

**Newsroom Culture and Journalistic Practice at the South African
Broadcasting Corporation (SABC): An Ethnographic study**

by

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Journalism and Media
Studies.



Declaration

I, Tula Dlamini (Student Number: 0516522R), declare that this thesis is my own original unaided work. Where other people's works have been used, this has been fully acknowledged. This thesis is being submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements of the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities, at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination, or to any other university.

Signed

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a white background. The signature is fluid and cursive, appearing to read "Tula Dlamini".

..... Tula Dlamini

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NB. Some parts of this thesis findings have been published jointly with my PhD supervisor as part of journal articles and academic reviews.

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List of Abbreviations

A&C	Adam & Charles Black
ANC	African National Congress
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCCSA	Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COO	Chief Operating Officer
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
ENPS	Electronic News Production System
F.W.	Fredrick Willem
FTA	Free-to-air
FXI	Freedom of Expression Institute
GCEO	Group Chief Executive Officer
GE	Group Executive
DPCI	The South African Police Services' Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
ICASA	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
ICT	Information and communications technology
ITV	Independent Television
MMA	Media Monitoring Africa
MMP	Media Monitoring Project
MeCCSA	Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association
NCCC	National Coronavirus Command Council
NKP	National Key Point
NP	Nationalist Party
OTT	Over the Top
PBS	Public broadcasting services

PCS	Public Commercial Services
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PSB	Public service broadcasting
PW	Peiter Willem
RSG	Radio Sonder Grense
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SABCTV	South African Broadcasting Corporation Television
SAGE Publishing	a company founded by Sara Miller McCune and George D. McCune
SANEF	South African National Editors Forum
SONA	State of the Nation Address
SOP	Standard Operational Procedures
SOS	SAVE OUR SABC
STPS	Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere
US	United States of America
USSD	Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
WEC	Wits Ethics Committees
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation

Abstract

This research sets out to examine newsroom culture and journalism practice at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The primary objective is to understand the factors inside the SABC newsroom that impact the construction of news stories and current affairs productions. Anchored on Pierre Bourdieu's theories of the habitus, doxa, and capital, together with Habermas' concept of the Public Sphere, this thesis describes the newsroom culture of the SABC between 2016 and 2021 based on everyday work experiences and perspectives of news workers, managers at the broadcaster and available documents. As a secondary objective, the study explores how SABC newscasts and current affairs programming mediate news. Specifically, the content analysis of News and Current Affairs products assesses how the SABC mediated pluralist politics during the 2016 local government elections from the perspective of normative public sphere principles and examines how routines, practices, and professional values broadly impacted the broadcaster's coverage, particularly the contested issue of 'land'. The study is essentially a qualitative ethnography of the SABC newsrooms, although a multi-method approach is adopted to arrive at a more encompassing view of the journalistic culture of News and Current Affairs construction at the broadcaster. The 2016 period and after are interesting because these are also moments in time when the SABC newsroom was characterised by widely reported tension and editorial turmoil.

The findings reveal some of the embedded structural systems in the SABC's newsrooms, such as the role of the management hierarchy and the institutional norms, shared professional values, and routines that journalists use to achieve functional ends for the broadcaster. Furthermore, the study identifies a gap in the general scholarship of the SABC. For example, fewer studies have attempted to account for the culture and journalistic practice inside SABC newsrooms, all of which have impacted directly on the general operations of the broadcaster and execution of its PSB mandate.

Section One Study Overview

Chapter One

Introducing The Study

1.0 Introduction

This research sets out to explore newsroom culture and journalistic practices at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The research took place during a unique period in which the SABC News and Current Affairs Division, the only statutory public service news provider in South Africa, found itself between 2016 and 2021. It was a time of unprecedented internal dissonance inside the SABC newsroom and uncertainty regarding the SABC's role a public service broadcaster operating within a shifting and increasingly highly competitive broadcast media ecology.

1.1 Thesis Structure

This thesis describes the institutional culture inside the SABC newsrooms, and maps the identifiable structures, norms, routines, and related journalistic practices, values, and beliefs. In sum, it maps the factors inside the SABC newsrooms that impact the construction of News and Current Affairs stories based on the everyday work, experiences, and perspectives of news workers and managers at the broadcaster. As a secondary objective and to broaden understanding, the study examines how SABC newscasts mediate news. Specifically, it assesses how the SABC mediated pluralist politics during the 2016 local government elections from the point of view of the main normative public sphere tenets and examines some of the broadcaster's taken-for-granted practices, including the subsequent coverage of South Africa's contentious land restitution issue. The study is predominantly a qualitative ethnography, although a multi-method approach is adopted to arrive at a more encompassing view of what happens at the SABC newsroom.

Qualitative content analysis in the form of thematic analysis and, to a small measure, quantitative analysis is adopted to make sense of the sampled SABC news texts, while participant observation of journalists in their everyday setting, including interviews with news, and the analysis of relevant documents on the SABC are used to engage with the visible and less visible dynamics of news and current making. The study

incorporates theoretical underpinnings from a variety of fields and approaches, which include the classical boundaries of institutional studies. By delving into the related areas of media studies and reflexive sociology, the study transcends the classical boundaries of institutional studies like Arndt (2007), and benefits specifically on (a) conceptualisations of structure and agency, as well as power and power relations inside media institutions, (b) the discourse and discussions on journalistic practices, professional values and the perceptions of media workers concerning their own roles, and (c) literature on newsrooms and public service broadcasting.

Two key critical theories are employed in this thesis, namely, the public sphere theory as articulated by Jürgen Habermas, and Perrie Bourdieu's 'field theory'. I discuss these theories in detail in my theoretical and conceptual framework Section two, Chapters 4 and 5. Suffice to say, in line with Habermas' conception and as the starting point, this study begins with the premise that the public sphere is a neutral space, away from economics and politics, where participants can come together as individuals to collectively debate societal problems freely, with the aim of influencing political action and creating the democratic ideal (Habermas, 1991).

While Habermas admitted to the complex and controversial class nature of the society, he nonetheless maintained that a universal public sphere was possible – even if 'only as a promise' (*ibid*). To this added nuance, Habermas posited that it is not class that binds participants to the public sphere; but a mutual will and emancipatory potential to discuss issues that are in the 'public interest' (Susem, 2018; Habermas, 1994). Related to his theory of communicative action, Habermas proposed that, at the most basic level, the way society works to keep everything stable and in order was dependant on the capacity of actors to recognize the "intersubjective validity of the different claims on which social cooperation depends" (Habermas as cited Bohman & Rehg, 2007). In this way, Habermas maintained that the systems of political and economic action evolve and were structured by the effects of individually actions, unlike through mutual understanding among contributors (*ibid*).

The SABC and media in general are, in this work, conceived as central to the public sphere. Normatively, this is where 'actors' in media coverage (including the institutions they represent) simultaneously contest their visions of the social world and view the

reconstructed version of society or evolve what approximates public opinion (*ibid*). Owing to its statutory mandate as a PSB, the SABC therefore has a particular obligation as a facilitator of informed citizenship, public deliberation on public interest issues, and the consolidation of South Africa's nascent democracy. In Bourdieu (1995), the media is the 'field' where actors perform and strive to gain influence in the public sphere (see also Benson, 2005). In this work, using Bourdieu's conception as a template, the SABC is considered in terms of the 'journalistic field'. In practical terms, the construction of news and current affairs in the journalistic field is viewed in terms of a model or ideal way of achieving goals in an orderly manner. 'If journalists adhere to this paradigm, the desired result is expected to follow' (Ericson, 1999 as cited in Berkowitz, 1999, p. 103). The practices are patterned and repeated, dictated by a range of factors such as deadlines, space, norms, and values (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Reese, 2001). The role job these patterned and repeated practices is to generate, within the boundaries of space and time, the best outcomes, in the most efficient and possible way (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 108-109). All this, journalists achieve through socialisation practices in the newsroom (*ibid*). Understanding the ways through which this socialisation takes place at the SABC is the object of this study. This is achieved by operationalising Bourdieu's theory of the field and related concepts. I take the position that the public sphere and field theories are useful and complementary for understanding what happens at the SABC and the media broadly, and in the case of my study, the two theories are useful for exploring SABC newsroom culture, News and Current Affairs story-making processes and output. I am mindful of the scholarship that suggests that although both the public sphere and field theory can provide a 'relatively' comprehensive outline of the intersections and embedded practices in the social world, such portraits are nonetheless incomplete, and therefore warrant continuous research (Eyal, 2013, in Benson, *ibid*).

1.2 Research Problem

SABC newsrooms are implicated in recent and ongoing developments in journalism as a field, which has resulted in a constant state of flux that will take some time to stabilise. For example, in July 2016, the South African parliament Portfolio Committee on Communications said in a media statement that it was deeply concerned by

developments at the SABC after it was reported that the broadcaster had dismissed eight of its journalists¹. Like those who engage in complex mental pursuits that shape policies, politics and the culture of their society, the role of SABC journalists, like all professional news workers, is ambiguous. However, this has not stopped society from conferring a high value on the SABC, PSB, freedom of the media, and the craft of journalism broadly.

The challenge of commercialisation, buoyed by the multichannel environment, makes it difficult to differentiate between PSB practice and the practice of commercial news channels. This makes it necessary for the SABC to aspire towards a very different PSB from the one currently prevailing. Building on existing scholarship on the role of PSB and its justification in the South African context and in the converging multimedia environment, it is worth of scholarship to examine how the SABC is responding to the challenges it faces, or at the very least to empirically identify the factors that constrain the broadcasters' ability to accomplish its statutory PSB mandate.

The independence of all media and journalists in South Africa is protected by law. However, journalism at SABC has been constrained by numerous internal and external impacts. Indeed, within the context of South Africa, the profession is legally free from interference. However, claims abound, indicating that the freedom of journalists at the SABC operates within prescribed limits². Editorial interference accounts for much of the gripe at the SABC, but a significant body of journalism scholarship highlights severe constraints emanating from factors such as institutional routines and other functional ends associated with news making, the SABC included (Orgeret, 2006; Arndt, 2007; Schultz, 2007; Willig, 2013; Bronstein & Katzew, 2018; Thomsen, 2018, and others). Journalists are expected to gather accounts of events and interview sources that happen to occupy their field of vision and, without fail, ensure that facts are accurate, contextual, and impartial, all under the pressure of deadlines. From a myriad of available first-hand stories and sources of news, they must select what is considered

¹ <https://www.gov.za/speeches/committee-deeply-concerned-developments-sabc-20-jul-2016-0000>

² [South Africa: SABC Fires Journalists for Protesting Censorship | Freedom House https://freedomhouse.org/article/south-africa-sabc-fires-journalists-protesting-censorship#:~:text=South%20Africa%3A%20SABC%20Fires%20Journalists%20for%20Protesting%20Censorship,management%20decision%20not%20to%20report%20on%20violent%20protests](https://freedomhouse.org/article/south-africa-sabc-fires-journalists-protesting-censorship#:~:text=South%20Africa%3A%20SABC%20Fires%20Journalists%20for%20Protesting%20Censorship,management%20decision%20not%20to%20report%20on%20violent%20protests)

newsworthy, i.e., what is interesting enough to warrant reporting. There are fewer studies on the SABC looking at these ‘structuring’ features of news making. Often, the choice is between competing ‘truth claims’. Their routine ways of news gathering appear sufficiently ‘unbiased’, even if the final news product displays an unfair tendency to believe that some people, ideas, and opinions are better than others. Often, mainstream news gravitates in favour of ‘official’ news and ‘prominent’ sources and conflict (Becker, 1967; Roshco, 1975; Tuchman, 1972; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). In this, the SABC and its news workers are implicated. However, there are fewer studies focusing on SABC that highlight this challenge.

Relatively speaking, the area of the SABC that is relatively well researched relates particularly to the political economy of PSB journalism (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989; Fourie, 2013; Wasserman, 2020, and others). This is largely because political and economic issues, whether presented as questions on regulations or the wider conversations on nation-building, democracy, or governance, have been central to the evolution of broadcasting and PSB, particularly in South Africa (Fourie, 2000, 2004, 2013; Banda 2015, Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989 – 2005; Duncan, 1994 – 2003; and others). Several studies have comprehensively described the range of institutional and regulatory arrangements in the South African broadcasting environment that are aimed at ensuring that the SABC, as a statutory PSB, serves the public good and considers the challenges of development, which are often government led (Duncan, *ibid*; Banda, *ibid*). There is no shortage of scholarly works that discuss the interface between government who are also the regulator, and PSB; neither is there a shortage of literature on the broader issues of nation-building and development. Scholars such as Duncan (*ibid*); Ruth Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, Kenyan (*ibid*); Fourie (*ibid*); Banda (*ibid*); and others who have long examined the SABC and PSB broadly have presented clear accounts of formal and informal challenges associated with issues such as regulation and reform, the PSB remit, organisational and structural factors, as well as developments inside the SABC following the end of apartheid and the period thereafter, and called for an urgent rethink of the path the broadcasting sector is taking (Louw, 1995; Duncan 2000, 2008; Tleane/Duncan 2003; Ruth Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, Kenyan, *ibid*; Arndt, 2007). For example, Duncan (*ibid*) outlined eloquently developments in the period that ushered a new democratically elected Board of management in 1993 and the subsequent transformation of the newsroom structure

when the SABC could no longer be allowed to continue operating like the apartheid government's mouthpiece (Duncan, 2000 - 2003). The role of the SABC in respect of its programming on topics such as watchdog journalism, social cohesion, social transformation, and the politics of nation-building has been ventilated extensively in a range of scholarship (Steenveld/Strelitz 1998; Teer-Tomaselli 1995), with a greater focus on the SABC news text. Tomaselli 1998; Tleane/Duncan 2003; Fourie 2004; Rumney 2008, and others have thoroughly discussed the issue of funding, especially its impact on the independence of SABC programming. In Mpofu (2000), it is argued that the issue of funding sources is secondary to the primary concerns relating to the ethics of programming when it comes to the realisation of the public service agenda (Mpofu 2000 as cited in Arndt 2007). However, in all these studies, news workers themselves rarely get the time or space for such reflection while at work. In fact, there exists a research gap regarding valuable knowledge about journalists themselves, particularly how invisible and other institutionally embedded structures inside newsrooms shape their beliefs and how, in turn, those beliefs influence journalism practices and consequently impact the daily functioning of the SABC. It was my assumption therefore that there was room in the scholarship of the SABC to generate a deeper understanding about news workers in their everyday work setting.

Undoubtedly, there are those studies on SABC that have focused on other aspects relating to the internal operations of the organisation. Abboo (2008), among others have successfully examined the factors that make it possible for institutional controls to be undermined, while the research by Maphetshana (2016) considered Corporate Governance Compliance SABC and highlighted the challenges associated with leadership and management. These works identified failure to implement effective corporate governance measures due to inept management leadership, poor organisational structure and, sometimes, due to issues such as government interference in the operational affairs of the organisation (Maphetshana, *ibid*). In short, internal institutional dynamics and external factors have had the propensity to negatively impact the PSB outcomes of the SABC.

The pioneering research by Tomaselli, K., & Tomaselli, R. (1989), titled 'Between Policy and Practice at the SABC, 1970-1981', assessed the ideological significance of the selection and presentation of content at the SABC. The study focused on the

gatekeeping processes, consensual discourse, and associated signifying practices that structure news making at the SABC and considered the extent to which such practices affect the construction of content and programming at the broadcaster. On a more general level, this study offers significant empirical data on the workings of the SABC and supports widely held inferences in several other scholarships concerning political threats to the independence of the SABC. It reveals the ‘determined effort of the SABC to maintain a façade of neutrality’ in order ‘to avoid dealing with contentious issues’ (p., 86). Orgeret (2008) discusses how the SABC has dealt with the contentious issue of nation-building in South Africa. Orgeret (*ibid*) addresses the variety of ways through which the goal of nation-building and the relationship between government and the SABC are reflected in the broadcaster’s news bulletins, specifically its newscasts on national TV. Orgeret analyses the changing discourses of nationhood and democracy in South Africa while emphasising the issue of media control, which she concludes was achieved post-apartheid before the end of 2004. Unlike my study, this work is confined to the discourse analysis of nation building as reflected in the SABC news. This study is nonetheless important to my work in that it presents a body of scholarship on the institutional performance of the SABC regarding its PSB mandate, and especially the broadcaster’s attitude towards democratic citizenship in contemporary South Africa. Orgeret’s rich findings provide a necessary context to my study through which one can infer on the existing institutional culture at the SABC at the time of her research (1994 - 2004). My study adds to this body of work by addressing more contemporary internal developments; current norms that are embedded inside the organisation; the ‘taken for granted’ practices of SABC journalists as they go about doing their work; and the focus on the role played by their ideological frame or dispositions in the construction of news.

Although not directly linked to the SABC, there are other works that relate to my study, specifically, professionalism in the context of journalism in South Africa. For example, the article by Rodny-Gumede (2015) addresses the various conceptualisations of professionalism in South African journalism. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with journalists, the research explored whether there were any deviations in practice from central insights shared liberal theories of the news media in relation to how media workers in South African understand their own professional values and their own role in society. The findings revealed that journalists did not frame their role in terms of liberal notions of ‘neither lapdogs nor exclusively watchdogs’ but rather in terms of

‘competing imperatives, in which concerns for the audience and a broader articulation of the public interest take precedent over more liberal conceptualisations of the role of journalism in democracy’ (Rodny-Gumede, *ibid.*, p. 67). My study builds on this impressive but scant and, in some cases, outdated body of work with a specific focus on SABC journalists in the context of PSB practice and conceptualisation.

1.2.1 Research Gaps

I discuss recommendations for future research in my concluding chapter 12.5; but suffice to highlight here some of the notable limits of the study, chief among these being the fact that there are fewer studies that focus on the internal processes and practices inside the SABC newsrooms. Although there are important works, for example, Arndt (2007 – 2018 - 2019), Oosthuizen (2020), and others, that have made significant contributions to the academic debate by focusing on the dynamics inside the SABC, particularly on the culture of journalism practice in the SABC newsrooms, these works are infrequent.

