclear. Makgoba argues that today's media fail to convey the African spirit as they «perpetuate predominantly Eurocentric values, ethos, ideologies and norms at the expense of African ones». Makgoba's description will not be evaluated here. The interesting observation is that his normative role of the media is inescapably linked to the rediscovery of genuine African values.¹⁹

- **Observation #45: Within the nation-building discourse, the normative role of the press is sometimes seen as linked to African community philosophies.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Makgoba, 22 November 1996; Molebeledi, 30 September 1998)

Echoing William Makgoba, the ANC Women's League president Winnie Madikizela-Mandela called for a more African press at a meeting at the Johannesburg Press Club. Like Thabo Mbeki, Nelson Mandela and others, Madikizela-Mandela accuses the press for being stuck in a «dying, European, conservative liberalism» (Molebeledi, 18 February 1998). The better alternative for the South African press, she claims, is to adopt «an assertive, emerging African renaissance». In terms of press standards, she says that the press «always cried for freedom of the press but never for responsibility, objectivity, sensitivity, thorough investigative journalism or analytical and informative reporting».²⁰ The assumption is that objectivity, analytical reporting, etc. are not compatible with generally acknowledged standards of the liberal press. However, the media profession itself and educators seem to convey the opposite (see for instance Diederichs, 11 January 1998; TML editorial charter, 11 July 1996).

- **Observation #46: Leading ANC politicians are convinced that the South African press will not be truly African unless it exchanges so-called European liberalism for the African renaissance. However, the politicians do not spell out how the African renaissance can be imported into journalism.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Makgoba, 22 November 1996; Molebeledi, 18 February 1998; Molebeledi, 30 September 1998)

There are of course also journalists and editors who accept the social responsibility model of the press, though to a lesser extent than do politicians. The editor of Cape Argus, for one,

admits that the challenges of transformation belongs to the press as much as it does to the rest of civil society. One of the difficulties with the South African press, according to an editorial in relation to the International Press Freedom day, is that large sections of the press does not correlate with the society they serve («Entrenching –», 4 May 1998). This concern is raised by both media professionals and politicians. That the press is in need of transformation, reflects a social responsibility discourse. According to the referred editorial, the needed transformation entails both staff demography (that the newsroom must reflect the demographics of society) and media content (that the columns in the newspapers should reflect all of society, not only the established, middle-class segment).

- **Observation #47: Concerns are raised by both the media profession and politicians that the South African press is not reflecting the society it seeks to serve.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Mbeki, 21 October 1996; Diederichs, 11 January 1998; «Entrenching –», 4 May 1998)

We have earlier seen that the proposed Times Media Ltd. editorial charter reflects libertarian values because of its uncompromising attitude towards the independence of the media. However, and this observation is particularly worthwhile since it is taken from an editorial charter, the charter also proves that the newspaper group commits itself to improving the conditions of South Africa, or, in the group's wording: «to advance the general good of South Africa and its people» (TML editorial charter, 11 July 1996). Also, the newspaper group «shall endeavour to reflect [...] the views, aspirations and needs of all South Africans». These statements, notably placed already at the preamble of the charter, reflects a desire on behalf of the newspaper group to be accountable not only to its owners and its internal standards, but also to the standards of the country as a whole. Though this is perhaps a somewhat diffuse commitment (a much clearer commitment would be that of economic prosperity on behalf of the owners), it does project a socially responsible role of the press that the press itself chooses to adopt. Whether the press actually succeeds in its commitment to «the general good of South Africa and its people» is difficult to decide, partly because 'the general good' is not defined.

- **Observation #48: In principle, the newspaper industry expresses a commitment to social responsibility.**

(Article supporting the observation: TML editorial charter, 11 July 1996)

Nation-building is linked to consensus, which is often seen as an enemy to the independent press. An interesting exception is the editorial standards of *The Sunday Independent*, whose pronounced goal is «to be part of the process of creating a national consensus» in post-apartheid South Africa (Ball, 20 February 1998). Editor John Battersby has repeatedly made clear that his newspaper has responsibilities also in the overall shaping of the new nation, which implies that it intends to go beyond the traditional rights-oriented libertarian paradigm. One editorial states: «We [*The Sunday Independent*] also believe that with rights come responsibilities. We are accountable to our readers and the society in all its diversity» («Let's learn -», 21 September 1997). Rather than looking inwardly to protect press rights, the editorial turns its focus on the population at large. The largest threat to the responsibility of newspapers, according to *The Sunday Independent*, is not restriction of press freedom but the fact that only a small portion of the population has a real opportunity to participate in the public debate. Participation is restricted by illiteracy as well as racial, cultural and socio-economic divides. Through this train of thought, the editorial shifts the focus of the role of the press from being one of independence (liberty from state regulation, commercial interests, etc.) to being one of interdependence (cooperation across the web of social formations). The libertarian view of the role of the press is challenged. It needs to be emphasized that *The Sunday Independent* departs from most other newspapers in its acclamation of nation-building responsibilities.

- **Observation #49: A few newspapers declare that building a national consensus belongs to their obligations. This view presupposes that the role of the press is best seen in light of responsibilities rather than rights.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Sullivan, 15 July 1996; «Let's learn -», 21 September 1997; Ball, 20 February 1998)

A similar comment that is worth attention, is Peter Sullivan's «Let's try and find our high road» (Sullivan, 15 July 1996). Sullivan, who is the editor of *The Star*, elaborates on the vision to crave for more responsible standards than just sheer watchdog journalism. After affirming that newspapers do play a watchdog role in society, «a role which demands that we criticise, expose, attack, lead public indignation, follow up on investigative reportage», Sullivan goes on to expand the role of the press to involve the invention of «a new national culture». Interestingly, the editor implies that this role of the press is of particular importance in South Africa, although it might not represent a universal standard for journalism. He writes: «In our emergent democracy, in our unequal society, we also have a role to lead the population

towards good things as well as away from evil» (Sullivan, 15 July 1996). The watchdog role thus connotes that which repels evil, which of course is an honourable duty, but Sullivan indicates that if journalism only aims at 'anti-evil', it can only reach so far. On the contrary, if journalism commits itself to «good things», it will expand beyond the traditional paradigm. Sullivan's comment therefore challenges the classical libertarian paradigm which is not associated with responsibilities («good things»).

To explain what good journalism entails, the editor uses various metaphors which are worth studying. The well-known metaphor of «the rainbow nation» is used to locate the newspaper in the wider cultural setting of the multicultural South Africa. The metaphor is a non-controversial one, and it is arguably expressing a diffuse vision rather than actual circumstances. The commentator continues: «It is The Star's task to be a *guiding light* for our nation, inspired by our leaders and readers» (Sullivan, 15 July 1996; italics added). This is the enlightenment discourse writ large. Within this discourse, the role of the press is one of illumination. The public has to be guided through the social maze, and the task of the press is to educate and inform. However, the press does not operate in a newsroom vacuum, as the libertarian discourse sometimes seems to suggest, but is dependent on input from «our leaders and readers». The latter involves the realization that the press is part of a negotiated social arrangement.

Rather than emphasizing the critical role of the newspaper, Peter Sullivan proclaims that his newspaper «will promote the positive aspects of our society». Such a commitment to transmitting good news is relatively uncommon when editors speak of their responsibilities. However, the editor of The Star clearly does not see any contradiction between reporting on positive news and being critical: «We will be supportive of the good, teach tolerance of everyone's best attempts and be kindly in criticism, while preaching intolerance of crime in communities or corruption in governance» (Sullivan, 15 July 1996). As a model for journalism, Sullivan's comment therefore represents a compromise between libertarianism and social responsibility.

A final example of a journalist who departs from the watchdog discourse, is Independent Newspapers parliamentary editor Zubeida Jaffer. She stresses that journalists must «provide information within a context which will deepen the knowledge of citizens and communities» (Jaffer, 5 February 1998). The understanding is that journalists should be accountable to communities more than individuals, in other words, the individualistic libertarian hypothesis is challenged. Jaffer draws a significant distinction between cynicism – which many people see as the chief trait of the press – and healthy scepticism. Only if the newspaper industry eradicates itself of the cynicist image, contends Jaffer, can it make a

contribution «as we try to rebuild our country». The responsibility of parliamentary journalists is then, at least partly, to contribute to the nation-building process.²¹

- **Observation #50: When challenged on the responsibilities of the press, some press representatives depart from classical libertarian values and acknowledges nation-building responsibilities.**

(Articles supporting the observation: Sullivan, 15 July 1996; «Let's try -», 21 September 1997; Jaffer, 5 February 1998)

4.3 The communitarian model: 'the alternative discourse' (observation #51)

As we move to the last section of observations, we need to be reminded that there is a diffuse line between social responsibility and communitarianism. Some would argue that the two approaches are essentially the same (Gunaratne, 1996; Howard Schneier quoted in Dennis & Merrill, 1996: 156-57; others). Some of the observations categorized in the previous section, particularly those regarding African philosophies, carry communitarian traits. However, during the period studied in this treatise, February 1996-April 1999, there appears to have been only one article which argues directly for a truly communitarian media. The article carries the indicative title «Media's role more than watchdogging», and the author is Annette Lansink, lecturer of public law at the University of Venda (Lansink, 7 May 1998).

The responsibilities of the media must be seen in close connection with the overall transformation of the country, argues Lansink. Central to her argument is a fundamental critique of liberal concepts of democracy. She explains that alternative models of democracy are excluded in today's westernized South Africa: «Other conceptions of democracy, such as an African-oriented concept of democracy in which notions of rights and duties to the community, a communitarian approach and consensual decision-making are central elements, are brushed aside» (Lansink, 7 May 1998). Lansink reports that the liberal model of democracy, which South Africa is imitating, aims to limit the state and dichotomize the roles of the government and the commercial sector, such as the media. In her view, the liberal model of democracy reinforces socio-economic imbalances. However, the new South African constitution has paved the way for «a more substantive notion of democracy», particularly with regard to economic equality. Lansink subsequently argues that the government must offer alternatives to the liberal understanding of rights and responsibilities in order to ensure transformation and nation-building. The media have an important role to play in this transition, but it differs from the traditional watchdog role. Lansink concludes: «The role of the media should extend beyond being a watchdog; the media should play its role in the

effort to create a national consciousness of substantive democracy» (Lansink, 7 May 1998). Notably, the watchdog role is not abandoned, but it is only one among a wider range of responsibilities of the media.

The normative media theory outlined by Lansink comes close to familiar descriptions of communitarianism. The article is, as already mentioned, the only instance in which communitarian ideas are developed as a model for the South African commercial media.²²

- **Observation #51: In only one instance have commentators applied communitarianism as a resource for thinking around the role of the press.**
(Article supporting the observation: Lansink, 7 May 1998)

Chapter 5: A new model of press ideologies in light of post-apartheid South Africa