There is a body of literature on news organisation, news construction and editorial independence at the SABC. For example, Bronstein, Katzew (2018) have produced very important work which focuses on the variety of ways that show how institutional controls designed to protect the autonomy and independence of the SABC were undermined by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) during the period 2011 to 2017. The downside is the article is that it is located in the era when the ANC had an overwhelming majority in local government and controlled nearly all the country’s metros. This is no longer the case. By 2021, the ANC had dipped below the 50% mark with 46% of the local government vote, and coalition alliances were set to change South Africa’s political landscape. Much has changed at the SABC since the period prior to 2017, when COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng headed the broadcaster and when the power of external factors over news organisations and journalists was overrated. The ‘agency’ of journalists is acknowledged, and the actions of the group of SABC journalists known as the SABC8 are among the most contemporary examples referenced in this study. In this way, the study is important, not least because it is not grounded in the past. Rather, my study objectives seek to bring out the most contemporary in terms institutional culture at the SABC, particularly the focus on the prevailing relationship between the embedded institutional norms and the reflexive moments of journalists inside the

SABC; more specifically, the ways journalists and their editors project themselves professionally with respect to their values. The study proceeds from the premise that the meta-discourses of journalists concerning professional values reveal much about their choices and practices.

There is a key challenge to this study, and this relates to the fact that some of the processes, interactions, and discussions between journalists' colleagues and with their editors or sources inside the news organisation often take place outside the newsroom, in private settings that are normally inaccessible to researchers. In addition, journalistic interactions inside newsrooms are in themselves very complex, often involving several platforms at the same time, or sometimes conversations between journalists happen in the same physical newsroom space at the same time. Thus, one can be trying to understand an interaction in the physical space, when in fact much of the conversation has already taken place in private, online via email or by telephone. All these interactions are important to observe and need to be captured so as to make sense of how they interface with 'structure'. The only closer way to do this was to supplement the observation of the newsroom with qualitative interviews, analysis of documents relevant to the SABC, and the work and approaches of others.

This work acknowledges the fluidity between the dichotomies of structure and agency. The study offers the case of the SABC8 among the conceptual frameworks. At the time of the study, Hlaudi Motsoeneng, employing his hierarchical authority as the chief operating officer of the SABC, directed reporters to avoid showing footage of violence during protests. However, what he got was open rejection in the newsrooms, including resistance from some of the senior management staff, and a massively publicised civil society protest in support of the dissenting journalists. Arndt (2018) draws insightful conclusions about the SABC, including the argument that 'the SABC's organisational culture is not homogeneous, and journalists within the same environment' sometimes 'behave in divergent ways, proving that there is a considerable space for agency and resistance towards politicisation' (Arndt, *ibid*, p. 349 as cited in Abbo 2008), while Ngwenya (2015), in his study titled 'SABC and its crises of independence', makes the point that the everyday work experiences of SABC journalists impact the way they perceive their own professional roles, at times in compliance with existing structures

that potentially prevent or hinder the execution of the performance goals of the individual (*ibid*).

1.3 Contributions to Current Studies

When I began my research journey, my initial focus was on how the SABC mediates pluralist politics from the point of view of the normative public sphere, with the identification of professional norms and values as the secondary objective. Given the broadcaster's statutory role in public service broadcasting, I assumed that there would be a significant difference between the SABC news bulletins and those of its competitors. Watching the news broadcasts live and switching between competing local national news channels, it was easily discernible that all South African national broadcasters tended to cover the same stories and interview the same actors in coverage, albeit in varying ways. As my fieldwork unfolded, I revised my research objective from solely considering the news bulletins to exploring the factors that impacted its construction. The new approach offered the promise for distinct findings while simultaneously adding to the body work that has focussed on the scholarship SABC newsrooms. For my study, although I conduct a content analysis of sampled news bulletins, this is done as an entry point to the revised larger objective of my work, which is exploring the culture that impacts editorial decision-making and, by extension, news making inside the newsroom. As already mentioned, there are scholarly works that have conducted content analysis of SABC news bulletins, but in opting for newsroom ethnography, I am able to make informed inferences on the bulletins based on my understanding of the culture that produces it and through the lens of the journalists who produce the news. With this approach, my work is well-positioned to explore the broader newsroom culture at the SABC in terms of strategic power, editorial management hierarchy, and examine professional values as understood by the journalists in the same newsroom who each embody different forms of capital.

My work joins the emerging body in newsroom studies and ethnographic field work, which places less of a focus on 'strategic power' (e.g., Oosthuizen 2020), and resituates attention on practice above structure. I am cognizant of the changes that are currently underway related to technology convergence, digital migration, and associated practices. The thesis work by Oosthuizen (*ibid*) is specifically acknowledged. This research examines the changes in the professional identity of SABC journalists

following the introduction of online journalism practices at the broadcaster. Oosthuizen (*ibid*) concludes that the sampled ‘SABC journalists have always understood their identities and values in opposition to those of corporate SABC leadership’ (*ibid*, p. 2), noting that even the journalists, at times permitted editors to rework their stories, often this was accompanied by some form of struggle. ‘It was a strategic compromise, since they understood the greater balance of their work to serve the public’ (*ibid*, p. 2). Not only is Oosthuizen’s work contemporary, but it is also invaluable for the study of journalistic attitudes towards how editors select news stories. This is a contentious issue at the SABC newsroom, and falls within the specific period 2016 - 2021, which is the period studied for my ethnographic account and through which I highlight some of the newsroom processes and practices that ‘structure’ how news is selected, produced into bulletins, and ultimately broadcast to generate a particular version of reality. This period is interesting because it is also a moment in time when the SABC newsroom is characterised by widely media-reported turmoil and editorial dissonance. This work highlights the fact that not all journalists in the newsroom are entirely satisfied with the end news product. At the SABC, disagreements about the selection of news culminated in a series of newsroom dissonances. The journalists that were not comfortable to accommodate themselves to what would have been the daily routine of news work were ‘maligned’ by their managing executives; and others, and, arguably, for lack of power to reorganise news work according to their priorities, decided to take their disagreements to the country’s courts of law and to statutory bodies of parliament. For the benefit of the reader, this thesis includes a brief chronicle of events leading to the incident and reveals the practices and structural conditions that prepared the ground for the emergence of this dissonance in the SABC newsroom. This study is unique partly because it relies on primary sources, thereby complementing those studies focusing on the SABC and other PSBs which have used secondary sources.

1.4 Objections and Research Questions

Three primary questions anchor this study as follows:

1. Which news-making processes, practices, norms, and values are identifiable at the SABC?
2. In what ways do institutional management and policy issues influence news making at the SABC?
3. How does the SABC mediate news?

To respond to the above key questions, the study engages with the following secondary questions:

1. Which shared professional journalism norms and values influence the mediation of news at the SABC and how?
2. What are the discernible issues of hierarchy and power within the SABC newsrooms?
3. How did the SABC mediate pluralists' politics in its news coverage of the 2016 local government elections from the point of view of the normative public sphere?
4. How did the SABC mediate the land restitution issue?

1.5 Rationale

Because of my positionality with SABC as a former newsroom practitioner at the broadcaster, this thesis contrasts with other scholarships on the SABC that do not benefit from the ‘insider perspective’. I worked as a news, current affairs, and policy researcher at the SABC for nearly 8 years beginning in 2006. I was located at the SABC news input hub, the Newsnet Research Unit. The mandate of the unit was to support the SABC newsrooms with research content and to contribute to content production, planning for coverage of key events such as elections and other major broadcasts. When I transitioned from my role at the SABC in 2014, I had risen to the position of Planning Editor: News, Current Affairs and Policy Analysis within the Newsnet Division of the SABC News and Current Affairs Division. The fact that I worked before at the SABC as a senior researcher, specialist researcher and later as the planning editor of news, current affairs and policy analysis made my fieldwork less challenging than if I had been new to the SABC and the journalism profession. I believe it is because of the same reason that the staff at the SABC were more open to me than if I had been considered merely as an academic or outsider.

As already alluded, my motivation for conducting this research includes the fact that there are fewer studies that reconstruct the newsroom culture of the SABC through the eyes of its community of news workers. Mostly, the SABC has been studied in terms of either from a political economy or institutionalist point of view (Arndt, 2007). Less studied are the ‘strategic’ imperatives that impact the news decision-making process daily. Most scholarships do not factor the reality that is experienced by its news workers, who are subject to severe constraints of institutional routines, pressure of deadlines, professional norms, values, and other aspects that impact how news is

mediated and the way journalists generally practice their profession. Indeed, every day, newsrooms process a myriad of available first-hand stories and sources of news, and journalists and their editors must select what is considered newsworthy, i.e., what is interesting enough to warrant reporting. However, to date, it has been my experience that news workers themselves rarely have the occasion to reflect on their everyday work, except for the occasional studies that have conducted interviews with SABC journalists and news managers (Arndt, 2007, Orgeret, 2008, and a few others). My study is opportune given its primary motive to contribute an empirical understanding of newsroom culture at the SABC. It comes at a time when the broadcaster has been undergoing negative publicity, particularly in the print media and in ‘grey’ literature, owing to the series of much-publicised events involving editorial dissonance at the SABC newsrooms. I therefore seek to shed light on some of the factors that potentially have contributed to news making at the broadcaster. I am also driven by a desire to understand, particularly how the SABC newsrooms have continued, daily, timely, and without failing, to cover a diverse range of unexpected, complex, and sometimes bizarre events, despite all the factors that often constrain journalists in their everyday work.

This work benefits from existing scholarship, some from the local environment and others from the global north; particularly the strand of research in PSB that is related to institutional studies; and studies focusing on understanding the field of media, practices and norms that are embedded inside media organisations, including the perceptions of journalists; how they view their professional roles and the social world in which they generate the news (Harcup, 2009; Entman, et al, 2009; Ward, S. J. 2019; Rodny-Gumede, 2014; Thomsen, 2013; Geertz, 1973; Peterson, 2003; Schultz, 2007; Willig, 2013). I employ normative arguments advanced in these works for the purpose of understanding the range of factors that impact news making generally in different settings and at the SABC, particularly to make concrete claims regarding the identifiable practices and perceptions of journalists and news output.

1.6 Methodological Issues

Although this work is essentially a qualitative study, I have adopted a multi-method approach to this newsroom ethnography of the SABC. The ethnographic fieldwork adopts various approaches, which include the case study approach; observation of the newsroom and editorial meetings; collecting other types of data in the field, such as

carrying out semi-structured interviews that focus on the opinions and beliefs of news workers about their everyday work; and the analysis of related documents, such as but not limited to the Editorial Code of Conduct of the SABC, the report on the SABC Board Commission Enquiry, Judicial Commission on State Capture, ICASA documents, and other literature on the SABC, including ‘grey’ literature from media and freedom of expression without governmental bodies.

In essence, the ethnographic fieldwork in this study was longitudinal, encompassing periodic engagements over an extended period of five years to provide situated knowledge of the SABC newsroom, culture, and views of SABC journalists concerning their everyday work. My fieldwork which began in 2016 was disrupted in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the government instituted strict regulations and restrictions on movement and public gatherings. This meant I could no longer attend any of the editorial and production meetings on site. Fortunately, at that point, I had already collected considerable amounts of data, sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions. Although there was no longer the need for direct interface with the research subjects, additional types of data were collected during fieldwork which ended in 2022, and this was used to facilitate a deeper understanding of what journalists and news managers at the SABC actually do and to provide context.

Pierre Bourdieu’s analytical framework of the ‘journalistic field’, ‘doxa’, ‘news habitus’ and ‘newsroom capital’, provides a useful approach or research template to theorise and empirically investigate context. The framework accounts for the ‘invisible’ structures in the daily news work that guide journalism practice (Willig, 2013) and shows how the ‘context’ can be explored utilising the reflexive sociology framework (*ibid*). ‘Invisible structures’ present a long-standing challenge in ethnography. For instance, scholars often note the disjuncture between what journalists sometimes say they do or do not do (Cottle, 2007; Willig, 2013; Thomsen, 2013; Oosthuizen, 2020), but on closer reflection, ‘what journalists say they do could very well differ from what they actually do’ (Thomsen, 2023), while at times journalists do what they do as part of the ‘greater balance of their work to serve the public’ (Oosthuizen, *ibid*, p. 2).

As already mentioned, one of the objectives of this work is to explore how news is mediated in the SABC news texts by carrying out a content analysis of sampled news

bulletins. This study draws on conceptual debates concerning PSB that is tied to the public sphere theory, and analyses SABC prime news bulletins to determine the extent to which the PSB mandate was fulfilled.

1.7 The Chosen Cases

This thesis constitutes two cases, case studies 1 and 2. Both cases are by no means exhaustive accounts, neither of my time at the SABC newsrooms nor what the SABC news bulletins reveal; but rather one of many possible narratives that are possible. There are perhaps other even more insightful and intriguing than mine yet to be written on the same research focus. Both case studies lean more towards the exploratory and descriptive approach; and there is no attempt aimed at explanatory research, i.e., to establish why certain things happen. Yin (*ibid*) proposed the exploratory approach for research is primarily concerned with “what” questions, and that such study is often considered in circumstances when the data collection process is challenging in some way, evolving or the research questions have not been studied in depth previously; while a study that is concerned with the background information and accurate description of a case in question fits the category of descriptive case study (Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2016). This study embodies elements of the explanatory approach in that data replication and the accuracy of the collected data are not the criteria, and there is no intention in the design of the research to come up with a definite conclusion; nor any intention or claim to provide new details that have not been well explained previously in a proper way. Rather the approach is deliberately flexible in order to enable understanding. Thus, in line with Yin, 1994; Du Plooy-Cilliers, et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2016), case studies adopted for this work are generally aimed towards description, and exploration and not explanation, rather than immediate cause and effect. For instance, the information from interviews with the SABC journalists and editors, and from the news bulletins that were sampled for content analysis explored, together with materials such as the editorial guidelines and other SABC documents, while operating procedures, daily institutional news making routines, embedded norms in the newsroom, etc., are described as observed during the fieldwork. All information that is collected is explored and described to add richness to theoretical discussions, and to the presentation of the collected data. Thus, in a nutshell, both case studies in this work explore issues in the data; while the presentation of the conclusions drawn from the explored data entails describing or defining generally in a manner that enriches the

discussions in this work, and ultimately to address the main research objectives of this work.

1.7.1 Case Study One

Case study 1 is an ethnographic study of the SABC newsroom. It examines the culture of practice, particularly the identifiable, embedded routines and processes of everyday news work at the SABC, including the ingrained beliefs and perceptions of the actors inside the SABC newsrooms. In short, Case study 2 constitutes my fieldwork, which offers an ‘account’ of the experience inside the SABC newsroom, what the journalists and news managers inside the SABC tell us concerning their general culture. In Marcus and Fisher as cited in Moore 1987, ethnography is defined in terms of a process whereby the researcher meticulously observes, participates, and records the everyday experiences of others. Most ethnographic studies of news making practices and processes almost inevitably rely on some form of observation of the internal workings of the news organisation, and because of it is often difficult to gain the necessary access it is understandable that the literature on such studies is limited. Observation is central to this work and constitutes the main plank of methods used in this study.

The observation must have a definite aims and objectives that are clearly defined before the start of the observation. This is necessary because without a proper focus, observation can be tedious and unproductive. According to Emerson, et al, (2001), observation is in essence a systematic method which involves a fair amount of planning. The situation or location of observation, the duration of the observation periods, the intervals between them, and various techniques, e.g., coding protocols for use during observation, etc., all must be carefully planned. In short, observation is specific and directed those elements of the total situation which are relevant to the purpose of the study. Put differently, observation must focus on ‘definite’ things or aspects which relate to the main objectives of the study. Such is important to ensure focus, time management, and effort. Below is an outline in detail of the type of observation method that was employed in this study.

1.7.2 Case Study Two

Case study 2 operates as the entry point to the main research question, which considers what the SABC news texts tell us about the mediation of news at the broadcaster from the point of view of the public sphere. To this end, the case analysed how the SABC

mediated pluralist politics by exploring the broadcaster's prime TV news coverage of the 2016 South Africa local government election campaign. Specifically, the case examined the extent to which the SABC achieved its PSB mandate.

Further, case study 2 discusses the identifiable dominant shared news value in the Current Affairs coverage of the issue of 'land restitution', and specifically focuses on the SABC news' choice of 'actors in coverage'. The section discusses the SABCs facilitation of the diverse views on land restitution 'from below', or lack thereof.

1.8 Thesis Overview

The thesis is divided into five sections and ten chapters as follows:

Section One (1) has two Chapters, one (1) and two (2).

Chapter One is the introduction the study. It provides the aim and research problem, questions, and maps out the study.

Chapter Two offers the context of PSB and debates on the SABC, its evolution from apartheid and its transformation post-apartheid. It locates these within larger global debates.

Section Two (2) presents the conceptual and theoretical framework. It is presented in two chapters: **Chapter three (3) and Chapter four (4)**.

Chapter three (3) is the conceptual framework. It highlights some of the expectations from this study based on existing studies on topics related to institutional culture, i.e., norms, journalism practices, values and other functional ends associated with news making at the SABC. It discusses how these ideas relate to this work.

Chapter four (4) builds on the conceptual framework by presenting the study's theoretical framework. It introduces and describes the key theories that are used to guide the research objectives of this work and methodology. It reviews the literature on PSB from the normative public sphere point of view. It offers both its historical context and theoretical conceptualisation. Furthermore, it presents some of the arguments that support the convergence and departure in the theoretical category of the public sphere and PSB. It also presents Bourdieu's field theory and related concepts that help sustain its most important realisations. In particular, the section highlights how field theory can be operationalised to elicit further understanding of what happens inside media

institutions. It discusses ways of mapping the various actors inside institutions, their dispositions and relational proximity to power.

Section Three (3) presents the methodology and research design. It comprises two chapters, Chapter five (5) and Chapter six (6).

Chapter five (5) presents the issues concerning how the field was accessed and issues of positionality. It discusses the rationale for the set of procedures, methods, and tools that have been chosen to guide this research.

Chapter six (6) discusses the methodology and research design of this work. The chapter presents the research type(s) that are used in this work and explains how and why they were selected. It explains the relevance and choice of the methods used to collect data in this work and discusses the data analysis and interpretation techniques.

Section four (4) presents the two case studies conducted in this work. It is divided into five chapters. Data and analysis from Case study one (1) are covered in Chapter Seven (7), Chapter Eight (8), and Chapter Nine (9).

Chapter Seven (7) presents the results of the ethnographic work at the SABC newsrooms (**Case study One**). It presents the data and analysis of the participant observation of the newsroom, interviews, and data from relevant documents.

Chapter Eight (8) operationalises Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus and how it applies in context at the SABC newsrooms. It discusses the processes, dispositions, shared professional journalism norms and values that influence the mediation of news at the SABC and the relationality that each actor who is armed with symbolic capital brings to the newsrooms.

Chapter Nine (9) uses Bourdieu's field concepts as a template for discussing some of the codes of practice in SABC newsrooms.

Section five (5) covers Case study two (2) and is divided into two parts, Chapter Ten (10), Chapter Eleven (11), and lastly Chapter Twelve (12).

Chapter Ten (10) presents the data and analysis from **Case Study Two (2)**, which examined how the SABC news coverage mediated the 2016 South Africa local

government election campaign. It answers the following question: To what extent did the 6.30 pm SABC prime-time news bulletins mediate pluralist politics during the 2016 local government election campaign from the perspective of PSB that is linked to the normative public sphere concept?

Chapter Eleven (11) addresses the shared professional journalism norms and values that are identifiable in the mediation of SABC current affairs broadcasts. Routine practices relating to the coverage of the land issue are discussed.

Chapter Twelve (12) presents a reflection of the study and highlights some of the future directions for newsroom research and studies on the SABC.

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the research objectives of this work. In summary, this is an ethnographic study which sets out to explore newsroom culture and journalistic practices at the SABC newsrooms. It incorporates theoretical underpinnings from a variety of fields and approaches. In essence, the study adopts a multi-method approach to arrive at a more encompassing view of what happens at the SABC newsroom and transcends the classical boundaries of institutional culture studies by delving into the related areas of media studies and reflexive sociology. The two key critical theories employed in this thesis are the theory of the public sphere as theorised by Jürgen Habermas and the theory of the ‘field’ by Pierre Bourdieu (see Section two of this thesis, which discusses the conceptual and theoretical framework of this work). The following chapter covers the contextual framework of this study.

Chapter Two

Context

2.0 Introduction

Although less researched, the subject of the ‘newsroom culture’ of the SABC, especially the journalistic practices at broadcaster’s newsrooms, has become a noteworthy issue in public discourse within South Africa. Often, discussion has focused on the construction of news, particularly with respect to ‘editorial independence’. While the value of ‘independence’ has hardly been subject to debate, the actual interpretations of what the term entails, what informs it, and how it is expressed through embedded

institutional norms and journalism practice inside the SABC have been subject to immense conversations, study, and fragmented understandings. The central task of this background chapter is to outline the origins of the SABC, albeit in brief, and to offer the context of the analysis of the broadcaster's 'newsroom culture' that is aimed at this thesis.

2.1 Historical Overview

The SABC was initially established in 1936 as a state-owned broadcaster by the then government of South Africa. At first, radio services offered in English and Afrikaans and eventually in the African languages of Sesotho, Setswana, isiXhosa, isiZulu, (Hadland, 2003). The first television service of the SABC was introduced in January 1976 (*ibid*). During the entire period of apartheid, the SABC operated as a broadcaster that largely served primarily the interests of the government in power at the time, and generally, its programming was targeted at the minority 'white' community. By the end of apartheid in 1994, the SABC became a site of intense negotiations, and following wide-ranging debates, advocacy, and public consultations, it was reconstituted as an independent public service broadcaster, while broadcasting was entrusted to an Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which started operating in 1994 (Horwitz, 2001).

The historical evolution of the SABC is entwined with politics in South Africa. Several scholars have written on the events following the parliamentary election that ushered in the Nationalist Party (NP) on 26 May 1948, particularly the extent to which the NP victory ushered a new phase in the history of broadcasting in South Africa – both radio and television (see Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994; Fourie, 2010). A collection of narratives contained in the book titled 'Media studies: Media history, media and society' is among the range of useful literature that identifies the most important events relating to the development of South African media. The book – a compendium of works by a range of media scholars – traces the origins and development of the SABC and the political economy issues that have helped shape the South African media environment broadly, including the role played by regulation in the development of both the press and broadcasting (Fourie, 2010). In a nutshell, the new government viewed the SABC as a tool to control society and was expected to prioritise the interests of the state over those of individuals. It was a societal arrangement that meant that

individuals could only achieve personal goals by aligning with or functioning under the state. The role of SABC was therefore limited to that of focusing the people on the agenda of the state, and to achieve this goal, a range of legislation and regulations were instituted that proscribed any publishing of content that was considered a threat to established authority. Coverage of political events, protests, banned organisations and people was prohibited. The public had no choice but to rely on official government sources and communiques for news on political developments and events. Reporters and editors were prosecuted for violating emergency laws, while foreign journalists who were considered hostile to the status quo were either refused entry permits or expelled if already in the country (Teer-Tomaselli K. G., 1994); and (Teer-Tomaselli R. , 1995). However, perhaps the most critical watershed in the history of the SABC is the intensive investigation in 1981 by the Steyn Commission into all forms of South African media. Although the resulting report was widely criticised for panting the ideological whims of the government, it nonetheless identified key recommendations (Wigston, in Fourie, 2010) – the top four arising from broadcasting as follows:

- Government control of the SABC needed to be relaxed to ensure the autonomy and impartiality of the broadcaster.
- The SABC Board should be open to all interest groups and not limited to white members only, while the Board would no longer be answerable to any minister but rather to the head of state.
- The Department of National Education should work in close collaboration with the SABC to realise the full potential of broadcasting in education; and
- That the creation of independent radio within South Africa should be allowed (Wigston, in Fourie, *ibid*, p.16).

The last recommendation above was not received favourably by government, as independent broadcasting was considered detrimental to the national interest (*ibid*). However, things took a head in 1989, after the NP leader Peiter Willem (P.W.) Botha, considered a hard liner, suffered a stroke. The event made way for Botha's party colleague, Fredrick Willem (F.W.) De Klerk, who introduced several reforms. In this context, the Viljoen Commission was launched in 1991 with the mandate to consider the future of broadcasting in South Africa (*ibid*). Wigston outlines the key proposals

that were released in 1993 by the commission and these include an Independent Broadcasting Authority to regulate broadcasting, fewer restrictions for commercial broadcasting compared to public service broadcasting, and finally transformation of the SABC into PSB (Wigston, *ibid*).

With the sea of political changes that ensued thereafter, the SABC is arguably no longer merely an instrument of the state. The broadcasting system has undergone significant changes, notably the introduction in January 1994 of an independent regulator, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). This was among the proposals contained in the 1991 Viljoen Commission and later in the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act (No. 153) of 1993. Among the several items proscribed in the Act was the provision for distinct categories of public interest broadcasting activities and to institute a Charter for the South African Broadcasting Corporation Ltd for that purpose (IBA, 1993). As an entity, the SABC was, incorporated as a public company in terms of the Company Act - owned by the country's citizens, answerable directly to the South African parliament. According to the IBA, the Minister of Communications (now Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies), representing the National Government, is required by law to ensure that the SABC observes the Broadcasting Act and Charter of Incorporation, which provide the framework for the protection and right to use broadcasting resources (Tomaselli, 1989). The national parliament is expected to monitor and enforce both the Broadcasting Act and Charter (Independent Broadcasting Authority Act, no. 153, 1993; Broadcasting Act, no. 4, 1999). In short, the regulatory framework casts the SABC as a critical pillar of support for democratic decision-making (*ibid*). To this day, the SABC Board, in terms of the Broadcasting Act, is specifically instructed to protect the freedom of expression of the SABC and its journalistic, creative, and programming independence (Chapter IV (5a) Broadcasting Act 1999). In terms of Chapter IV (5a) of the Act, the Board must also outline editorial policies for the SABC, and this must be achieved through public consultations and regular appraisal. However, the challenge has often been the application in practice of the provisions of the Act and Charter, which is not always undertaken properly, resulting in public contention against the SABC (Duncan, 2008).

2.1.1 New Dispensation: Initial Action Themes

Duncan (2001) notes that among the first action items was the election of a new democratically elected Board of management in 1993. The post-apartheid era in South Africa meant that the new Board had to bring about the envisaged transformation of the SABC to pursue notions of equality, inclusion, and redress (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994; Hadland, 2003). Notably, the structure of the new SABC Board had to reflect balance in terms of existing social demographics, and unlike in most postcolonial African countries, the SABC Board enjoyed statutory independence with a mandate to serve not the government but the public (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994; Duncan, 2000; Hadland; 2013; Fourie 2004). Restructuring the broadcaster to align with the new political order in South Africa meant that the SABC had to reconstitute its entire management and programming to align itself with the notions of democratic citizenship (Duncan, 2000). Programming was severely altered to reflect the new dispensation; and several mechanisms were introduced inside the newsroom. Thus, whereas by the end of 1993, most employees were white men and predominantly Afrikaans speaking, a new employment equity policy saw the introduction of 'men' of colour into senior positions. Physical separation between journalists and editorial management was removed to ensure a 'flatter management structure' (*ibid*). The implementation of the latter occurred in 1994 with the approval of staff, unions, management, and the Board (Duncan, 1996; see also SABC Annual Report, 1994, p.27). However, these sweeping changes, particularly in the management of the SABC newsrooms, were accompanied by several critical appraisals. For instance, the mere fact that these agents of change were all 'men' and known high profile African National Congress (ANC) functionaries triggered considerable accusations of political patronage. Among the appointees was **Zwelakhe Sisulu**, son of ANC Deputy President, Walter Sisulu; **Solly Moeketle** who had just returned back in the country after graduating from Carleton University in Canada; and journalist **Gavin Reddy**, a returnee from exile.

Critics have argued that the above appointments were 'a replacement of one set of political masters by another' (Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1994, p. 93). Moreover, since the year 2000, several studies have highlighted the fact that most Board incumbents have had close links with the ANC, and this has further fuelled the perceived lack of independence for the SABC. This perceived ANC patronage of the SABC is not consistent with its mandate of constructing an inclusive society as outlined in the IBA

Act and Broadcasting Charter. There is no doubt that the task of operationalising the provisions of both the IBA Act and Charter has been difficult. As a result, the SABC, once considered as a yardstick of how to move from being a state broadcaster into an ideal PSB, is now subject wide ranging criticism in a range of scholarship which has characterised the broadcaster in terms of two different paradoxes of power, i.e., lap-dog of the state and hyper-commercial broadcasting, both of which, arguably, have been detrimental to the public interest as envisaged in the IBA and as expected of an ideal PSB (Moyo & Chuma, 2010).

2.1.2 SABC Mandate, Obligations and Challenges

As an entity, the new SABC is a public broadcaster with 18 Radio stations and four television platforms. It is owned and controlled by the country's citizens. The Broadcasting Act and Charter of Incorporation provides the framework for the protection and right to use broadcasting resources. A key objective of the SABC, as stated in the Charter, and outlined in the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa ("ICASA") regulations and license conditions is to 'inform, educate and entertain the public of South Africa' (Official SABC Website). The SABC editorial policies enjoin the broadcaster's news and current affairs division to ensure 'a plurality of views and a variety of news, information and analysis from a South African point of view' (SABC Editorial Policy Book, 2020). In sum, the Charter's demands include a range of operational and managerial initiatives, designed to assist the editorial staff with often challenging editorial matters and choices so that unique and worthy – and every so often provocative material can be broadcast while guaranteeing the best ethical and editorial standards (Nicholson, 2006). In terms of the Broadcasting Act, the SABC Board has the responsibility to guard the broadcaster's freedom of expression and its creative, journalistic, and programming independence (ICASA act 2000³). The Board is also expected to outline editorial policies for the SABC, and this must be achieved through public consultations and regular appraisals. In all, the SABC mandate is unambiguous and aligned to the vision of a free and socially transformed country, but several inside and outside critiques, have blamed the broadcaster for acting in variance to its mandate and obligations (Ryan, 2000; Arndt 2007; Qhobosheane, 2018).

³ [Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act 13 of 2000 | South African Government \(www.gov.za\)](http://www.gov.za)

Furthermore, the SABC has faced additional challenges relating to its legal and funding model, which in turn has impacted its editorial independence (Kupe, 2005).

2.2 SABC Audience Reach

As of 2021, the SABC TV platforms were watched by approximately 90% of the total adult TV-viewing population in South Africa (SABC Official Website). The TV network includes the SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 (all free-to-air platforms) and one 24-hour news channel on a pay-tv⁴. Audience figures for the latter are not readily available, but the three free-to-air TV channels combined attract approximately 19 million adult viewers daily. The SABC has the largest network of radio stations - 18 radio stations in total - 15 of which cater for PSB. South Africa has 11 official languages, each of which has a dedicated fully equipped station. There are three cultural service stations: one for the Indian community based in Durban offered in English; a regional community station located in the Eastern Cape Province broadcasting in isiXhosa and English; and a community station in the Northern Cape broadcasting in the!Xu and Khwe languages of the Khoisan people. The SABC's commercial portfolio includes three stations: 5fm, Metro FM and Good Hope FM (SABC, ibid).

By 2020, access to communication services in South Africa stood at an estimated 70% for households owning radios. The figure includes car radio receivers in the approximately 13 million vehicles that were purchased in South Africa during the 2018/19 financial year⁵ (SABC, Annual Report, 25 years of memories, 2019). The SABC, therefore, naturally assumes centre stage in the coverage of national issues such as election reporting relative to any other media entity in South Africa. In summary, the SABC, in line with its statutory mandate, has the capacity to produce between approximately 30 and 40 stories daily in each newsroom (SABC Official Website). In a typical month, an average 27.9 million people watch the SABC's three free-to-air channels⁶.

⁴ South Africa has one other free-to-air TV – eTV established in 1998.

⁵ https://www.SABC.co.za/SABC/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/SABC_AR_2019_.pdf

⁶ Broadcast Research Council (BRC) Television Audience Measurement Survey (TAMS) covering the period April 2018-March 2019

2.2.1 Staff Retention

In 2020, the SABC introduced a new structure which resulted in the reduction of its staff compliment from 3 167 in 2019 to 2 979, while contracted freelancers grew marginally from 1 775 in 2019 to 1 792 in 2020⁷ (Khumalo, 2020). Another retrenchment of staff followed in 2021, during which period the SABC cut its employee numbers by a massive 20%. Management said the exercise was designed to ‘re-establish the financial probity of the organisation, while at the same time fulfilling its PSB mandate’ (Sowetanlive, 2021⁸). In total, 621 employees left the public broadcaster in a move management argued to be necessary for the continued sustainability of the broadcaster and for ensuring its public interest role (*ibid*). A majority of the remaining SABC employees operate from the broadcaster’s main hub in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, while fewer work from the SABC’s regional offices that are spread throughout the nine provinces of the country (SABC, 2021). The broadcaster operates satellite offices in several African countries, most notably in Kenya.

2.3 SABC Departments

At the time of my fieldwork, the newsrooms at the SABC Headquarters in Auckland Park were large open spaces, with workstations for each news worker. Several small rooms enclosed in transparent glass panels surrounded the large spaces. These were occupied by the senior editors and sub-editors, and others by specialist reporters. Several TV monitors were located throughout the newsroom and were switched on at all times. An aura of seriousness characterised all these spaces. Noise levels were bearable despite the relatively large numbers of people in the newsroom at any one time. The staff interacted unhindered but not in an overly intrusive manner.

The radio News and Current Affairs teams were situated in one large area on the 2nd floor in one wing of the building, and the TV news teams were situated on the other

⁷ <https://www.news24.com/fin24/companies/ict/over600-SABC-employees-lose-jobs-in-a-difficult-and-emotionally-charged-restructuring-process-20210330>

⁸ <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2021-03-30-621-employees-leave-SABC-as-retrenchments-are-finalised/>

wing on the same floor. The enclosed offices of news editors were located on the same floors, while the current affairs production executives had their own enclosed offices on the 3rd floor, surrounded by the production staff whom they could see from their offices through large transparent glass windows. There were at least 50 journalists on these floors at a time, including the editorial staff. A wired relay rediffusion network, complete with Radio and TV monitors, distributed signals to every corner of the broadcaster whenever the executive management had cause to address the staff across the institution, or in the event of important announcements and during important research meetings. The packaging of the story often began with the script that was checked and often tweaked by ‘bulletin editors’ before being included in the final newscast. In TV, the final packaging of a story into a bulletin was mostly a negotiation between the reporter, video editors who often recommend which footage to use, and, of course, the daily diary conference meeting, which includes individuals with the institutional authority to exercise editorial rights. The activity and atmosphere in the newsroom changed somewhat as the evening approached, marking the return of the field reporters from the field with their recorded material. At this time, the editing boots were always in full swing, and the tension to produce the main bulletins of the day was evident.

Senior reporters and editors of the SABC gathered daily in the S2 conference room for the line talk to discuss the news diary. The S2 conference room was situated on the second floor of the 12-floor structure in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. It was relatively auspicious, characterised by a large oval meeting table that accommodates up to no less than 30 persons at a time, although less than half that number physically attended the daily editorial meetings. The downside of this room was arguably its lack of windows, although it was equipped with decent air conditioning facilities and had two separate access doors. It was also equipped with adequate teleconferencing facilities that link directly to SABC news hubs across the nine regions in South Africa. All news platforms of the SABC, Radio and Television converged in this room at dedicated time slots for at least one hour at a time and each at least twice daily. Current affairs production teams had a choice to use this teleconferenced facility, although many seemed to prefer the several meeting rooms dotted between the first, second, third and fourth floors.