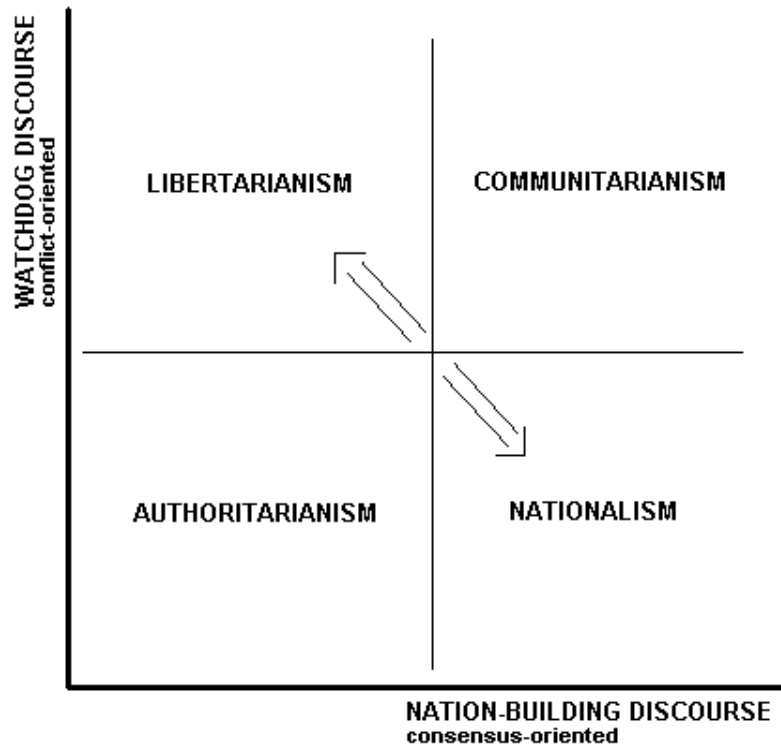
Intention: This chapter proposes a new way to understand normative press models based on the research presented in the previous chapter. Although the model is inspired by post-apartheid South Africa, it brings insights that are applicable to other modern media societies as well. It represents a challenge to the classic division that Siebert et al. proposed in their «Four theories of the press» (1963).

From the research just presented, one is left with the impression that the press debate in South Africa is dichotomized. One is either for a libertarian model or for a social responsibility model. The media industry argues for libertarianism, while politicians and the government argues for social responsibility. It is as if the two views are mutually exclusive. Even when government officials attempt to reconcile the watchdog function and the nation-building function, they imply that there are inherent tensions between the two; they cannot truly coexist.

The following model illustrates the dichotomy that seems to inform the South African media debate. However, rather than presenting the opposing views on a continuum with watchdogging as one extreme and nation-building as the other, the model suggests that the two positions operate on two dimensions. In other words, watchdogging and nation-building are not mutually exclusive. It is the argument of this model that the discourse which informs the media debate, falsely upholds an imagined dichotomy between the interests of the press and the interests of the government.

Figure 1:

A new model of press ideologies in light of post-apartheid South Africa



(Note: The arrows represent the tensions in the public debate.)

Libertarianism is characterized by a high degree of conflict. That the libertarian discourse is conflict-oriented means that it sees tensions between the media and the government as healthy. The total independence of the press is a necessity. Any cooperation between the media and the government is seen as unfruitful and damaging, not only to the press, but to society at large. It follows that libertarianism cherishes the watchdog metaphor, which maintains that the foremost function of the media is to be critical towards the government. The libertarian discourse is by far the most favoured discourse among South African journalists, as we have observed.

Authoritarianism carries a low degree of both conflict and consensus. There is no room for the press to challenge or negotiate with the government. Though Siebert's (1963) authoritarian media theory was largely based on the experiences of past regimes, it is a possibility that the apartheid state displayed authoritarian attitudes towards the press. This reality – or at least the *fear* of such a reality – is perhaps an explanation as to why many commentators today favour either a strongly conflict- or consensus-oriented press.

Nationalism is not a press model per se, but the concept is timely in the current South African media debate. The diagram suggests that the social responsibility model is in reality exchanged for a nationalistic framework. The purpose of the press is to serve the nation, not just society as such. To this end, it is remarkable how often images of 'the nation' are used when ANC politicians address the role of the media. We saw for instance that Deputy President Thabo Mbeki focused on «one nation» when he spoke at the founding meeting of Sanef (Mbeki, 21 October 1996), and he encouraged the press to share «a common sense of patriotism» (Mbeki, 8 April 1996). The purpose of the press is, once more, to take part in the nation-building process. These efforts require a high degree of consensus between the press and the government. In the nationalistic discourse, open conflict is seen as a direct threat to the advancement of the country, thus we get the kind of reactions from government officials like Trade Minister Alec Erwin who said the South African press was «overwhelmed by cynicism» («Media overwhelmed –», 14 October 1998). The nationalistic media model which is attributed to the new South African leadership, is undoubtedly motivated by the desire to break with South Africa's past. The ANC uses the imagery of the split country to motivate every institution of society to work together towards 'one people' and 'one nation' (cf. ANC Commission for Religious Affairs, 17 October 1998). The press is not justified as an independent institution within this paradigm. Consensus, not conflict, is the keyword.

Conflict is destructive and should therefore be avoided, is the underlying credo of a nationalistic normative press model.

Communitarianism, as it is located within the proposed model, challenges the view that the watchdog and the nation-building discourses are contradictory. It also challenges the view that the media must be either conflict-oriented or consensus-oriented. On the contrary, since watchdog/conflict and nation-building/consensus operate on two different dimensions, the two can coexist. The background for communitarian ethics is exactly the realization that the libertarian press serves neither the nation (nation-building has failed; Etzioni, 1998) nor democracy (Fallows, 1997). A new media model, based on community involvement, but not disregarding the critical perspective, is needed. Lansink (7 May 1998) did an attempt to outline how this model can operate in today's South Africa. She maintains that the communitarian understanding is based on both national consciousness and democratic values like social justice and fundamental rights. Unlike the politicized nation-building discourse, communitarianism denies the necessity to control the media through top-down regulations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Main findings

The analysis in this treatise shows that the South African press is highly informed by Western libertarian ideologies. Both journalists and politicians agree that a free press is a necessity for democracy. The particular function of the press is to watch over the government, which induces the watchdog discourse. The watchdog discourse establishes the press as a homogeneous industry with common interests and goals. Libertarian ideals within the press frequently intermingle with ideals of freedom of expression, but the ideals are rarely explored or questioned. The libertarian ideology and freedom of expression are assumed to be self-evident and unchangeable. Libertarian dilemmas such as ownership commitment, are discussed only to a very limited degree.