2.3.1 SABC Organisational Structure

According to information available on the SABC Official Website⁹, the broadcaster comprises several divisions (see Figure 2- 1: SABC Organisational structure, p.28). Its outlined vision is to ‘become the leading, credible voice and face of the nation and the continent’, while its mission is to become ‘high-performing, financially viable, digitised, national public broadcaster that provides compelling informative, educational, and entertaining content via all platforms’ (*ibid*). The News Division and Current Affairs division is among the main strategic operations of the SABC. Among its key goals is to stay up to date with the latest trends in broadcast technology, to anticipate changes and competitively adapt to new developments in the broadcasting arena (SABC Annual Reports, 2022¹⁰). The News Division and Current Affairs division provides a range of news and current affairs programmes for all SABC platforms, which all its radio, television, and digital services. Of the 5 television channels, two are offered on a subscription digital satellite network. The SABC has a bureau across all nine South Africa provinces, in addition to specialist correspondents who are based across the world, including in places such as Brussels, London, United States of America, Kenya, Zimbabwe and other countries. SABC purports to embrace global PSB values such as accountability, diversity, and independence (SABC Editorial Policy Book, 2021¹¹). However, the broadcaster adds that its ‘positioning’ is determined by the context of the SABC, which relates to the fact that South Africa is relatively still an emerging democracy and undergoing social transformation (*ibid*). The Research and Policy Analysis Department is integral to the News and Current Affairs division and plays the role of a news information input hub. It also services other platforms within the News Division and Current Affairs division by ensuring current and detailed news making information.

⁹ <https://www.SABC.co.za/SABC/>

¹⁰ <https://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/annual-reports/>

¹¹ http://web.SABC.co.za/digital/stage/editorialpolicies/EditorialPolicyBook_9July2020

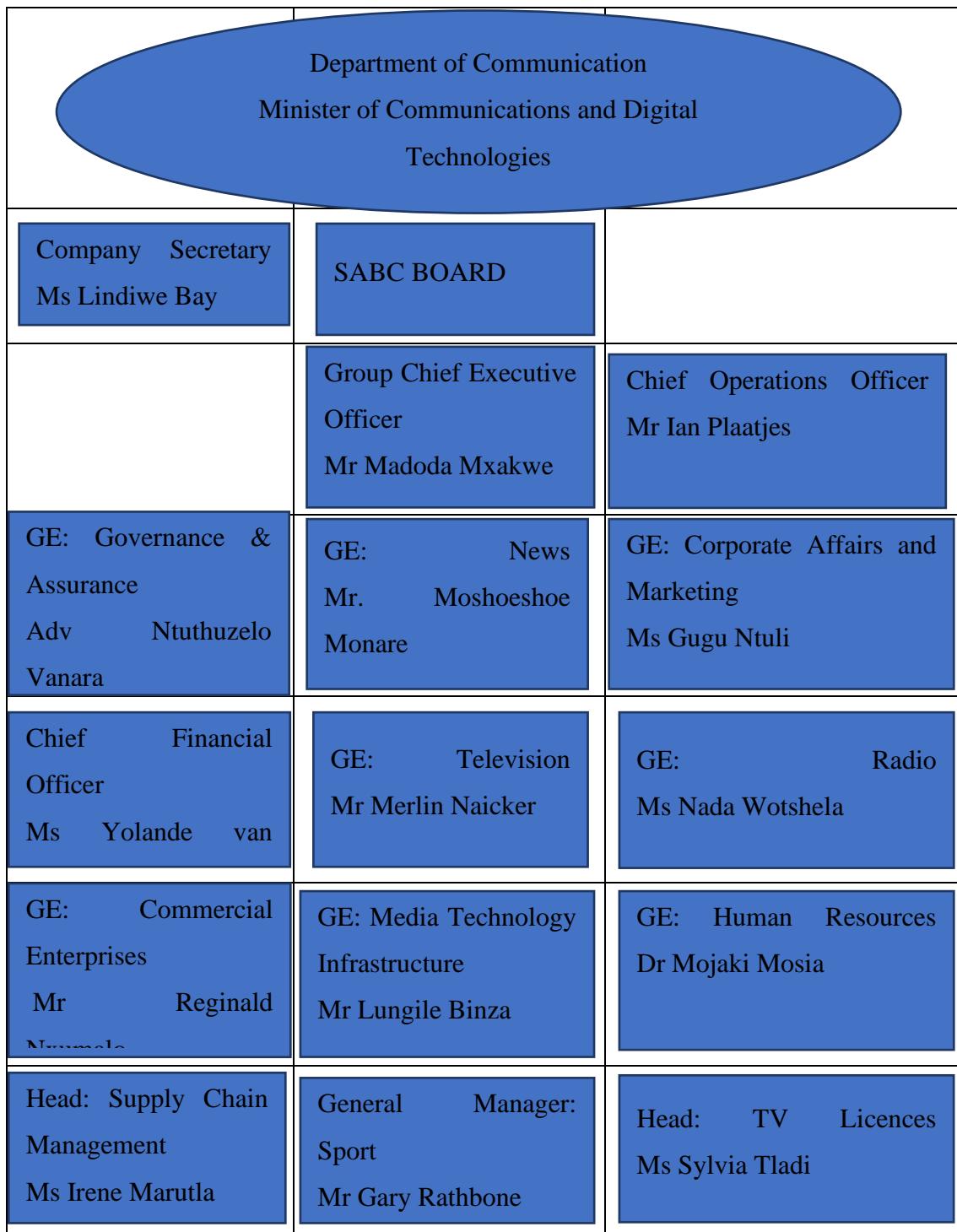


Figure 2- 1: SABC Organisational structure

The author of this thesis reconstructed this figure during field work.

2.4 The SABC Newsroom in Context

2.4.1 Of Gatherers, Processors, and Deliverers

The SABC newsrooms epitomise a typical professionalised news-making machinery. Like all organisations that produce at a mass scale, component parts work together in an almost predictable way, despite the common unexpected turns. Predictability is important for news making. It guarantees a news product on time as scheduled, and news organisations adopt factory-like practices and processes (Berkowitz 1997; Berkowitz, D., & Beach, D. W. 1993) with clearly defined roles. For example, there is a special role for individuals inside whose sole function is to provide input into the newsroom, and these individuals are distinguishable from those responsible for news output, i.e., the news content that ultimately makes up the broadcast bulletins. According to Shoemaker et al. (2001), three main types of persons are involved in the news-making process, i.e., gatherers, processors, and what Peterson (1979) refers to as ‘delivery persons’. In the context of the SABC, the gatherers are the field reporters, part-time news staff employed or commissioned by the SABC, wire services, and research staff whose role is to monitor other media, archive relevant materials, and provide additional News and Current Affairs research when requested. The role of this group of persons is limited to bringing information to the SABC. The gathered information is ultimately used by the second group, here called the ‘processors’, comprising news bulletin editorial staff or, in the case of current affairs productions, current affairs producers and executive producers. The ‘delivery’ is carried out by the programme presenters, news anchors and voice artists. The observation at the SABC confirmed the structuring roles of each of these group functions, albeit not in an absolute manner. For instance, the processors choose, and rework news items brought by the ‘gatherers’ (SABC correspondents). They identify and edit news items directly received from the wires, press releases; or sift through the information that resides with the internal research and archive teams, including information from sources regarding key issues, dates of key events, etc., whereas the presenters and anchors (delivery persons) carry out the output roles which include presenting the already ‘processed’ news to the audiences. This structure is embedded as part of the process of constructing the news at the SABC, and it goes without saying that these functions are performed routinely at an organisational level. Even as they may be subject to asymmetrical power distributions that indirectly affect the selection of what is covered as news or current

affairs, routine practices are deeply embedded institutionally. Changing these routine ways of doing is not easy. Several studies have shown how disrupting the routine often risks undermining professional legitimacy both within the professional community of journalists and among other institutions and publics that identify with them (Tuchman 1978; Ryfe 2006; Berkowitz 1992). For example, journalists tend to embrace routines because they can always assign the consequences to a system and not to individuals, while the routine practice of relying on accredited institutional sources and officials ensures timely and reliable supplies of information (Tuchman *ibid*; Berkowitz *ibid*). Of course, such ways of doing and associated dependence are shown in a range of scholarships to allow official and accredited actors to set the media agenda and, as such, narrow the public sphere and its potential for public opinion formation (Tuchman *ibid*; Berkowitz *ibid*; O’neill & Harcup 2009).

2.4.2 Internal Input News Hubs at the SABC

The SABC has internal units in the form of content hubs that effectively help orient or cue the direction of news at the broadcaster towards collective goals. These internal news hubs and the multiple groups of people who operate inside them work together with the newsroom to ensure that news is delivered in a timely manner, faster and easier and that the content is up to date, relevant and informative. Specifically, these embedded hubs ensure that ‘swift’ decisions on sourcing and story selection can be made and that news judgements relating to content, framing, etc., can be achieved rapidly – sometimes too rapidly (Elliot and Golding, 1971, p. 114) – without compromising the vested interests, values, and norms of the broader organisation regarding the kind of news product that eventually makes it for broadcast.

‘We keep tabs on prominent individuals, collect information about them and archive it for that the rain day. When something newsworthy happens involving a prominent figure, our news research team usually comes handy with background information, including profiles and contacts’ (SABC Interview 5)

It is common for the SABC to gather news and information from wire services or some news agency. A good example is the SABC’s use of the Electronic News Production System (ENPS) on a daily basis. However, the role of internal mechanisms involving structures such as the SABC Newsnet intranet unit, the SABC Sound and Audio-visual

Archive, and the SABC digital news platform could not be underestimated. The group of staff working in these units are just as integral to the news-making process as are the journalists, producers, editors, and executive producers. All constitute a crucial part of a system of doing, which ensures not only the operational efficiency of the newsroom operations but also, importantly, that the SABC remains in tune with the dominant news conversations in the country.

‘There is always relevant material on the wires. We cannot afford to deny our audiences what other media are talking about, but from a public service point of view’ (Fieldnote 23)

‘The wires are reliable sources of news and so are the press releases which provide us with advance notices of upcoming events. Of course, we have responsibility to tell the story independently and impartially’ (SABC Interview 16)

Thus, it was observed during my fieldwork that beat researchers spend significant time in their offices identifying story ideas from the wires and through their constantly evolving database of sources, networks, and other media. Reporters, editors, and producers constantly communicate with specialist news researchers and the planning editor for News and Current Affairs research at the Newsnet unit and with the SABC digital news service and the SABC Sound and Audio-visual Archive teams. Below is a snapshot of the news-making role that is played by the SABC digital news portal, alongside Newsnet and the SABC Sound and Audio-visual archive. These three digital spaces at the SABC are each manned by online researchers and digital specialists who are embedded as part of the SABC newsroom ecosystem. I outline the role played by these platforms, particularly their contribution to news making.

2.4.2.1 SABC Sound and Audio-Visual Archives

The SABC hosts at least four main archive services. Relevant to news making are the SABC Sound Archives, which catalogue and maintain content from all SABC sound and audio-visual platforms, including the SABC TV news as a core business. The material is preserved for a range of reasons, including but not limited to:

- The corporate function of preserving SABC raw and broadcasts material;

- To support SABC news and current affairs teams with archived audio-visual programme material;
- To support researchers with audio-visual information and facts that may be difficult to access; and
- to preserve and record, as part of the National Broadcaster's function and as much as possible, complete recordings of South African culture (legends and oral traditions), including a comprehensive set of nature and habitat sounds of South Africa (IIse Assmann- SABC Media Libraries, 1999¹²).

The permanent collection includes:

- All events such as the opening of parliament, inauguration of the State President, and national festivals, etc.
- Speeches by state presidents, premiers and other prominent figures and leaders within fields such as economics, artists, scientists, sport personalities, politicians, etc.
- A selection of programmes of all the PBS Radio stations of the SABC, as well as the commercial radio stations of the SABC (IIse Assmann, ibid).

Overall, the role of the SABC Sound and Audio-visual Archive and that of Newsnet overlap somewhat in that both content hubs contain a searchable database of news sources.

2.4.2.2 SABC Digital News

The SABC digital news portal primarily serves to optimise SABC news content for digital audiences. Unlike the other two news support services, i.e., Newsnet and the SABC Sound and Audio-visual archive, the SABC digital news portal is accessible in the public domain through a dedicated website. The portal has undergone marked growth from the time it was relaunched in 2011, following the recalibration of the broadcaster's old 'New Media' unit into the rebranded SABC digital news. Its role was extended to integrate the various online accounts and platforms into a content ecosystem that includes radio and television livestreaming, online news, and

¹² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350108013_SABC_Archives_Processes

multimedia, As mentioned above, the aim is to optimise SABC news content but also make the content searchable, archivable, and accessible online in order to achieve the most effective use for SABC editorial teams.

Editorial teams work on tight deadlines, and if they require previously broadcast content, it must be easily available immediately from the existing SABC digital news website. This is one of the ways that digital media specialists at the SABC digital news are able to assist SABC newsrooms by converging traditional radio and TV broadcast platforms with interactive digital options. The SABC Radio and TV news services have also been able to establish a strong online news presence. For example, the digital service at the SABC not only enables the online transmission of broadcast content, but this interconnection of information also permits media consumers to access content via portable devices such as smartphones, laptops, etc, while journalists are enabled to interact directly on social media. Through convergence, digital platforms have become integrated to the newsroom operations in ways that enable journalists to create impactful stories using more mediums simultaneously.

‘Background and context make for a good news story; and access to a good archive, and research teams is essential in news reporting. We rely on our news researchers for background information, statistics, and expert sources, much as the archive material often works to provide perspective’ (SABC Interview 21).

2.4.2.3 Newsnet Unit

It was common for journalists at the SABC to revert to a basic database of known sources that were logged on the broadcasters Newsnet intranet portal.

‘It helps always to call our News and Current Affairs research colleagues at Newsnet, or simply log on the intranet portal. The portal has details of accredited news sources whom we contact regularly. It also has updated information on previous bulletins, current affairs topics, profiles of prominent actors and their contacts. Our online SABC digital portal is another useful resource for background information. Like the Newsnet portal, its themed archive often contains previously covered stories’ (SABC Interview 13)

The above extract is a perfect example of the organisation's structured but fluid influence. Here, and often, the task of the journalist becomes that of scheduling the 'sources' of news – the majority of whom are already pre-accredited and included in a sanitised database. At the SABC, it was common to revitalise a source that had previously appeared in other publications. Often, the Newsnet research team would know who to call. The reporter and the Newsnet researcher would ordinarily meet to discuss and clarify what kind of sources were needed.

'...we tell Newsnet what kind of people we need to comment, at least in the way that speaks to our story focus. Sometimes the editors provide a list of names to select from and who at Newsnet or across the department would be best suited to help with the task.' (SABC Interview 12)

A journalist working on the story would regularly check with the Newsnet researcher if the source or sources that had been contacted got back to them. In instances where a source that has been contacted was unavailable, both the news researcher and reporter would revert to colleagues to try and identify accredited sources to contact. Journalists in the SABC newsrooms rarely for assistance with curating the news item itself, but often requested help with obtaining sources for the news item.

Newsnet, SABC digital news, and the SABC Sound and Audio-visual Archive, all three News and Current Affairs support facilities, are therefore indispensable news-making tools for the SABC. This makes the making of news and current affairs an extremely 'collective' process involving several hands and selective processes (McQuail, 1992). Routinely, journalists at the SABC use these support facilities to access raw information and some updated, current, and archived news clippings.

2.5 The BBC as a Yardstick for the SABC

The SABC was founded in August 1936 through a Charter written by Lord John Reith, former Director General at the BBC from 1927 -1938 (Hadland, 2005). The BBC was the first PSB worldwide and for a long time remained the foremost PSB worldwide. Nonetheless, today, in Britain and indeed throughout Europe, PSB transcends the BBC network and includes a range of broadcasting models and funding mechanisms that are regulated along public service principles (Scannel, 2005). The SABC, like the BBC,

was ostensibly launched as a PSB. In Jeremy Tunstall's work, the notion of PSB includes fostering a sense of national identity, a socially distributed public life that promotes social enrichment (Tunstall, 2010). However, in Britain, as in South Africa, it has been difficult to obtain consensus on what these PSB principles entail in practice – even from the broadcasters themselves (Peacock Committee, 1986). Notably, there exists no single or concise definition of the PSB principles and practices as each is applied differently in every environment, dependent on history and the philosophical assumptions of the institutions that adopt them. As such, these explicit principles do not capture the whole meaning of PSB and have been subject to constant variation over time.

2.5.1 Changes in the PSB Structure

Throughout its history, the BBC has adapted to various changes in television structure and regulatory control while retaining its income from the licence fee and right to broadcast by a Royal Charter (Scannell, 2005). Scholarly analysis of the BBC has mainly portrayed the BBC as an example of PSB and the public sphere ideal, albeit an imperfect one. Its relative autonomy from state and the market, and its commitment to hold power holders to account, its mediation role as a credible conveyer of relatively unhindered PSB communication, including its range channels that are accessible universally in Britain; all these attributes have positioned the BBC in line with Habermas' normative model. In this regard, the BBC is commonly seen as exemplary. However, the BBC coexists with three other broadcasters which are funded commercially but regulated along PSB norms. In this study, with a focus on South Africa, I discuss PSB and argue its merits anew (see Chapter 4.2).

I am cognisant of the radical transformations in the original socio-economic, political, cultural and technology conditions that enabled the birth of PSB to date and highlight some of the critical triggers for such transformations, such as the transition to digital media. Globally, digitisation has become an ongoing conversation, and some scholars question if PSB can survive media convergence, while others laud the possibilities that come with new media (Steemers, 2003). In the case of Britain, these changes are seen by some scholars as contributing to the acceleration of the demise of PSB.

Both the BBC and the SABC share the paradox relating to funding. PSB needs money to make programmes, unlike commercial media that needs programmes to make money. PSB is therefore compelled to think about ways of funding its services, often the choice is between independence and financial stability, leading to robust discussions about the viability of the licence fee which constitutes the practical funding model for PSB thus far (Scannell, 2005). The BBC has sought to defend the licence fee and retains its status as a PSB, despite arguments that the Reithian notion of the BBC rendered it as a paternalistic, white, middle-class, and elitist institution that offers an outdated or false sense of national identity. For example, the study on the BBC's Panorama, war coverage and the 'Westminster consensus' authored by David McQueen (2008) considers the broadcaster's reporting of the US attack of Iraq and explores the claim that its documentary feature series, the Panorama was biased in favour of 'elite' opinions. The content analysis of the broadcasts confirmed the war coverage was characterised by limited 'establishment' views and perspectives at the expense of more critical opinions and explanations. Government pressure, intimidation and interference was among the factors identified in the study, citing a range of current affairs practitioners and media analysts who argued that the Panorama series typically reflected a 'Westminster consensus' (McQueen, 2008) – a far cry from PSB. For reasons of focus, this thesis does not cover in detail the issues relating to the relations between the British government and the BBC which have for long been subject to debate and analysis. This thesis highlights similar concerns in respect of the SABC's reporting in general, more especially the broadcaster's propensity to rely on accredited officials in the construction of news bulletins. Chapters 10 and 11 of this thesis address this phenomenon extensively. The thesis argues that overreliance on elite sources in the construction of news narrows public opinion and as such it is not consistent with PSB.

2.6 Digital Migration at the SABC

The SABC has publicly proclaimed commitment to South Africa's digital migration process. In this regard, the broadcaster has already embarked on a journey towards web-based journalism by initiating the SABCnews.com portal - the one such service has grown since its inception. The SABC online news portal attained 1 146 290 pageviews by March 2019, while the broadcaster's YouTube News channel increased by 3 303 149 from 6 859 176 at the close of 2019 (SABC as cited by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2019). This increase in online viewership was attributed to high viewership of

foreign stories which included local protests by members of a church controlled by self-proclaimed Prophet Shepherd Bushiri (*ibid*).

In Chapter 9 of this work dealing with Codes of Practice at the SABC, I give an account of misgivings that were presented to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) by Bushiri relating to allegations of bias, prejudice, and failure by the SABC to afford the complainant the ‘right of reply’ – an important professional journalism value. During the same period, SABC News was the most followed news broadcaster on YouTube in SA – making the ‘conflict frame’ an obvious strategic institutional value for news making at the SABC. The average instance of pages loaded in an internet browser per story experienced on the SABC news portal in 2019 was a clear indication potential future progress, characterised mainly by the SABC News YouTube. Earlier in July 2018, the SABC News YouTube channel achieved its all-time high monthly performance – receiving no less than 22 million views on the occasion of the live streaming of the 16th Nelson Mandela Lecture (SABC Annual Report, 2019). In all, visits to the digital properties of the SABC grew significantly, although this achievement was not accompanied by a viable monetization strategy and as such it was not profitable for the period. Both Facebook and Twitter exceeded the set target for the period under review (SABC Annual Report 2019 as cited by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2019). Again, according to the SABC, stories about the self-proclaimed Prophet Shepherd Bushiri and the deaths at his church were among the main traffic drivers. There were other popular stories, such as the death of Credo Mutwa – a famous Zulu traditional healer and diviner, the high matric certificate results, and the 2019 coverage of the election. With this high online viewing performance, as of 2021, the SABC Annual Reports showed the SABCnews.com website was the most popular news site and continues to rank among the top 20 SA news websites (My broadband, 2023).

It is important to stress that the SABCnews.com currently serves only an online platform for the broadcaster’s traditional news journalism. There is currently no user-generated content on the platform and the extent of control in terms of professional journalistic processes and professional evaluation of the content is high. This is typical of the uni-directional approach of traditional news journalism in which the media users are generally not active, serve for opinion columns that provide the possibility for

citizens, often accredited actors, or experts in their fields (Bowman & Willis 2005, Rosen 2012). As already stated, the SABC was established on the tenet of PSB. However, because of the absence of universal access, the PSB promise for SABC news online and all its digital products remains elusive. However, in this thesis, using the above arguments as the backdrop, the SABCnews.com, the broadcaster's digital news platform is viewed as a space that has the potential to contribute to social cohesion by promoting discursive participation on issues of mutual public interest, difference, disagreement, and opportunities for consensus. As such, this study is mindful of challenges associated with new media's potential to promote unbridled access; that while it can promote access, and ultimately media diversity, it can also heighten differences and tensions; resulting dissonance and overall lack of social cohesion. As Medina, et al, (*ibid*) have argued, this level of inclusiveness and diversity, poorly applied, runs the risk of glamorising social tensions. This is a huge challenge – owing to South Africa's history of racial apartheid (Tomaselli 2008). Arguably, new media has the potential to contribute to inflaming Apartheid rifts rather than seeking to redress them (*ibid*). The SABCnews.com platform, therefore, is viewed in this thesis as having the potential to enable coverage of a diverse range of ideas and participation. It is an essential element of the SABC and its PSB pledge because it allows the possibility for individuals and groups, regardless of social standing, to debate an issue or issues and ultimately to evolve that which approximates public opinion.

2.6.1 Digital, Commercial and Public Services

In 2004, through amendments to the Broadcasting Act, 'public' and 'public/commercial' divisions were created to enhance the SABC's financial viability. A commercial service was instituted to help support the public channels (R2K 2011, cited in Chiumbu & Ciaglia, 2015). This legal framework and funding model embodied the tension between the free-market economy ideology which approaches broadcasting as a marketable good or commodity – like any other, provided for or supplied to consumers (Scannell, 2005), the social democratic ideal which argues a different role for PSB, mainly conceiving its audience as a public as opposed to a market or as citizens instead of consumers (Raboy, 1996; Ramsey, 2010). The market paradigm invites PSB to stay relevant to its audiences by answering to audience needs in ways they can recognize as useful and interesting, while the social democratic ideal is commonly understood in terms of the primary responsibility to address the audience as

rational citizens who share collective interests (Raboy, 1996; McQuail 2003; Scannell 2005). In my concluding chapter 11.3, I briefly weigh-in on the impact of these two paradigms and some of associated concerns.

The SABC as such is characterised by these two approaches classified in terms of two distinct services, i.e., public broadcasting services ('PBS') and public commercial services ('PCS'). Both are managed independently with different applicable license conditions and statutory provisions, including the SABC Charter¹³. As detailed in the SABC Annual Report (2020), the broadcaster finds the differentiation of the two services unhelpful in the sense that operationally, the SABC is governed as a single organisation. Thus, owing to this institutional structure, the broadcaster argues that it is incapable of accounting for each service separately. In total, SABC PSB consists of three television channels (SABC1,2 &3) and 15 radio stations; PCS has two television stations, the SABC News (HD) and SABC Encore and three radio channels stations. Although unencrypted, the two PCS TV platforms are available only via digital satellite and through a subscription. Together, the channels provide local and international content across the country. At the time of writing in 2022, the SABC had embarked was on its first phase of the Broadcast Digital Migration programme which focused on the immediate switch-off of analogue services beyond a specified threshold (694MHz band). The SABC maintains it will expedite its digital migration and prepare for the rapid digital convergence of all its media platforms, in spite of the market challenge arising from new free-to-air broadcasters, pay-television and Over the Top (OTT) PSB stations players that operate on digital platforms already. As highlighted earlier the SABC's digital media offerings on the internet are highly competitive in South Africa (SABC Annual Report 2022¹⁴).

¹³ <https://www.SABC.co.za/SABC/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SABC-AR-2020.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/annual-reports/>

2.6.1.1 SABC Digital Presence Across the Internet

Table 2- 1: Digital presence

The table is reconstructed from SABC documents.

Space	Description
Internet	The SABC Corporate portal hosts dedicated websites of all SABC radio stations and television channels, as well as SABC News, Sport, and Education.
Podcasts and Streaming	All radio stations offer live audio streaming via their own dedicated websites as well as via the SABC portal. The radio stations also offer podcasts of their most popular shows and SABC News publish hourly news bulletin podcasts.
Online video	The SABC hosts YouTube channels for SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3, as well as for a number of its most popular television shows.
Mobile	Mobile applications are being developed for SABC programming. For example, the SABC Education content division annually hosts the National Department of Basic Education's matric results on its mobile App which allows learners to register using SMS or USSD to receive their results on their mobiles.
Social media	All brands are active on social media, especially Facebook and Twitter platforms.

2.7 Operational Procedures Inside the SABC News Departments

Although there were no official documents at the SABC publicly detailing any standard operational procedures (SOPs), it was the assumption of this study that the broadcaster, like all news organisations, would have embedded in its News and Current Affairs production practices, covertly and overtly, those routine practices that facilitate and influence the flow of work. The sense that I got through participant observation and interviews with SABC journalists was that news making was in the entire news department, an ingrained practice, characterised by the taken-for-granted routines,

procedures, norms, values, and other embedded mechanisms. Thus, it was the aim of this ethnographic work to map these characteristics and to draw theoretical conclusions.

This study observed interfaces between journalists and their editors during daily news diary meetings and with the various departments and platforms within the institution. As already highlighted, there was no evidence of any official SOP that relates to editorial matters/staff/operations, and this the study had to map out. Data sources included members of committees that were established to draft SOPs for the newsroom following saga in 2016, during which the SA media reported widely on eight journalists who stood up to dissent against censorship imposed by the broadcaster. They became known as the SABC8. The development of SOPs was still ongoing when this study concluded. Such an absence of written SOP's was at the core of the problems that came about during an 'interdict' incident that was widely covered in the media, which resulted in the suspension and subsequent disciplinary hearing of the then Executive Head of News and Current Affairs, Ms Phathiswa Magopeni. In fact, it was during this incident that the SABC management continued to mention that certain conduct was against SOP but failed to produce the said documents during the inquiry¹⁵. This was a clear recognition of the fact that the lack of official SOPs was a 'systemic problem'. Evidently, in the newsroom dissonance, both the SABC 8. Ms Phathiswa Magopeni, and the SABC management generate convincingly a model that is synonymous with Bourdieu's formulations of 'habitus', 'doxa' (rules of the game) and journalistic 'capital'. The concepts of 'habitus' and 'doxa' permit different kinds of interpretations, leading to what Bourdieu (1971) characterises as the assumed "right mode of intellectual activity" (*ibid*, p. 201). Bourdieu's argues that all social activities embody more than one truth, and these truths are not easy to harmonise (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 95); and using this logic, we can hypothesize what Bourdieu characterises as a case of 'technocrats and epistemocrats' who use their unique forms of capital to skilfully appeal to 'reason and the universal' (Bourdieu, 1998). It is mostly about position taking. In Bourdieu's conception, as social actors make way through life and different social spaces (sites of contestation), they are compelled to mobilise all forms of justifications, technical, rational, and otherwise, so as to dominate the field and in which field,

¹⁵ <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/sabc-news-ge-found-guilty/>

according to Bourdieu (2000), the ‘habitus’ is most crucial producer of social practice. Bourdieu uses the concept of ‘habitus’ to account for the discernible structures in the social world and the subjective relational actions of actors within it. The habitus being the “set of dispositions, reflexes, and forms of behaviour people acquire through acting in society”; revealing the different positions people take in society as they contest their versions of reality (*ibid*, p. 19).

Throughout the course of the field research which commenced in 2016 and concluded in 2020, meetings were held internally within the SABC between the SABC channels, technical teams, and the News and Current Affairs departments, with the aim was to outline and write SOPs for workflows (doxa or rules of the game) in relation to various aspects of our operations (Fieldnote 33 and email communication from staff, 2019). These would include workflow SOPs for live shows, daily bulletins, current affairs documentary shows, etc. Some of the respondents in this study (names withheld on request) were part of those committees, but the process stalled at some point. This study was able to view some of the inconclusive initial drafts that were shared in confidence and to apply Bourdieu's formulations of ‘habitus’, ‘doxa’ and journalistic ‘capital’.

2.7.1 Journalistic Independence at the SABC

While the independence of all media and journalists in South Africa is protected by law, and the profession is legally free from interference; journalism practice at the SABC has been constrained by numerous external and internal institutional factors.

Politically, the SABC has on numerous occasions been condemned for ‘censorship’ and ‘political interference’ in its editorial decisions (see Arndt, 2007; Dlamini, et al., 2017; Dlamini, T., & Chiumbu, S. H., 2016). For example, in 2006, the SABC was accused of blacklisting the use of certain journalists and analysts for the reason that they were considered hostile to the then President, Thabo Mbeki (Ndletyana, M., & Maserumule, M. H. (2015. Other cases included the refusal by the broadcaster to air a political satire documentary featuring cartoonist Jonathan Shapiro, also known as Zapiro; the canning in 2013 of the current affairs programme ‘Big Debate’ (*ibid*) and the banning of political adverts of the two contending opposition political parties – the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) – during the 2014 General Elections (Chiumbu & Ciaglia, 2015). In the weeks before the 2016 local government elections, the SABC once again was embroiled in censorship allegations when the COO

of the broadcaster, Hlaudi Motsoeneng, announced a policy directive that footage of violent protest action would not be included on television news bulletins (Mahlangu, Ndenze & Hosken, 2016 as cited in Dlamini et al., 2017). Several journalists who questioned the new editorial policy were suspended on charges of non-compliance, prompting an uproar from the media fraternity (*ibid*). Amid allegations of censorship and purging of those who disagreed with him, Motsoeneng argued that he was advancing a ‘transformation agenda’ and that his choices on editorial content were ‘what the people want’ (Pretorius, 2016). At odds with Motsoeneng were some journalists and civil society groups who held the view that South Africa’s hard-won right to freedom of expression was being threatened. This conceptual clash inside the SABC is not the focus of this paper, but it highlights the existence of tensions associated with editorial choices, in particular the patterns of news interpretation or news frames in the SABC election campaign bulletins.

2.7.1.1 Editorial Responsibility and Upward Referral

Following the departure of Chief Operating Officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng on the 12th of June 2017, the SABC formally scrapped the controversial policy of ‘Upwards Referral’ for The Newsroom, which has operated at the broadcaster since the SABC was reconstituted post-apartheid. This means that the Group Chief Executive Officer no longer has control of news editorial decisions. It was previously stated in Section 3.1 of the Editorial Code (2020) that the SABC policy of upwards referral was not aimed at shifting editorial decision-making upwards but was intended to facilitate, when necessary, timeous collective decision-making and shared editorial responsibility; ease the challenge in situations when editors are confronted with difficult choices or decisions; and finally to underline the interdependency between the editorial staff and the broadcaster’s management (SABC Editorial Code, 2020). After widespread consultation, full editorial responsibility was given back to the Group Executive for the News Division. In addition, SABC journalists were authorized to decide on what stories to cover, how to frame the stories and who to interview. It can be argued these revised guidelines were consistent with the PSB ethos, which calls for broadcasting that is aimed at liberating rather than restricting the programme makers, “whose work should be protected from arbitrary interference and safe-guarded by the norms of media professionalism” (Mpofu, 1996, p. 9-16 as cited in Wake, 2002, p.14). This thesis

mostly focuses on the association between the desired characteristics of a PSB and how such responsibility is conceptualised and subsequently practised inside the SABC.

2.8 The SA Regulatory Cum Policy Variant and Its Challenges

This study refers to several works in the literature that have attempted to chronicle PSB debates at the SABC but also those that have attempted to locate the various arguments within the context of regulatory provisions. The issue of broadcasting policy and its role in reforming the SABC is evident in many of the provisions of the following statutory provisions:

- I. Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act of 1993 (as amended in 1996)
- II. The South African Broadcasting Act (1999 and the proposed amendments to it in 2002)
- III. The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Act No 13 of 2000 (ICASA Act)

Activists and scholars have called for further regulation and considered how to position policy, organisation, and management in the interest of the range of publics. However, positioning policy is difficult given a socially and economically fragmented citizenry, cultural and language multiplicity, and historical differentiation along racial lines in South Africa (Banda, 2014; Fourie 2003. p. 149; Kupe, 2007; Rodny-Gumede 2015; Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1996; Wasserman 2006). Moreover, as the reviewed literature alludes, each country has its unique experience relating to PSB practice, and as such, each environment has evolved its own unique set of PSB frameworks and accompanying 'political' documents. The South African Broadcasting Act (1999 as amended) provides the policy and regulatory yardstick often used in studies to explore the extent to which SABC complies in practice with its PSB mandate of promoting democratic citizenship, facilitating deliberative politics, fostering development and nation-building. The Act establishes the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), which effectively regulates public service broadcasting (PSB). Ideally, ICASA is expected to ensure that broadcasting in South Africa is carried out in a manner which promotes democratic citizenship. Several studies have either confirmed or questioned ICASA's effectiveness concerning monitoring the SABC's licence conditions, particularly its role as a PSB operating in the public interest. Section 6(5) of

the Broadcasting Act (amended) calls upon the SABC to outline policies that are aimed at ensuring adherence to the broadcaster's license provisions, ICASA's Code of Conduct, and all the requirements of the Act (Kupe, 2002). The prescribed guidelines include a range of operational and managerial initiatives, all designed to enable the editorial staff when confronted by challenging editorial situations and decisions in order for unique, worthy, and every so often provocative programme can be aired without compromising ethical and editorial standards (Nicholson, 2006). ICASA recommends a mandatory review process of the SABC editorial guidelines every five years, and the SABC to be accountable for such guidelines (SABC, 2004). The first editorial guidelines introduced in 2004 formed part of a review process, while the broadcaster had previously invited public comments and convened consultation meetings in several provinces on draft editorial policies.