The government is more likely than the press to favour the social responsibility model, but the model is seldom referred to by that name. Rather, images of nation-building are used, thus social responsibility is exchanged for nationalism. The nationalistic model of the press must not be seen as a detrimental, us vs. them typology, but is rather a framework which grows out of the efforts to develop social structures in a country that for many years has been split by apartheid. Nonetheless, the nationalistic model that the government generates, tends to censure critical reporting. The analysis shows that the distinction between 'critical' and 'negative' is blurred.

The treatise has suggested an alternative press model to libertarianism and social responsibility, namely communitarianism. It is argued that this ideology encourages both critical reporting and nation-building. Its starting-point is a people-driven journalism differing from immediate professional or administrative (governmental) preferences. However, the treatise has not dealt with communitarianism as a journalistic discipline other than on the superficial, ideological level. The article analysis shows that communitarian ideals are absent within the current South African journalism debate, although some calls for social responsibility ethics resembles the essence of communitarianism.

6.2 Further studies

This treatise is mainly a descriptive study, and it lacks a closer theoretical analysis of the identified press models. In particular, the libertarian ideals need to be analysed further within the South African context. It is an open question why these ideals are guarded so tightly by the press and the NGOs in South Africa. Is it because of the country's past and its

experiences with heavy restrictions on press freedom? Also, the relationship between a robust media and freedom of expression needs to be problematized. It is all too often taken for granted that freedom of expression and other libertarian 'necessities' inevitably leads to a more open and healthy democracy (cf. chapter 4). A closer study would reveal that the complexities of a modern democracy go far beyond freedom of expression and similar libertarian virtues.

Finally, communitarianism and public journalism opens up for an array of studies within the South African context. This 'people-driven' media ideology originated under certain conditions in the USA, but it is not unlikely that it corresponds with African community philosophies as well. Foremost, communitarianism is an ideology of practice, and it cannot be studied in the academic institution alone.

Endnotes

1. Whether the media industry and politicians disagree on particular issues is not the concern here. Rather, we want to point to differences in the understanding of the fundamental role of the media. A politician may disagree strongly with a newspaper on a particular political issue, but can still agree that the media ought to be critical and independent.

2. The clipping archive, which is the most extensive resource of the South African print media, is available on the World Wide Web from January 1997. It covers more than 120 publications. See <http://inch.uovs.ac.za>.

3. This is exactly the critique of Tomaselli (2000) towards the discourse analysis approach used by the South African Human Rights Commission when investigating racism in the media. Tomaselli claims that the research is insufficient partly because «no research was done inside the media industry» and because it assumed «a homogeneous readership/audience». The infamous discourse analysis by Teun A. Van Dijk (1984) on racism on the international news industry, on the other hand, included studies on newsroom practices.

4. This is why I will write the treatise mostly in the present tense (e.g. «the ANC government *favours* a free press»), unless referring to particular incidents which are of historical interest. The assumption is that the views expressed on behalf of the newspaper industry and the government 1996-99, persist unless reason to believe otherwise.

5. Torfing (1999) does, however, outline the disputes between Laclau/Mouffe and Foucault on theoretical issues of discourse, for instance in terms of the relation between discourse, power and authority. However, there appears to be no conflict between the scholars on the importance of how discourses operate meaningfully in relation to each other. Both a Gramscian approach (Laclau and Mouffe) and a post-structuralist approach (Foucault) would agree on the necessity to undertake studies of the relationships between discourses.

6. I would like to make a comment on the use of *theory* and *model*. Siebert et al. (1963) spoke of «four theories of the press». It has subsequently been common to speak of *press theories* and *press models* interchangeably, although I wish to argue that the latter is a more precise

term when referring to the normative aspects of the media. When using *model*, we point to a framework which does not necessarily exist in its 'perfect' sense; it is rather the archetype that the media are aiming at. When using *theory*, on the other hand, most people, both in academia and elsewhere, think of a *proposed explanation of a particular phenomenon*, thus a theory explains that which already exists (descriptively), not that which only exists as an ideal (normatively). I will therefore distinguish between *theory* and *model* in this treatise, and subsequently use *model* only in the normative sense, thus opposing Siebert et al.'s normative use of *theories of the press*.

7. For a critique of Siebert's four press theories, see for instance Curran (1991), Skogerbø (1991) and Skjerdal (1994).

8. I wish to distinguish between *liberal* and *libertarian* in this treatise. *Liberal* is a more inclusive term than *libertarian*, and denotes freedom for the individual. It is not necessarily associated with a certain political preference, as one can be liberal in one area (say, the right to exercise press freedom) and restrictive in another area (say, the right to exercise environmental freedom). A *libertarian*, on the other hand, is someone who subscribes to a certain ideological tradition, *libertarianism*, which is historically connected with the ideas of John Stuart Mill and Adam Smith in particular. Libertarianism advocates consequent freedom for the individual, to the extent that the state performs the role of a necessary evil. The difference between *liberal* and *libertarian* is obvious when we look at media ideologies: *Liberal* principles (the view that the media should be free to express their ideas without governmental intervention) are championed in both libertarian and social responsibility models of the media. It is sometimes assumed that favouring a liberal press means that one necessarily subscribes to libertarian press principles. That is not so. We need to distinguish between ideological preferences (libertarian vs. social responsibility) and ethical preferences (liberal vs. restrictive).

9. For a discussion on the differences and similarities between communitarianism and social responsibility, see Gunaratne (1996) and Skjerdal (1998).

10. It is difficult to distinguish between the ANC and the government on this issue, which is *inter alia* evident from the November 1996 dispute. President Mandela receives support from the ANC head quarters for his critical view on the media (Niehaus, 15 November 1996;

Yengeni, 15 November 1996), and he does not distinguish between 'ANC mouthpiece' and 'government mouthpiece', for instance («Black pressmen →», 19 November 1996).

11. This concern led a majority of the black journalism profession to proclaim that they identified themselves with a professional journalist community rather than with a racial community. Journalists, both black and white, strongly rejected that they were controlled by forces which are against democracy and transformation. In response to Mandela, non-white journalists denied that they represented token appointments (e.g. *Sunday Times* editor Mike Robertson, *Cape Argus* editor Moegsien Williams, *Sowetan* editor Mike Siluma; «Black editors →», 19 December 1997).

12. Bruce's letter is rebutted by Steuart Pennington (23 October 1998). Pennington argues that it is a failure of the media to reject its nation-building role, and that the media should stop hiding itself behind the «commercial rationale».

13. To justify the government, it is of course in the opposition's interest to make the impression that the government is against press freedom. Nevertheless, indications are that the opposition is valid in its concerns since the ANC on several occasions has failed to prove that its handling of particular cases is faultless. A case in point is the mentioned McBride affair, which caused ANC Premier Ngoako Ramatlhodi (6 April 1998) to react with disgust on the attitude of the press. His reaction is not primarily a defence of ANC's treatment of the case, but a general criticism of the press which supposedly fails to report on the positive achievements of government. That the press allows too much negative reporting, is therefore not sufficiently proven.

14. The editorial charter caused much debate within the company. Journalists said the charter was compiled by the leadership without consulting the staff.

15. The DP later accepted ANC's proposal that freedom of expression should not extent to «advocacy based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion that constitutes incitement to cause harm». The reasoning was that the racial tensions of the past made it necessary to send a message through the constitution that certain kinds of speech would not be tolerated (Madlala, 24 March 1996).

16. I have not been able to find the exact *Ilanga* reference, but the editorial at hand was published in the middle of March 1999.
17. Another characteristic example of government representatives who have accused the press for inappropriate government coverage, includes Northern Province Premier Ngoako Ramatlhodi, who criticized the press for «the under-reporting of government initiatives or successes» (Ramatlhodi, 6 April 1998).
18. In an editorial reply to judge Chaskalson, *The Sunday Independent* expressed concerns that the judge in his speech «was more preoccupied with how to limit the definition of press freedom than with how to entrench and expand on it» («Freedom and responsibility –», 20 October 1996). However, the newspaper failed to look into any of the issues raised by the judge with regard to troubles with unlimited press freedom. Perhaps the failure to address concrete issues illustrates the general failure of the press to defend full freedom of the press when faced with actual situations.
19. Makgoba is supported by intellectuals from other African countries who have argued for a journalism practice that differ from the so-called Eurocentric journalism. One is Nigerian author and publisher Dr. Chinweizu, who claims there is «a need to develop an African renaissance media philosophy with clear goals, operational principles, criteria and professional ethics» (Molebeledi, 30 September 1998). Of particular importance to Chinweizu is to rectify Africa's false image of African civilization, an image which the mainstream media supposedly upholds.
20. These words, together with other extracts that are attributed to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, are in reality derived word by word from William Makgoba's comment in *New Nation* 22 November 1996.
21. William Saunderson-Meyer (7 February 1998) is critical of the views of Zubeida Jaffer. In typical libertarian manner, he maintains that the only option for the media is to stay critical rather than 'constructive'.
22. Arguably, there are also other media critics who propose communitarian ideals. North-West Premier Popo Molefe claims that only a community-based media can ensure participatory democracy («Molefe says –», 13 March 1998). The type of 'black journalism'

that developed during apartheid, also resembles a people-driven communitarian approach to the media (Molefe, 23 February 1996). Such examples are still not developed instances of communitarian journalism as the term is understood in contemporary journalism.

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Appendix A: Example of a detailed discourse analysis with notes

The following notes serve as an example of how each article was analysed by means of discourse analysis and textual analysis before they were put together in the general observation section in chapter 4.

Text: Attacks on the media a sign of democracy in SA

Author: Stephen Mulholland

Date: 11 January 1998

Medium: *Sunday Times*

Type of article: Opinion

Structure of the article

1. Introduction: Free press is a necessity of a healthy democracy.
2. Specifying topic: Recent attacks by leading ANC politicians on the South African press.
3. Reference to history: The malfunctioning press/government relationship under PW Botha.
4. Intermediate conclusion: Newspapers are private investments. Economic independence from the government is necessary.
5. Historical parallel: The Watergate affair (negative/positive example).
6. Contemporary parallel: Cuba and Zimbabwe (negative examples).
7. Returning to local topic: Mandela is mistaken; black editors want to protect their editorial independence.
8. Conclusion: Journalists will not give up their integrity and independence from the state.

The layout: This column by Stephen Mulholland appears every Sunday in the second section of *Sunday Times*. It is called «Another voice», as to denote that the author is not afraid to speak against mainstream opinion. Mulholland has worked as a journalist and editor for many years in liberal South African newspapers. The readership of *Sunday Times* is largely white middle-class.

Key phrase: «By and large the relationship between government and the media should preferably be an adversarial one.» (section 4)

Positively loaded words: healthy – democracy/democratic (5) – free and cantankerous press – survival of democracy – good corporate governance – adversarial – service to a public – fine investments – great public trust – favour – the interests of the people – stronger than ever – flourished mightily – good journalism equals good business – credibility – independence (2) – treasure and protect – editorial independence – sacrificing – proud tradition

Negatively loaded words: hysterical attacks – dangerous – cosy relationship – too friendly – ‘patriotic’ press – damage – megalomaniac – fiercely – lapdogs – out of touch – flatter – delusions – insulted – force – distort

Overall observation: By using contrasting words and images, Stephen Mulholland sets up a contestation between the press and the government. The press is connected with positive values, and the government is constantly representing a threat to those values. The key word is ‘democracy’ (see the title and the introduction). Interestingly, two words which are usually negative, ‘cantankerous’ and ‘adversarial’, are coined by the author to imply positive values. This underscores the libertarian discourse, which believes that growth comes through competition rather than cooperation. The author uses historical and geographical parallels to prove that the South African government is threatening democratic values.