The response to the SABC's public consultations on the editorial policy has always been significant – notably characterised by conceptual PSB debates and robust articulations. Tomaselli & Tomaselli (1994) contend that some of the extraordinary articulations proved to be problematic. “One of these was...a type of call for 'good news' in the face of the debilitating violence that racked the transition to general elections in April 1994 (*ibid*, p.47)”. How PSB might respond to the editorial review processes mentioned above remains relevant today, not only in South Africa but also across Africa.

While the IBA addresses the public perceptions of social and economic exclusion and seeks to ensure the promotion of PSB for discursive participation and democratic citizenship in South Africa, critics argue that the Act does not address the massive challenges, including the rapid technological changes sufficiently, soaring operational costs, susceptibility to government pressure, and the demands of nation-building.

The study by Govenden (2019) systematically brings to the fore the various ways in which the SABC could be held accountable through regulation to the extent that it operates as a fully-fledged PSB and further questions the ICASA's role. Govenden's doctoral dissertation explores instances in which ICASA has been called upon to exercise its mandate and argues that ICASA's mandate is and should be broader. Indeed, what is entailed by a broader mandate has been the subject of study for the growing number of media scholars in South Africa. Others have posited a role for

ICASA that includes enforcing the continental framework for PSB as reflected in the Windhoek Declaration on PSB. According to Govenden, failure to translate the continental frameworks and 'political' blueprints undermines the ICASA's ability to regulate PSB effectively (*ibid*). This trend is widespread globally, not only in South Africa (McCauley, 2003 as cited in Govenden, *ibid*). As already alluded to above, different countries evolved different regulatory systems – each informed by local political and social dynamics.

2.8.1 Challenge With Regulating Advertisements

A cursory look at the SABC daily news bulletins and current affairs programming revealed a collection of stories organised into beats and supplemented by public information announcements and advertisements. This distinction between stories, beats, announcements of public information and advertising mirrors both the institutional arrangement of SABC news routine practices and, in a way, constitutes the broadcaster' habitus. In this sense, public information and advertising are viewed in terms of their functional roles and not notwithstanding their potential impediment to quality journalism or the SABC's normative PSB function. The question that I posed to SABC journalists was whether PSB should accommodate public announcements, such as those relating to social campaigns, e.g., health or environmental awareness, and room for commercial advertising and sorts.

'We are not a commercial broadcaster. Our mandate is public service broadcasting.'
(SABC Interview 10)

'SABC does not receive government subsidies. How are we expected to perform our mandate?' (SABC Interview 6)

Commercial advertising and forms of advocacy information by a range of interest groups have been identified in scholarship as having the effect of diluting the quality and flow of credible news and professional journalism (Fourie, 2014; Cowling, et al., 2007 - 2008). Cowling et al, (2008) investigated the role of commercial factors in structuring media output and professional journalistic practice. Their study highlights the continuing challenges to the quality of media in South Africa arising from hyper-commercialization, and specifically, the over-reliance of media on revenues from

advertising. The argument is that numerous media houses develop endless ways to ensure advertising revenue or what Bourdieu calls a “ratings mindset” or the “sales model on cultural products” (Bourdieu, 1998) and this implies curating items with mass appeal that entice advertisers or a "buying mood" for... products (Herman and Chomsky called as cited Cowling, et al., 2007 - 2015). These views are widely held in critical scholarship; mainly that commercial considerations have resulted in the decline of professional journalistic standards and, as a consequence, compromised the media's normative role (*ibid*; see also McChesney, 2016 on hyper-commercialisation of the media in the US context). The work by Cowling et al. (2008) is important to this study because it approaches the issue of commercial pressures and the resultant conflation of editorial content with advertising through an analysis of the practices, routines, and structures within a South African media setting. The approach is relevant in this discussion in that, although the focus is on the print media, it zooms to the consequences of commercial considerations in professional journalism practice and, theoretically encompasses the normative understandings of media operations. Generally, critical scholars identify the ‘fiscal squeeze’ as contributing to the deterioration of PSB at the SABC (Teer-Tomaselli, 2019; and others). However, this is only one perspective. Perhaps the most important question for my work is how the news product distinguishes its function and upholds its role as the provider of objective, impartial, accurate, nonpartisan, and commercially-free information? For reasons of focus and time, exploring how commercialism impacts news making at the SABC is not the aim of this study, although this factor is discussed at length in my theory chapters, and has been identified in a range of scholarship as imposing constraints on the quality, trustworthiness, and impartiality of news bulletins (Cowling et al., *ibid*; McChesney, 2016; Karppinen, et al., *ibid*; Banerjee, I. [Ed. 2005]; Moe & Syvertsen, 2009, etc). This work notes nonetheless literature that has argued in favour of a media system supported by a strong PSB system, but one that accommodates an appropriate range of senders, channels, or owners in the system (McQuail, 1992). As such in this work, it is acknowledged that the activity of news making co-exists with other information neighbourhoods such as public announcements and commercial advertising, although this study’s analytical focus is limited only to the examination and the understanding of newsroom culture and journalistic practices in the SABC News and Current Affairs Division.

2.8.2 Distance from the State

The prevalence of state broadcasting systems in most countries has often resulted in a tendency to equate PSB with State broadcasters. After all, when commercial broadcasting is juxtaposed with State broadcasting, the latter is assumed to be more oriented towards public service than its commercial counterparts; and this has resulted to common conflation between PSB and state broadcasting systems' (Banerjee & Seneviratne, *ibid*, pg. 13). We can explain the phenomenon in reference to attempts aimed at driving social transformation, democracy, and development broadly. While these are considered a responsibility for PSB, in South Africa, the same has been the responsibility of the post-apartheid state. Such experience has made it harder for the SABC to sustain its independence from the political activities of the state (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994; Nicholson, 2006; Orgeret, 2008; Fourie, 2010; and others). However, the SABC is uniquely positioned here – given that its operations are regulated independently by a statutory instrument that guarantees its independence. In this regard, the SABC cannot be classified as a state broadcaster but rather as a PSB. This distinction is important because even as state broadcasters often accomplish certain PSB roles, their carte-blanche control by states, who are also the media regulators, compounded by dependence on state resources for their operations, limits to public interest programming, autonomy and independence prevent them from assuming that which approximates PSB principles. Indeed, to some degree, state broadcasters do perform certain public roles like education and entertainment; also cover functions such as national events. However, they still do not fulfil other key roles of PSB that is regulated in the public interest, and as such do not qualify to be defined as real PSBs.

After 1994, a key objective was changing the SABC from being a state control into a public institution, i.e., broadcaster controlled by the public, in line with its broadened statutory obligation to meet the demands of a transforming society (Kupe, 2005). Furthermore, the overlap of the PSB role with that of the state has in some instances resulted in abuse by government incumbents who have used PSB services to promote personality cults and other related activities that have denied citizens democratic participation in social and political spaces (Raboy, 2003; McCauley et al., 2002). The converse is also true in the sense that examples of government abuse of PSB services sometimes misrepresent the normative model of a genuine PSB and, by extension, PSB institutional values (McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 2014; Banerjee, 2005). In this

way, commercial values in broadcasting find promotion as an alternative to state control (Banerjee, 2005). The latter is not trusted to provide legitimate or efficient goods and services in society (Banerjee, *ibid*). That noted, the need for arms-length distance in relation to PSB versus all vested interests is unchallenged – be they commercial, governmental, religious, or selective personal and group interests. This goes to consolidate the view that PSB is best achieved when it is orchestrated from a position of independence and autonomy. It is therefore assumed in this study and in a large body of literature, including Abboo 2008; McChesney 2016; Ciaglia 2016; Milton 2018; and others, that programming that is funded by commercial advertising necessarily orients content to niche audiences in the promotion of a product and in pursuit of consumer eyeballs, while funding from powerful group interests or advocacy groups usually seeks to promote specific ideas, selective interests, or particular visions of society. Furthermore, in the absence of public interest regulation that guarantees independence and autonomy of PSB, it is presumed that the funding by the state often results in programming that is tone deaf on topics that are critical of the government (Abbo 2008; Berger et al, 2009; McChesney, 2016; Ciaglia 2017).

2.8.2.1 Perceived Influence from the State

That the ANC is on record demanding a larger frequency of media coverage commensurate to its electoral majority has fuelled the perception that the ruling party was to dominate the SABC. For instance, in key submissions to the enquiry on the probe into editorial and political interference at the SABC, Zizi Kodwa, then ANC's head of monitoring and evaluation in the Office of the Presidency, and Pule Mabe, then ANC spokesman, both equated balanced reporting and equitable coverage to affording more media access to the largest political party in the country. At the enquiry, which was closed to the media, the official report as cited by a range of media publications confirmed that Kodwa had told the SABC Board Commission that 'the ANC enjoys 62% of electoral support' (News 24, 2018¹⁶; Mail & Guardian, 2018¹⁷).

¹⁶<https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-07-03-anc-demands-greater-sabc--exposure-as-majority-party/>

¹⁷ <https://mg.co.za/article/2018-07-02-anc-demands-more-coverage-on-SABC-ahead-of-2019-polls/>

Conflating the function of the ANC party with the state, and therefore the ‘public interest’, Kodwa argued that the SABC giving access to a minister ought not be mistaken to giving the access to the ANC (*ibid*).

‘Ministers don't speak on behalf of the ANC... ministers represent the state,’ Kodwa told journalists after presenting to the inquiry, that ‘people of South Africa in a constitutional democracy have expressed their preference. The ANC enjoys 62%, how that gets carried out in terms of editorial news is something, one way or another it must show’ (Mail & Guardian, *ibid*; News 24, *ibid*)

‘That is why in Parliament parties are not given equal time, but they are all given time to speak. It is recognition that it is an expression of the will of the people’ (Independent Online, 2018).

‘They speak to the minister and speak to other political parties, and they omit the ANC. Ministers do not speak on behalf of the ANC. The ANC’s official voice must always be added because ministers do not represent the ANC. They are ministers of state and not ministers of the ANC. We will continue to raise these issues as part of protecting this independence and impartial editorial policy’ (*ibid*¹⁸).

In the above arguments, two ANC officials claim is that the state is the custodian of the ‘public good’; therefore, ideally, the ruling party of the day represents the ‘public interest’. This view is problematic considering that the SABC’s PSB mandate is to present to and from citizens, regardless of social affiliation, the informational needs, and interests of the generality of all members of the public, and to facilitate participation in public life, including holding authorities to account. An ideal PSB, while belonging to the nation and the state being the custodian of all national assets on behalf of all citizens, must be independent of both economic and political pressures in the practice of its mandate (Banerjee, et al., 2006; Jakubowicz, 2011). In short, PSB cannot be subsumed to serve only the state or ruling political party. In South Africa and

¹⁸ <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/kodwa-tells-SABC-give-anc-campaigns-more-airtime-15801576>

elsewhere, ‘public interest’ is often viewed together with concerns about the political independence of the media. Although PSB has traditionally had close relationships with the governments of the day, it requires a legal framework and certain structural attributes that allow it to execute its role effectively (*ibid*). Often, this is not seen to be the case. Take for instance the long-standing arguments in scholarship since 1990s that has highlighted government’s ideological views with respect to SABC (Fourie, 2004; Arndt, 2007 - 2018 - 2019). In general, discourse concerning the ‘independence’ of the SABC, state interference in any form is often viewed as potentially opening the door to the SABC becoming a propaganda tool of whom so ever is in charge of the state, while the market ideology globally presupposes that only ‘democratic’ regulatory mechanisms are necessary to regulate the impact of funding, particularly advertising (McChesney, 1997, p. 3 as cited in Fourie (2003). Evidently, these interrelated PSB paradigms (commercial and public) are the heart of the conceptual clash inside the SABC. There is a section of internal actors who are wary of control by elite interest groups with economic power to control both the SABC and its content and another section that is suspicious of government control, even if it through regulation – believing that there are state actors, and alleged proxies they perceive inside the SABC to be playing the role of limiting journalistic ‘independence’ at the broadcaster. The alternative to commercial control is discussed in terms of PSB funding through state mechanisms. This perspective is treated with suspicion, primarily that state funding could be used to promote the decisions of the state or even social control with respect to the national imperatives that are the purview of the ruling ANC party. This perspective posits that state control could translate into turning the SABC into a propaganda tool, much like it was under apartheid.

2.8.2.2 Routine Meetings with the Presidency Questioned

The Presidency of South Africa, together with its incumbent, is among the most important political figures in the country and, as such, constitutes a large topic at SABC and in the news media generally. Despite the political shifts in nature of SA media, the fundamental role of reporting on the presidency has remained, as has the strategic intent of maintaining the relationship. There are two ways of characterising the interactions between the presidency and the media. The engagements are often characterised as either ‘closed’ or ‘open’. Finding the balance is often complicated. On the one hand, there are concerns that the presidency may exercise undue influence on the media, but

the relationship can also indicate whether the media is free to access the presidency when it so desires or not. Seemingly, therefore, SABC has no choice but to keep this relationship, primarily for the strategic purpose of reporting on the public's interest in the work of the presidency or risk not knowing first what the office is doing for the citizens. However, because the relationship is not one-sided, there are concerns that the presidency may desire to use the SABC or media to further its own agenda. The incident below highlights some of the related conversations regarding this relationship.

In October 2017, then presidential spokesperson of South Africa, Bongani Ngqulunga, held a scheduled meeting with senior SABC editorial staff, who included the then acting Group Executive: News, then-acting Head of TV News, and then National TV News Editor. Meeting was followed by protest letter written by SABC staff members to Parliament raising concern over the meeting (My broadband, 2017¹⁹).

'We find that the meeting held by our acting-GE (general editor) of news with the head of the president's private office and spokesperson, Dr Bongani Ngqulunga, to be injudicious and we call on our head to exercise more circumspection in the future and to protect the newsroom from perceptions of bias,' (ibid; SABC8 letter)

The presidency responded, saying:

'Such consultative meetings actually take place routinely between journalists from various media houses and communication professionals in the public and private sectors' (The Presidency, 2017²⁰)

The presidency statement went on to express concerned about the public impression generated by the stance taken by the SABC newsroom and equally condemned any possible attempts to intimidate journalists at the broadcaster (reference to the senior

¹⁹ <https://mybroadband.co.za/news/broadcasting/232765-presidency-responds-to-SABC-8-open-letter.html>

²⁰ <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/press-statements/presidency-deeply-concerned-about-statement-group-SABC-journalists>

journalists at the said meeting), who the statement argued were legitimately entitled to engage with ‘government and/or any other institution whether in government or the opposition, in the quest for news or information’ (*ibid*).

From this episode, I concluded that, despite resistance by some, there were several SABC journalists who maintained close proximity to government officials, not least the senior editors who had attended the contested October meeting, which the presidency had described as ‘regular’ (*ibid*). This instance pointed to another ‘taken for granted’ practice in mainstream journalism – the routine practice of deferring policy topics to those in authority or government officials. Indeed, this practice was self-evident in the sampled SABC news stories on the land issue that are referenced in this work (see Chapter 8, Section 2). Indeed, several scholars have shown how this practice potentially limits the number of perspectives or angles from which a story can be explored (McCombs, & Shaw, 1993; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Berkowitz, 1992).

The SABC are not the only mass media that is fingered broadly for concentrating on the affairs of the powerful (both state and market actors) at the expense of ordinary voices. Several studies focusing on the criteria often used in determining what makes a story newsworthy, including how news is presented or framed, have shown that the ‘actions of the elite or those in positions of authority, often generated more media attention than the activities of others’ (Galtung and Ruge, 1999, p. 25 – see also, Harcup and O’Neill, 2001; Manning, 2001). However, journalists say the experience at the SABC goes beyond referencing people in authority:

‘It’s as if our role is public relations for either those with lots of money or political power. We follow government events and politicians as although nothing else is worth reporting on’ (SABC Interview 22)

The comment above is not unusual. The widespread view suggests that ‘the organisation of news is not geared up to the needs of the socially powerless’, except in instances ‘when they are victims of crimes or natural disaster’ (Cottle, 2000, p. 434). This pattern of access based on hierarchy is partly what makes news making possible (Golding and Elliott (1999). However, this work argues that the SABC’s editorial

priorities ought to distinguishable owing to its PSB mandate which enshrines the broadcaster and its content producers with statutory autonomy and independence.

2.9 Examples of Challenges in the SABC Newsroom

Earlier, in 2012, a week before the ANC's elective conference in Mangaung, journalists reportedly listed a number of concerns that suggested political interference in their work²¹. The journalists who did not name themselves or sign the letter ostensibly in fear of victimisation claimed that certain current affairs shows were 'canned' shortly before the arrival of the intended programme participants (Schalk, 2012). Examples included the SABC's refusal to air scenes of the opposition Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) being removed from Parliament for disrupting President Ramaphosa's delivery to the SONA (MyBroadband, 2015), while the SABC decision to prohibit the broadcast of election infomercials of two major opposition political parties during the run-up to the 2014 general elections provided the context in Chiumbu and Ciagla's analysis of political television advertising in South Africa (Chiumbu & Ciaglia, 2015). These and other factors have prompted media fraternity formations and political parties to challenge the fundamental news broadcasting values of the SABC (Phatlane, 2014). Formations such as the Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), Save Our SABC (SOS), and the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) demanded public interventions at the SABC in line with normative conceptualisations of the role of PSB (SASFED, 2014), while the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) Party made representations to the ICASA to determine whether the SABC had breached its licence conditions. In particular, the DA party accused the SABC of bias and failure to uphold its editorial independence. The party argued that the SABC's news and current affairs programming did not fulfil basic standards of democratic deliberation (DA, 2014). However, although research conducted by the SA-based Media Monitoring Project (MMP) in 2006 cited examples of political bias at the SABC, the MMP also pointed out that there were fewer complaints actually lodged at the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa.

²¹ <https://mg.co.za/article/2012-12-06-00-sabc-decision-on-mangaung-talk-show-leadership-at-its-best/>

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the background and context of this study. It has described News and Current Affairs operations and the SABC, including some key events and factors relating to the broadcaster that have emerged as key issues in South African public discourse. Greater focus is placed on the internal dynamics of news work at the SABC, including management, routine practices, overview of internal operational units, and a glimpse into some of the strategic goals of the institution. Included are some brief notes on the impact of the political economy on PSB within the South African context. In short, this background chapter outlines the origins of the SABC, albeit in brief, and offers the context of the analysis of the broadcaster's 'newsroom culture' that is aimed at this thesis.