Detailed analysis: The title – «Attacks on the media a sign of democracy in SA» – is actually an interpretation of recent South African history. It assumes that democracy is still not fully in place in the newly transformed country, yet there are ‘signs’ which indicate that the transformation process is maturing. The title also combines ‘media’ and ‘democracy’, which are the two main constituencies (beside ‘government’) that inform the article. It is almost assumed in the title that democracy cannot exist without the media and vice versa.

The preferred reading of ‘democracy’ continues in the introductory paragraph, where the author opens with a truth claim («tension between governments of the day and the media is a healthy characteristic of democratic society»). The author here exploits the liberal Western myth of democracy, which assumes a society built up by three different institutions (the state, the corporate society and the private society) with clearly differing duties. Rather than offering an alternative to this understanding of democracy, the author makes use of a

truth claim («is») and affirms that the media constitute one institution and the government another. There is no option that there can be overlaps in the duties between the two. The next sentence qualifies the truth claim («it can be argued»), but the title and the introduction have already assumed the common-sense understanding of 'democracy', and the qualification serves more as a sign of trustworthiness on behalf of the author than a qualification per se. The introduction sets the agenda for the rest of the article. 'Democracy' or 'democratic' is used five times in the article, and is the most noteworthy symbol in the text.

The author goes on to name his enemies. Until this point, the author has appeared unbiased in his use of generally acceptable 'truth claims', but now, he suddenly deploys a highly loaded phrase, «hysterical attacks». The construction of the article legitimates and strengthens the phrase, as the author builds up confidence through his seemingly impartial and non-provocative statements in the opening paragraph. When he suddenly changes writing style from a denotative to a connotative type and condemns Mandela and Mbeki's treatment of the media as «hysterical attacks», the reader is led to be convinced that the accusations are justified. Mulholland particularly refers to the Mafikeng speech that Mandela held a few weeks before (December 1997), but he simultaneously conveys the impression that the political leadership is *constantly* attacking the media on false grounds. The article exploits the unfavourable image that the public has of President Mandela after his outburst a few weeks before, and turns this impression into a general claim. A public discourse is formed, but it is an overgeneralized one.

It is important for the author to draw parallels between the current South African government and authoritarian regimes. He first compares Mandela with former president PW Botha, who called for a 'patriotic press' in South Africa. The comparison is incomplete for a number of reasons, but the author manages to convince the reader that there are similarities between the current government and the former apartheid regime. This is a very effective argument, as people's connotations to the media policies during apartheid are exclusively negative. The author also refers to Cuba and Zimbabwe, both of which are poor examples of free press practices. Thus, he uses publicly agreed enemy discourses to argue against South Africa's own leaders. The irony, of course, is that the discourses he uses as examples, are more or less distant in space or time, and are therefore mediated discourses which are largely created by the media themselves.

Mulholland also uses the infamous Watergate scandal as an example. President Nixon, who had to resign after the affair, is implicitly compared with President Mandela. Since Nixon was against transparency, the implication is that also Mandela is against transparency. In a rhetorical twist, Mulholland goes on to use the Watergate scandal as a

proof that «good journalism equals good business». This is because «advertisers and readers want credibility and credibility comes from independence». What the author actually does here, is to use circular argumentation to argue for both structural and editorial independence. To him, independence equals independence from state intervention only, which is another trait of classic libertarianism. The problem of commercial constraints is not discussed.

Towards the end of the article, a discourse of race is introduced and perhaps reinforced. Mulholland argues that Mandela is wrong when he claims that black editors are token appointments. In line with the rest of the article, the author refers to «editorial independence» and «proud tradition» when arguing that black journalists are just as much part of the journalism community as white journalists are. It seems that race is not an issue in journalism; the journalistic mind is driven by «independence» rather than by racial interests. Mulholland thus succeeds in exchanging white vs. black barriers for press vs. government barriers. He leaves no option on behalf of black journalists; they must stop cooperating with the ANC if they want to protect the «proud tradition» they have inherited. It is questionable, however, if Mulholland would have to refer explicitly to this tradition if everyone took for granted that black journalists actually are part of the liberal press tradition. Arguably, the article therefore functions as a subtle confirmation of the supremacy of white journalists. It is all in the unspoken discourse in the article, which cannot be ascertained by a technical analysis alone.

Overall, Mulholland confirms the liberal watchdog discourse through positive connotations, and smashes the «lapdog» discourse through negative connotations and biased historical parallels. The structure of the article gives the impression that these two discourses are competing on equal grounds, but the author is aware that the discursive community he writes for, is largely informed by Western liberal values. The article therefore appears to function as a negotiation of discourses on the surface, but is more likely a reinforcement of certain discursive practices which are motivated by the particular socio-political context which confines post-apartheid South Africa.