An attempt is made through discussion to distinguish between 'state power' 'economic power' and 'public power'. Habermas (1991, p. 398) equates the latter with state power because of the legitimacy accrued through public elections, but critical scholars have argued that the 'powers' of the state are not part of the public sphere where public opinions are formed (*ibid*); therefore, making it imperative for a PSB that is ideally located in the public sphere concept to insist on its 'independence' from 'power' holders, including the state. This study takes the position that the issue of power, domination, and the independence of the SABC cuts both ways. The chapter includes a discussion regarding the potential control of PSB by private individuals with money and the fear of state control, and in both instances, PSB runs the risk of being an elitist service. The elites in question can either be those who hold political power and may dictate their values to the public (Thompson, 1990) or those individuals and groups who control the markets and other symbolic resources (*ibid*). The chapter highlights the two interrelated ideological paradigms, namely, the social democratic ideal that is based on universal suffrage and the free-market economy in which people are encouraged to seek private solutions to public problems (Murdock, 1995 as cited in Dlamini, 2004).

Section Two

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Overview

This section addresses both the theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed in this study. Generally, conceptual frameworks are associated with qualitative studies, and theoretical frameworks are linked to quantitative studies. This study requires both since it adopts the multiple methods approach.

The first Chapter three (3) is the theoretical framework – presented in two parts or pillars. Pillar 1 discusses the journalistic culture within the SABC newsrooms from the perspective of studies in institutional culture and on PSB. The focus on newsroom culture at the SABC is facilitated by Bourdieu's analytic concept of the 'field', which specifically allows for the conceptualisation of the range of practices, some of which are contradictory at times. As Bantz (1985, p. 124 as cited Arndt, 2007, p.31) argues, 'only when researchers understand the culture of an organisation, they can understand the life world of its members', 'what they value and devalue' and 'the way news stories are defined' – in other words, 'how the organisational member interprets and constitutes social reality.' Ordinarily, the difficulty lies with the risk of overstating the impact of culture on practices that take place inside institutions. In Arndt (2007, p.31), we are reminded that both 'formal' and 'informal' rules have a structuring effect on the actions of individuals in society and within institutions, and that this social influence on behaviour includes the way things are perceived and performed by the people we around us. Specifically, newsroom culture is embedded in both written and unwritten rules, including the shared assumptions regarding the mores of the journalism profession, which encompass values, beliefs, and practices. In this study, it is posited that newsroom culture is not dependent on one determining feature, such as the leader or management hierarchy, and that it evolves constantly. What makes the newsroom significant is that it shapes how news making is done and governs the ultimate behaviour of individual journalists.

The second distinct theoretical framework (pillar 2) is PSB, the other key concept used in this study. PSB is viewed through the lens of Habermas' public sphere concept.

While the guiding principles of PSB and the public sphere are broad, care is taken to focus only on the aspects that are relevant to this work.

What follows below in Chapter Three (3) is a discussion focused on the relevant academic literature that informs this study. At the very least, both concepts of the Field and Public Sphere are employed in this study to come to grips with the idea that the SABC is a field of power or space within which individuals contest their visions of the social world, and indeed a vital component of the public sphere. In Bourdieu (1991), power is symbolic – characterised by the active role played by habitus in its various forms, including the implicit and explicit ‘assumptions and practices’ that feature ‘in the constitution and maintenance of power relations’ (*ibid*). These power relations take place within ‘fields’, or in Habermas (2020), take place within the public sphere defined as a social space where individuals assemble freely to discuss and identify societal problems, and that through that discussion evolve what approximates public opinion. Both field and Public Sphere concepts are used to draw conclusions on the SABC newsroom culture and what the SABC news and current affairs texts reveal in relation to the broadcaster’s statutory mandate of PSB.

Chapter four (4) presents the conceptual framework. It outlines the key theories and review of relevant literature used to address the research objectives in this study and to guide data collection, analysis, and generalisation of findings. In sum, the key theories used in this work are field theory, which is used to explore newsroom culture, and notions of PSB and the public sphere. This is complemented with relevant conceptions from classical scholarship on news making, data-derived newsroom observation, interviews, and grey literature on the SABC, all with the aim of highlighting various factors that feature SABC newsrooms in terms of institutional culture.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework

3.0 Introduction

This study's exploration of newsroom culture and journalistic practice at the SABC is essentially an ethnography of news work and journalism within context. Ethnography relating to news production is understood in numerous scholars as an interdisciplinary enterprise, located within 'media and journalism studies, anthropology, and the sociology of work' (Wahl-Jorgensen (2010, p. 22, as cited in Jordaan, 2018, p. 51). Newsroom ethnography is appropriate for this study because it facilitates direct access to the institutional culture of SABC newsrooms. It is a useful approach for exploring first-hand the experiences, beliefs, practices, and interactions of the journalists who make the news within their everyday setting.

One of the key objectives of this study is to contribute to the already existing scholarship on the SABC – both in terms research approaches and the development theory. Thus, an additional goal in this work is to add to the existing academic approaches for the study of the SABC's newsroom culture and journalistic practice as observed within an internal context. Although this study references several related theoretical traditions, the foundation of this study is rooted in two cogent and critical theories, namely, Bourdieu's field theory, which is a subset of reflexive sociology, and PSB, which is linked to Habermas' public sphere concept.

Regarding the 'field theory', among the many insights accounted for in this study is Bourdieu's argument that although interaction in the social world is structured, it is not 'structured' in predictable ways but relationally around power and in ways that involve both cultural and economic resources. In this conception, the media is as such an arena of power, one in which journalism practice is implicated, particularly the way it mediates 'power' through the news.

Another important insight for this work relates to how we can operationalise public sphere theory, specifically to PSB can potentially achieve free politics that is devoid of

domination. According to Colombo (2010), the public sphere theory forces us to ‘think and rethink the contours and limits of democracy’ (*ibid*, p.20).

The reflexive sociology of Bourdieu and Habermas’ conception of the public sphere are therefore employed in this work as analytical tools for understanding the internal dynamics inside the SABC newsroom. Applied in tandem, both theories have enabled this work’s conceptual framework – summed in terms of understanding the SABC as a field of power – defined as a space from which power is contested by different actors or agents – a journalistic field that is always constrained and at the same time enabled by numerous internal and external factors (Bourdieu, 1985 – 1986; see also Denord, et al., 2020).

The notions of the ‘field’, encompassing habitus, doxa, and capital are helpful, particularly in understanding both the implicit and explicit structures that guide journalism practice at the SABC, while the public sphere framework has allowed this work to explore the extent to which the claim of PSB is practised in the context of the SABC, from the point of view the public sphere.

Applied to the study of the SABC newsroom culture and journalistic practice, this theoretical approach is intended to add to the ongoing debates on the future of news making in South Africa within the context of PSB. At the time of writing, there were limited studies focusing on the internal workings of the SABC newsroom based on the first-hand approach, and they existed, there were still underresearched.

In Chapter Three (3), I discuss further the study’s theoretical arguments. In sum, the theoretical framework has two pillars – each focused on the two distinct theories applied in this study. Pillar 1 discusses the field theory as predominantly applied in Case study 1 of this work. It addresses the question of newsroom culture at the SABC, while Pillar 2 discusses the public sphere theory that is used in Case study 2 and employed as a tool to understand how the SABC mediates its news bulletins. The complexity of each theory is discussed, including the various ways by which this study has operationalised them in the context of the SABC.

The chapter concludes with a synthesis of these two theoretical concepts and highlights the theoretical commonalities and points of departure between notions of the field and the public sphere. Furthermore, it highlights how this multi-method approach strengthens my analysis of newsroom culture and journalistic practice at the SABC. The review of the literature used in this work is embedded within this theoretical framework.

3.1 Analytic Framework One (1)

3.1.1 Bourdieu's critical perspectives

The likes of Schultz (2007) and others have argued in support of Bourdieu's approaches, namely, reflexivity and relationality. These two critical approaches seek to connect and to further develop the analytical procedures and practical insights offered by existing scholarship on newsrooms (*ibid*). These approaches are generally important for this work and indeed for other scholars, especially ethnographers whose goal is to understand or explore how societies, groups and individuals interact with each other within context. Below, I discuss three key concepts in Bourdieu's field approach, namely, the field, doxa/illusio, capital and habitus.

3.1.2 Key Concepts

3.1.2.1 Field

The journalistic field is presented in this work as a social space in which the journalistic game is enacted through endless encounters regarding the status and legitimacy of practices in journalism, not least the practical understanding of journalistic doxa/illusio such as newsworthiness; right of reply, impartiality, etc (Schultz, 2007 - see discussion at 3.1.2.2).

A key element of Bourdieu's field theory is presented in terms of a space, characterised by system of social positions occupied by the different groups and individuals who struggle with each other over knowledge, and exploit all kinds of power capital or resources to accrue benefits (Wacquant, 1998). In short, the 'field' is 'space' that structured in terms power relationships. The utility of this conception lies in grasping 'the relation between forms of capital and social structure' (Anheier, et al., 1995). Only then can any analysis of practices, habits and dispositions of actors or agents in a given

field be rendered meaningful (Bourdieu & Wacquant, (1992, p. 105 as cited in Anheier, et al., *ibid*).

Using the foregoing logic, ‘the journalistic field’ is a space in which ‘the journalistic game’ is played out (Schultz, 2007). Applied to the SABC, its newsrooms are the journalistic field, and the site for the journalistic game, wherein constant battle over dominant definitions of journalism and the profession’s values (Doxa) is enacted.

In analytical terms, the concept of the field allows us to conceptualise context not only by identifying the embedded institutional structures but also, importantly, by relationally mapping actors’ or agents’ social positions (the journalistic game) and the relative power dynamics between them (*ibid*). As already mentioned, the concept of the field is adopted in this work as an analytical tool to investigate the wider cultural impacts arising from the everyday work of journalists within their own setting. Indeed, there are other important sources of inspiration. For example, classical newsroom ethnography continues to offer empirical insights regarding what happens inside news organisations, particularly how the journalistic game is played by individual agents and groups within the field. This strength in classical newsroom ethnography is acknowledged, particularly the ability to document journalistic practices. However, Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology and field theory takes us further to the domain of invisible structures that either enable or constrain the practice of journalism or, in Bourdieu’s parlance, ‘the playing of the game’ (Bourdieu, 1983; Calhoun, 2003; Schultz, 2007). However, as Schultz (*ibid*) notes, one does not play the game effectively in the absence of ‘an unquestionable belief that the game is worth playing’ (Willig, 2013, p.3), and this is best shown through Bourdieu’s notion of doxa.

3.1.2.2 Doxa/Illusio

The concept of ‘doxa’ (rules of the game) is used to explain journalistic professionalism. In Bourdieu (1998), “Having a feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game” (*ibid*, 1998, as cited in Schultz, 2007, p. 192). Journalistic doxa/illusio, therefore, is the appreciation of the values that are deployed to determine what may be deemed ‘newsworthy’ or the appreciation of strategic

institutional goals of news making such as meeting deadlines (Schultz, 2007). The principles of the journalistic game are not to be questioned but believed and incorporated by agents ‘as both an inclination and a modus operandi’ (Crossley, 2001, p.83), which the player can adjust to the necessities of the game (Schultz, *ibid*; Willig, 2014, p. 6). Operationalised in my study, the journalist, denoted as the actor or agent, is ‘socialised’ in the field, herein categorised as the journalism profession. The journalist is assumed to be prepared for participation in the field as they consider the symbolic value of playing the game (*illusio*), without questioning the rules (*doxa*) through which the field is configured (Bourdieu, 1990). Of course, fields may require agents to first overcome certain barriers to entry that require implied recognition and embrace of the established norms or rules of playing the game, while agents can also adjust the rules to suit a particular context; and, suggesting that specific forms of disagreement are considered legitimate, others illegitimate (Bourdieu, 1987; Swartz, 1996). Overall, all actors or agents, be they dominant or subordinate, consent that the game and the field where the disagreement takes place is worth pursuing in the first place. In other words, all actors or agents in the field are individually invested in the preservation of the field, in spite of the disagreements about the mechanics or ways of resolving those disagreements in the ‘social domain’ (*ibid*).

According to Soloski (1989), mastering the ‘rules of the game’ is a species of capital that enables one to master what is ‘unquestionable’ as opposed to things that might not be openly discussed and contested. This requires a deeper and shared understanding of the professional values, norms, and policies which every journalist must internalise and so to apply in the game (*ibid*, p. 218). The grasp of the professional values, norms, and policies in short, represents species of capital are considered among the range of tools that one must possess in order to obtain and preserve legitimacy and power, or at the very least ‘navigate’ the field, and as already highlighted, these consist of ‘the dispositions and competence that both generate and shape action’ (Crossley, 2001, p.86). In this study, doxa/*illusion* is investigated by looking at ‘news criteria’ such as timeliness, conflict, personalisation, or prominence, right of reply, etc. (see Chapter 9 on the Codes of Practice at the SABC Newsrooms, and the thematic content analysis Chapters 10 and 11 which discuss news making at the SABC.

3.1.3 Capital

First, let us consider Bourdieu's concept of capital more broadly. In essence, Bourdieu views equates capital to resources when it is employed as a means to 'power' (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 69). Those actors that skilled at both 'accumulating' and 'reinvesting' this 'capital' are the most successful in the field (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, as cited in Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). Building on the above, journalist capital therefore relates to the competency one acquires in respect of the grasp of professional values, norms, and policies, including the performative crafts associated with journalism – such as the ability to curate content, grammatic and communicative competency, etc. Formal journalism training, professional experience, social networks, etc are all forms of journalistic capital - all function as potential tools of navigating the profession, and also obtaining and preserving legitimacy and power. They enable one to 'both generate and shape action' (Crossley, 2001, p.86). A good example relates to how leaders in institutions, editors or media managers typically 'dominate' their subordinates through deployment of their accumulated capital resources, which typically may sometimes include the 'capacity to withhold or withdraw capital' or recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, as cited in Fox, 2014). Such structural relationships between the dominant and the dominated do not require direct social interaction to enable practices to be objectified but rather are embedded in the habitus (*ibid*). However, as it may, the outcome of any relationship in the field cannot be predetermined. Rather, according to Bourdieu (1977), 'structuring structure' is presented on actors and existing social structures, in which there is the potential future characterised by the possibility of both loss and gain. In other words, capital can be taken away or increased in any agent or actor, at any time.

3.1.3.1 Capital the Relationship Between Habitus and Journalistic Capital

What is the relationship between habitus and capital in Bourdieu's concept of the field? To answer this question, it is helpful to distinguish Bourdieu's cultural capital from concept of 'human capital' that is advanced by the likes Becker (2009) and Rosen (1976). Both argue that individual possess unique set of skills and abilities which they improve or accumulate through training. This formulation presupposes that as individuals acquire training, skills and advanced education, capital accumulation also increases (Becker, 2009). However, this conception fails to account for the structuring factors in the larger environment, e.g., sluggish economy, competition for resources,

etc. For his part, Bourdieu conceptualises capital not only in terms of human attributes acquired individuals but also the way society as whole reproduces itself. His framework is located in theories of social reproduction and symbolic power which permit existence of actors

within a system of relations that are subject to change (Emirbayer, 1997). Importantly, Bourdieu stresses the role of social structure and the related restrictions, barriers and all the inequalities that are embedded in it, including the disproportionate access to institutional resources and power (Bourdieu, 1986). For Bourdieu, power is symbolic as much as it is economic and political (*ibid*). Unlike Becker (2009), Bourdieu and his notion of habitus is far removed from the anthropological expectations that position actors as rational beings, pursuing rational choices. In Bourdieu's outline of social practice (2020), individuals and groups engage in schemes or plans but not as wilful maximisers of scarce resources necessary for one to attain desired outcomes. Their choices are 'tacit, practical, and dispositional', reproducing the 'relational interactions' that connect to their accumulated capital, but not in a predetermined way (Bourdieu, 2020); but organised hierarchically in terms of 'the structure of the distribution of the species of power' or 'species of capital' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 119). This applies to journalists, regardless of the personal journalistic capital they may embody, which manifests in various forms. Put differently, in Bourdieu's relational theory, the actors or agents, regardless of their capital, are both potential losers and winners, depending on the objective situation at a given time and on the amount of capital they have accumulated over time. The story of the SABC8 epitomises Fox (2014)'s synthesis of Bourdieu's relational view of interactions. Whereas senior management initially attempted to impose their own will ('induce an effect', *ibid*) on their newsroom subordinates by virtue of their institutional capacity (accumulated symbolic and editorial capital) – using the same to take away the accumulated professional 'symbolic capital' from subordinates (suspending dissenting journalists) – with the subsequent avalanche of public uproar that came the media fraternity in support of the dissenting SABC8 journalists epitomised Bourdieu's articulation of the 'dominator' becoming the 'dominated'. To use a metaphor: "The hunter became the hunted".

3.1.3.2 Professionalism as Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital is a specie of journalistic capital (Stack, 2010), the same as academic capital is the symbolic capital of the field of academics (Willig, 2013, p. 9; see also

Bourdieu, 2005). It is a form of power that ‘journalist... mobilize within and across their fields to be seen as having knowledge that is worthy of recognition’ (Stack, *ibid*, p. 108). Though not always apparent as power, symbolic power imposes ‘legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience, or the services of others’ (Swartz, 1996, p. 77). According to Willig (*ibid*), having journalistic capital suggests that one is recognised as credible by one’s own peers, and this comes with ‘having a good position internally in the journalistic hierarchy’ (Willig, *ibid*, p. 9). Following on Bourdieu’s perspective on relational interactions and capital, we thus can infer that journalist inside the SABC newsrooms (or any other), accommodate their roles and associations based on the individual position in the field by internalising expectations and relationships that are relevant for operating in the context of their everyday work environment and by accumulating and monopolising capital (symbolic and other) grounded on the specific field rules of the game (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017).