Appendix B: Article overview

Date	Name of article	Source	Type of article	Author	Informants
15-02-96	In defence of free speech in SA	The Cape Times	Speech extract	Tony Leon	Tony Leon
16-02-96	Freedom redefined	The Star	Editorial		Editor
18-02-96	New era in fight for press freedom	Sunday Times	Opinion	Carmel Rickard	Carmel Rickard
23-02-96	Sowetan survived hard times	Sowetan	Background	Themba Molefe	Sowetan
24-02-96	Media told: 'Be positive on parliament'	Weekend Argus	News	Mxolisi Mgxashe	ANC parliamentary caucus
07-03-96	Public has a stake in press row	The Cape Times	Opinion	Guy Berger	Guy Berger
16-03-96	A celebration of newfound wisdom	Weekend Argus	Editorial		Editor
17-03-96	Freedom of speech becomes a mirage	Sunday Times	Opinion	Jeanette Minnie	Jeanette Minnie
17-03-96	The transformation of newspapers is easier said than done	The Sunday Independent	News	Elizabeth Kinghorn	Rhodes Journalism Review: Guy Berger, Thami Mazwai, John Patten, Moegsien Williams
17-03-96	A free press has to tell it how it is!	City Press	Editorial		Editor
24-03-96	DP accepts new hate-speech provision	Sunday Times	News	Cyril Madlala	ANC, DP
08-04-96	'Do battle with racist thinking'	The Cape Times	Speech	Thabo Mbeki	Thabo Mbeki
15-04-96	Intolerable dissent?	Democracy in Action	Opinion	Raymond Louw	Raymond Louw
21-04-96	The SA press may be free at last, but freedom is only the beginning	The Sunday Independent	Speech extract	Ivan Fallon	Ivan Fallon
28-05-96	Govt, media duty to inform public: Mac	The Citizen/Sapa	News		Mac Maharaj
30-05-96	Phosa says Press are all 'bastards'	The Citizen/Sapa	News		Mathews Phosa
31-05-96	Role of Press in E Cape finds support	Eastern Province Herald	News	Bronwen Roberts	ANC, editors
31-05-96	Don't blame the messenger	Eastern Province Herald	Editorial		Editor
14-06-96	Threatened by Mbeki and admonished by Chaskalson	Financial Mail	Opinion		Editor
11-07-96	Times Media Ltd. editorial charter	Business Day	Information		Editorial charter
13-07-96	Mandela does his best, but mainstream press chides 'future' president Also published as: Pen which maligns Mbeki was once poisoned with treachery	Weekend Argus Also in: Saturday Star	Opinion	Jon Qwelane	Jon Qwelane
15-07-96	Let's try and find our high road	The Star	Opinion	Peter Sullivan	Peter Sullivan
23-07-96	Media study results released	Business Day/Sapa	News		MMP
25-07-96	SA press dogged by poor training, says Mbeki	The Argus (Cape Argus)	News	Peter Fabricius	Thabo Mbeki
11-09-96	Press freedom as vital as ever	The Cape Times	Opinion	Bennie Bunsee	Bennie Bunsee (PAC)
30-09-96	Is the media too hard on govt?	Mayibuye	News		MMP
07-10-96	From the tower of Babel, a new message	Cape Argus	News	Clive Sawyer	Comtask
10-10-96	Tutu champions free press	The Cape Times	News	Barry Streek	Desmond Tutu
12-10-96	The spanner in Comtask's works	Saturday Star	Opinion	Chris Moerdyk	Chris Moerdyk
17-10-96	Striking a balance on SA Press freedom	Business Day	Speech extract	Arthur Chaskalson	Arthur Chaskalson
20-10-96	Freedom and responsibility in the media	The Sunday Independent	Editorial		Editor
21-10-96	A milestone in building a nonracial media	Cape Argus	Speech extract	Thabo Mbeki	Thabo Mbeki
21-10-96	Govt and press 'at odds forever'	The Cape Times	News	Barry Streek	Ben Bradlee
21-10-96	Mandela summons City Press editor	The Cape Times	News		Nelson Mandela, Khulu Sibiyi
22-10-96	Media answerable to society: Min	The Citizen/Sapa	News		Jay Naidoo

26-10-96	Defining the transformation will be a serious challenge	Weekend Argus	Opinion	Ace Mgxashe	Ace Mgxashe
02-11-96	Mandela editors agree to talk	The Citizen/Sapa	News		Nelson Mandela/Thami Mazwai
12-11-96	Mandela accuses unnamed senior black journalists	Sapa	News		Nelson Mandela
13-11-96	Black journalists used by minority to undermine government: Mandela	Sapa	News		Nelson Mandela
14-11-96	DP slams Mandela's attack on the press	Sapa	News		Dene Smuts
15-11-96	The Star accused of gutter journalism	The Star	Opinion	Carl Niehaus	Carl Niehaus
15-11-96	Journalists should carry out their duties to the letter, but responsibly	The Star	Opinion	Tony Yengeni	Tony Yengeni
19-11-96	Black pressmen, pres end row	The Citizen/Sapa	News	Matthew Burbidge	Nelson Mandela
19-11-96	Mandela, journalists resolve differences	Business Day	News	Kevin O'Grady	Nelson Mandela, Thami Mazwai
19-11-96	Mandela's bizarre attack on journalists reflects ANC insecurity	Business Day	Opinion	Raymond Louw	Raymond Louw
19-11-96	Free Press	The Citizen	Editorial		Editor
20-11-96	Comment	Sowetan	Editorial		Editor
24-11-96	Wagging fingers old and new put press freedom in its place	Sunday Times	Opinion	David Bullard	David Bullard
20-11-96	Free press in all our interests	The Star	Opinion	Kaizer Nyatumba	Kaizer Nyatumba
22-11-96	Free Press: perception and reality	The New Nation	Opinion	William Makgoba	William Makgoba
30-11-96	Government and media	The Natal Witness	Editorial		Editor
15-07-97	State and media developing smart relationship despite the fall-outs	The Daily News	News	Rich Mkhondo	Cyril Ramaphosa, Ivan Fallon
21-09-97	Let's learn to speak our minds and build a new nation	The Sunday Independent	Editorial		Editor
28-09-97	Seleoane misrepresented Mbeki's view of the media	The Sunday Independent	Opinion	Thami Ntteni	Thami Ntteni
18-12-97	Black editors tokens, says Mandela	Sapa	News		Nelson Mandela
18-12-97	How the papers see it: press comment on Mandela's speech	Sapa	News		Sowetan, Business Day, The Citizen, The Star, Cape Argus, The Cape Times, Die Burger
19-12-97	Black editors reject tokenism claims by Mandela	Sapa	News		Mike Robertson, Moegsien Williams, Mike Siluma
19-12-97	ANC can't handle media/opponents' criticism: DP	Sapa	News		Tony Leon
08-01-98	Frankly, the media should not be condemned	The Cape Times	Opinion	Wilmot James	Wilmot James
11-01-98	Only accurate reporting and fair reflection will redeem the press	The Sunday Independent	Opinion	Pedro Diederichs	Pedro Diederichs
11-01-98	Attacks on the media a sign of democracy in SA	Sunday Times	Opinion	Stephen Mulholland	Stephen Mulholland
25-01-98	ANC calculated in approach to media, says head of editors forum	Sunday Tribune	News	Sam Sole	Moegsien Williams
26-01-98	We're watchdogs, editors warn govt	The Citizen/Sapa	News		Sanef
26-01-98	Mandela's media attack to top editors' agenda	The Star	News	Eddie Javiya	Mike Siluma (Sanef/Sowetan)
27-01-98	Press freedom	The Natal Witness	Editorial		Editor
05-02-98	No magic blueprint for journalists	The Daily News	Opinion	Zubeida Jaffer	Zubeida Jaffer (journalist)
07-02-98	Sunny skies journalism is not the answer	The Saturday Paper	Opinion	William Saunderson-Meyer	William Saunderson-Meyer (journalist)
08-02-98	Media in destabilisation plan: Mandela	Sapa	News		Nelson Mandela (ANC)
18-02-98	Lack of black language press impedes participatory democracy	Business Day	News	Pule Molebeledi	Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (ANC)
20-02-98	SA media in process of transformation	ECN	News	David Ball	John Battersby (The Sunday Independent), Ryland Fisher (The

					Cape Times)
20-02-98	Press freedom is one of the freedoms ANC fought for	Business Day	Opinion	Dumisani Makhaye	Dumisani Makhaye (ANC)
10-03-98	NASA pushes for press freedom	Integrated Communications	News		Hennie van Deventer (NASA)
13-03-98	Molefe says media still represents old dispensation	Sapa	News		Popo Molefe (North-West Premier)
22-03-98	With the right spirit, the media can help to shape a new SA consensus	The Sunday Independent	Opinion	Joel Netshitenzhe	Joel Netshitenzhe (GCIS)
06-04-98	Fair shake from media is wanted	The Star	Opinion	Ngoako Ramatlhodi	Ngoako Ramatlhodi (Northern Province Premier)
22-04-98	Trying to muffle the watchdog	The Star	Opinion	Nanga Lidovho	Nanga Lidovho (PAC)
29-04-98	Editors ask Mandela to axe Nat press law	Cape Argus	News		Sanef
29-04-98	Editors Forum raises concerns	The Daily News	News		Sanef
May 98	The looking-glass war	The Leadership Magazine	Opinion	Kaizer Nyatumba	Kaizer Nyatumba
04-05-98	Entrenching press freedom	Cape Argus	Editorial		Editor
04-05-98	A long walk to freedom for SA press	Cape Argus	Opinion	John Patten	John Patten (The Star ombudsman)
07-05-98	Media's role more than watchdogging	Sowetan	Opinion	Annette Lansink	Annette Lansink (public law lecturer, Univ. of Venda)
29-05-98	Media needs intervention to foster diversification	Business Day	Opinion	Thami Mazwai	Thami Mazwai
17-06-98	Hiding apartheid's abuse of power	The Star	Opinion	Johan van der Walt	Johan van der Walt (law professor)
14-08-98	Govt, editors decide to 'work together'	The Star	News	Troye Lund	Sanef, gov. ministers
30-09-98	Media needs transformation, says publisher	Business Day	News	Pule Molebeledi	Dr. Chinweizu (Nigerian author)
06-10-98	Landmark ruling	The Natal Witness	Editorial		Editor
14-10-98	Media overwhelmed by cynicism - Erwin	Business Day	News		Alec Erwin (Trade Minister)
15-10-98	Govt's failure not media's fault	Business Day	Opinion	Peter Bruce	Peter Bruce (Financial Mail)
21-10-98	Well said, Netshitenzhe	The Citizen	Opinion	Jethro Goko	Jethro Goko (Sapa)
23-10-98	Media should handle its influence responsibly	Business Day	Opinion	Steuart Pennington	Steuart Pennington
12-11-98	HRC to probe media racism	Sapa	News		HRC
17-11-98	Free press essential: Leon	Sapa	News		Tony Leon (DP)
17-11-98	Mixed reaction to probe into media	The Star	News	Raphael Banda	Barney Pityana (HRC), Jake Mloi (BLA), Joel Netshitenzhe (GCIS), Peter Sullivan (The Star)
17-11-98	Probe will harm Mandela's efforts at reconciliation	Business Day	Opinion	Raymond Louw	Raymond Louw (FXI)
20-11-98	Feebly disguised assault on press	The Mail & Guardian	Editorial		Editor
20-11-98	Editor's note	Financial Mail	Editorial	Peter Bruce	Peter Bruce (editor)
31-01-99	The beginning of the end for press freedom in SA?	Sunday Times	Opinion	Stephen Mulholland	Stephen Mulholland (journalist)
17-02-99	Government looks at broader spread of media ownership	The Star	News	Jovial Rantao	GCIS
22-02-99	In the interests of freedom	The Cape Times	Editorial		Editor
05-04-99	Press freedom in the spotlight	The Daily News	Opinion	Nicola Jones	Nicola Jones (communications lecturer)

Appendix C: Hard copy of 102 articles (only in printed version)