As with each field, including the journalistic field, symbolic capital ‘evolves’ around a set of professional ‘roles’, ‘rules’, and ‘relationships’ (Schultz, *ibid*; Willig, 2014). In this work, therefore, professionalism is understood in terms of the accumulated legitimacy in respect to a set of roles, rules, values, norms, and relationships related to the broader profession of journalism, which might appear obvious and objective merely because they coincide or conform with common structures in the journalistic field. It is posited in this study that the application of professional attributes or claims of professionalism to one’s practice primarily serves to reinforce its legitimacy in the symbolically ordered hierarchy. Therein enters Bourdieu’s concept of disposition, in which journalists as agents begin to pursue interests that are often taken for granted but are ingrained in them by the rules of the game. In return, they gain symbolic capital that acts as a ‘coin’ of exchange in interactions with other social agents/journalists. Here, Bourdieu notes instances where agents compete with one another for symbolic benefits often presented as degrees of ‘insights’, ‘knowledge of a situation’, ‘who one knows’, ‘access to certain places’, etc. - all of which might bring significant competitive advantage to one in relation to peers. Linking with Miller (1997, p. 155) these individual professional distinctions ought to be recognised mutually as ‘investments open to calculation’ because ‘social hierarchy tends to be reducible to these... linear strands, through which capital can be exploited in social positioning’ (Miller, *ibid*, p. 155). Inversely, professionalism can also be used as a control mechanism. According to

Ahva (2010), ‘it is easier to guide and control a journalist who acts according to the common professional norms than a journalist who does not (Ahva, *ibid*; p. 75). ‘Thus, professionalism also acts as a personalized self-regulation system’ (Solsoki 1997 as cited Ahva, *ibid*; p. 75).

However, in professional journalism, it is argued that this mastering of the ‘rules of the game’ constitutes an ideology that holds both the individual and profession coherent (Deuze 2005; Evetts 2003); in as much as professionalism also establishes other widely held patterns of behaviour and dispositions in the field or social domain. Thus, importantly, the application of the rules must be done properly; ‘appropriately... at the right time, in the right place, and in the right way’ (Crossley, 2001, p. 83). In a range of scholarship on journalism practice and professionalism, it is therefore argued that it is the very existence of such an ideological thrust that allows the individual journalist to ‘play the game’ (Ahva, *ibid*; Solsoki, 1997; Hanitzsch 2007).

3.1.3.3 Capital and Relational Power

Evoking Bourdieu, this thesis contends that the exercise of relational power at the SABC requires legitimisation and that such is characterised by the logic of self-interest, which, according to Bourdieu’s field theory, underlies all social practices in the cultural domain.

‘Power’, according to Bourdieu, is symbolic and is characterised by the active role played by the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices which structure the boundaries within which relationships, position taking, and power relations are maintained (Schultz, 2007; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Applied journalist at the SABC and drawing from Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘field, one can infer that each enters the newsroom with various kinds of capital, for example, social capital or social networks. They also bring along cultural capital and other dispositions that encompass knowing the set of rules regarding how to behave and what to do, with whom, and in different situations. This defines what is ‘thinkable’ as distinct from what is ‘sayable’ – a contradiction that emerges when actors are challenged by different contexts (Bourdieu, 1980 as cited Moncrieffe, 2006, p.25-37). By themselves, some actors are unable to change their social worlds. They function in ambivalent ways, perpetrating certain ways of doing while hoping to change the same (*ibid*). According to Bourdieu theory, this “can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one

[field] and express complicity in another” (Moncrieffe 2006, p. 37 as cited in Skleparis, 2017, p. 117). This is because playing the game ‘efficiently’, requires ‘legitimation’ from the other players in the field, and therefore it is relational. In June 2016, the year that my field work at the SABC started, Jimi Matthews, then SABC’s Acting CEO resigned from the broadcaster²². At that point, it had become apparent to him that he could no longer ‘play the game’. Matthews’s resignation was prompted by changes to editorial policy at the SABC, specifically the controversial directive not to air footage of violent protest action. On Twitter, Matthews shared a picture of his letter of resignation, which in part read:

‘For many months I have compromised the values that I hold dear under the mistaken belief that I could be more effective inside the SABC than outside...What is happening at the SABC is wrong and I can no longer be part of it’

The editorial directive was heavily criticised by the media fraternity and rejected by a group of journalists led by the SABC8. Matthews joined the list of dissenters. According to Bourdieu (1991, p. 245 as cited in Skleparis, 2017), actors who are experiencing similar situations, often coalesce among themselves. ‘It is within this context that people at the bottom of a symbolic power system can resist domination and generate the contents, practices, and affects’ (Skleparis, ibid, p. 117). But as far as the actor or agent is concerned, subconsciously, and arbitrarily, the default position is to assume the logic of self-interest, which, in Bourdieu, is present in all social practices, particularly those in the cultural domain. This logic of ‘self-interest’ is in fact ‘disinterest’ which is ‘misrecognised’ (Swartz, 1996, p. 77) – put mildly ‘turning a blind eye’ and through selective memory and retention, acting as though something has not happened, does not exist, or is not heard.

3.1.3.4 Misrecognition as Distribution Of Capital And Legitimation

‘Misrecognition’ in the field is an important concept for Bourdieu and one that is highly visible in the context of the SABC newsroom culture. The concept denotes ‘denial’ or selective embrace of the ‘economic’, ‘political’, and other ‘interests present in a set of

²² <https://cfo.co.za/articles/sabc-acting-ceo-jimi-matthews-resigns/>

practices' (Swartz, 1996, p. 77). In the Marxist tradition, 'misrecognition' is akin to 'false consciousness' (Swartz, *ibid*). 'The misrecognition of the real foundations of differences and of the principles of their perpetuation is what makes for the fact that the social world is perceived not as the site of conflict or competition between groups endowed with antagonistic interests but as a 'social order' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, p. 298).

In the context of the SABC – section 4.1.3 of the SABC Editorial Code, the BCCSA and Press Code, all agree that due care and responsibility must be exercised in reporting, programming, and publishing content that contains gratuitous violence, brutality, explicit content, violent crime, and all forms of discrimination. Yet, when the conceptual clash erupted between COO Motsoeneng and the SABC8, in all defences by the latter and in judicial judgements, it can be argued that the statutory references to violence were 'misrecognised'. Linked to Bourdieu's argument; like all symbolic practices, misrecognition works to 'deflect attention from the interested character of practices and thereby contribute to their enactment as disinterested pursuits' (Swartz, *ibid*). Bourdieu, as referenced in Swartz, therefore maintains that actions and resources accumulate symbolic power, acceptability, or legitimacy in social fields to the degree that 'they become separated from underlying material interests' and as such 'misrecognised as representing disinterested forms of activities and resources' (*ibid*, p. 77). According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (2013), individuals and groups who can benefit from the transformation of self-interest into disinterest obtain 'symbolic capital'. In this way, symbolic capital is therefore 'denied capital', as it hides the existing 'interested' relations associated with it, conferring them 'legitimation' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, *ibid*).

3.1.3.5 Invisible Capital

This work shows that whenever the SABC newsrooms have faced changing circumstances, the existing staff compliment has always succeeded in accomplishing tasks while working with news-making constraints. We can assume that the embedded structural systems such as management as well as the routines journalists use to achieve functional ends for the SABC partly account for the success. However, research has yet to account for the invisible capital that is embodied in every individual journalist at the SABC. This invisible capital is exemplified by how, for instance, changes in senior

editorial management that took place following the appointment of Phathiswa Magopeni in 12th of February 2018 as the new head of news, and her subsequent controversial and disputed axing in January 2022 following a disciplinary hearing. Both her appointing ad departure resulted in the unleashing of fresh professional identities and practices amongst the rank and file. Rhetorically, there was indeed notable frustration among some employees, but empirically, journalists also seized the opportunity to display resilience, while others displayed greater initiative that was ordinarily not possible or permitted.

‘I miss my editor, but work must go on. We know the ropes’ (Fieldnote 16)

The question that arises is: What does this experience tell us about the field of journalism, and newsroom culture at the SABC? Despite the avalanche of departures by veteran journalists, those who remained took on the responsibility of ensuring continuity and progress while senior management worked behind the scenes to institute a replacement of the departed senior managers. Thus, in terms of the SABC news broadcasts, there was never a day when the broadcaster failed to present the scheduled bulletins. The existing journalists ‘kept the lights on’. What this suggests for the study of the SABC is that while the focus on journalism practice at the SABC has primarily targeted a few internal factors and actors, e.g., newsroom dissonance, the SABC8 and COO Motsoeneng, the embodiment of journalistic capital is often mis-recognised in the broader journalistic community inside the SABC newsrooms. This is therefore an invitation to explore the entire ‘culture’ at the broadcaster, particularly to expand the internal voices within the internal community of practice. Journalism practice at the SABC is not a mechanical process. Rather, news making at the SABC is a product of a broad range of internal activities, strategies, and beliefs, all of which interact relationally with each other and in ways that connect to the larger and constantly evolving external body politic in the country and the world. This is one area that makes my study on the SABC valuable in the sense that it contributes to further understanding of how decisions are made and enforced regarding which story makes it to the final news bulletin. The field theory of Bourdieu is helpful because it shows how to map embedded power that is applied regularly, indirectly, and not explicitly. Indeed, a journalist who knows the ‘rules of the game’ can anticipate institutional boundaries, and as such agency is reflected through self-censorship or other positions in the field.

Journalists may accurately plead independence or reject implicit control overtures. These kinds of dispositions amount to self-policing and are more impactful than direct censorship. Equally, the same applies to the structuring effect on the field. If, the larger social structure, its goals, and policies, and how power is expressed within it influence the behaviour of media institutions, we can assume that the beliefs of journalists and their routine assumptions are equally influenced by the embedded institutional norms and structures located within the formal and informal journalistic field. However, it is a multiway street in which structure and agency interact not in a binary way but in a fluid and dialectical manner. While scholars such as Foucault have presented ‘power’ as omnipresent or present everywhere and transcending agency or structure, in Bourdieu’s conception, power is symbolically and culturally formed and continuously re legitimised by through the interaction of agency and structure (Wacquant, 2005). This happens primarily through what Bourdieu calls ‘habitus’ (*ibid*). Journalistic habitus reflects a particular mode of ‘playing the news game’, the way each player (actor) opts to position one’s self in the game, or, according to Willig (2013) the embodied ‘feel for the game’. Each journalist can deploy into the game, the accumulated journalistic capitals, i.e., ‘resources that are recognised in the field and by the other agents in the field’ (Willig, *ibid.*, p.3). The newsroom contestations relating ‘selection’ stories that make it to the diary and ultimately for broadcast (what is selected); and the ‘presentation’ (how it is framed), all but present opportunities for the interplay between habitus i.e., and structure (Karppinen (2007).

3.1.4 *Habitus*

In Pierre Bourdieu’s formulation, habitus is a set of norms, values, dispositions, reflexes, and forms of behavioural attitudes that individuals and social groups acquire through acting in society. Central to this concept is the idea that the habitus of an individual is shaped by their social, cultural, and economic history, as well as their life experiences. Oversimplified, it can be inferred that those in more powerful social, cultural, and economic positions are equipped with a different habitus from those that occupy less advantages in the field. In each situation, the habitus largely explains why some actors or agents legitimise the field, while others delegitimise it, but this is not a fixed configuration. According to Bourdieu, habitus is not a product of agency or the free will of an individual or social group, neither is it determined by social structures – rather it is a kind of interplay between agency and structure over time (Bourdieu, 1984).

This conceptualization of the habitus is operationalised at the SABC to examine the way journalists, individually and collectively, including their principals perceive and react to their social space or field, here delineated as the journalistic field.

3.1.4.1 Habitus and Newsroom Capital

In Bourdieu, habitus, and capital shape the conduct of the actors or agents in the field, causing each actor or agent to gravitate more towards positions that best reflect their internalised beliefs and attitudes. What emerges from this view is that the habitus and relationships in the field are also dependent upon capital (Bourdieu, 1990). Applied to my study, individual journalists, and news organisations, through the weight of their significant resources – their wealth (economic capital), access to power elites (social capital), degrees of academic qualifications and skills held by the actors or agents (cultural capital), and so on – impose on others positions as the legitimate forms. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). These resources are deployed to function as status symbols and reputation, or put plainly, used as forms of symbolic capital that has the power to impose an effect in the field (Bourdieu, 1996).

3.1.4.2 The Journalistic Habitus

For Bourdieu, the habitus an agent's habitus is constitutive of ‘dispositions’, ‘perceptions’, and ‘attitudes’ towards their social world. In the context of the field of journalism, habitus represents the physical embodiment of cultural capital – as manifest in editors and journalists, through their internalised habits (routine practices), competencies, and dispositions they possess based on their lived experiences. ‘The mud in our feet from somewhere’ is the applicable metaphor. According to Crossley (2001), ‘habitus is an active residue or sediment of his past that functions within his present, shaping his perception, thought, and action and thereby moulding social practice in a regular way.’ (Ibid, p. 82) ... but also ‘below the level of consciousness and language; and beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by will’ (Ibid, pg. 83).

3.1.4.2.1 Behaviour of Individual Agents and Social Practice

Noting that dispositions can sometimes be shared by individuals with similar backgrounds, Bourdieu warns that their individual actions should not be aggregated to understand their social practices. Bourdieu argues that certain relations transcend the social space of agents in a manner that creates shared dispositions among actors or agents. This goes to highlight the temporality of each relationship within the field – a phenomenon that plays out explicitly in the SABC8 debacle. For instance, the case of

Suna Venter when she enjoins her voice with that of her senior managers (Thandeka Gqubule and Foeta Krige) in the newsroom tussle with the Head of News, Simon Tebele. In his book, the SABC8, Krige described the scene as follows:

Suna's soft voice struggled to fill the huge conference room. 'And as junior as I am, please record my voice as dissenting on this one', she said. (Krige, 2019, p.49)

The above scene clearly illustrates Bourdieu's proposal of a dialectic or fluidity between the agency of individual actors or agents and the structures in the broader field of cultural production. In this way, operationalising Bourdieu, the practice of journalists is impacted by complementary of both structure and agency, in which, journalists influence journalistic behaviour (themselves) on the one hand, and, on the other, they have the capacity to influence the social structures in the field/s they occupy.

This view informs my thesis, in that in spite of their dispositions and beliefs, journalists are viewed as both enabled and constrained by impersonal structural factors located in the broader interactions with the journalistic field but also by the prevailing factors that may include not only the existing political economy structures, including the range of publics (institutional, civic and otherwise) or sometimes by individual citizens who contest authority and control of the SABC, and by default, the broader public sphere. Applied to the SABC, journalists at the broadcaster are assumed to embody 'relative' agency to influence what stories to include or exclude in news and to shape the framing of the news content based on their dispositions – the term 'relative' being the operative word. Specifically, therefore, it is by mapping how SABC journalists perceive their own practice and role internally within the institution, understanding the prevailing doxa and the kinds of symbolic capital that play out within their field, that we can begin to evolve a better view of the broadcaster, and to make inferences on the general question regarding the 'silent taken for granted understanding of the logic of the field' (Schultz, 2007) but also their relationship with the larger field? It is by following this logic that Bourdieu draws a 'distinction between ... interactions and structural relations ... constitutive of a field' (Fox, 2014) and, in the process, illustrates the fluidity of agency and structure and the micro and macro levels (Shultz; 2007; Willig, 2014). This presupposes that the game can be played from different positions all the time and that different dispositions point to different ways of internalising the game (*ibid*).

3.1.4.2.2 Structure vs Agency Debate

The ‘structure’ versus ‘agency’ debate relates to determining whether the actions of individuals are self-driven or dictated by social structure. As already highlighted, in Bourdieu’s conception, structure and agency have a dialectical relationship; Schultz (2007) loosely uses the metaphor that both are ‘two sides of the same coin’. Likewise, this dissertation is careful not to attribute interactions to social structures; rather, it is cued by Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology, which suggests that structures and constituent components evolve in everyday life. According to Bourdieu, structures are temporal and durable at the same time, i.e., they evolve through practice over time (Bourdieu, 1990), and habitus is ‘the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product’ (1990b, p. 56 as cited in Fox, 2014). These constituents serve to connect the past with the future but without necessarily imposing any rigidity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This research takes the cue from Bourdieu’s rejection of the idea of an all-structuring social arrangement. It assumes the view that journalists at the SABC have the free will to make take positions in matters of opinion based on their own free thinking, by may enabled or constrained by the various forms of capital they may possess or not possess (Bourdieu, ibid). In this regard, some theorists have stressed the potential of the individual to ‘create and recreate the world’. In essence, there is no unified theory characterising the relationship or interactions between structure and agency, notwithstanding the ongoing debates and disagreements among scholars. What exists are scholastic attempts towards theoretical and methodological synthesis, but even then, there is no agreement on nuances. This presents a challenge for ethnographic researchers, not least for this thesis. However, this study adopts Bourdieu’s clear departure from the proposition that there exists a dichotomy between the structure and agency or social reality and the individual. The perceived dichotomy is in fact artificial, according to Bourdieu (2007), who has argued that it is misleading to express the two concepts of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ in terms of fixed arrangements that are derived from one set of circumstances or actual situations (ibid). Instead, Bourdieu creates a synthesis of the two approaches in which he argues that agency, often expressed through thoughts that individuals present, is an element of structure ‘irrespective of their consciousness and will’. In this way, he argues that social reality actually consists of the ‘innumerable’, yet seamless and flexible ‘acts of interpretation’, in which ‘people jointly construct lines of interaction’ regardless of the ‘set of relations and forces that impose themselves upon the agents’ (Wacquant, 2008: 266-267).

3.1.4.2.3 Autonomy in the Structure vs Agency Debate

In some of the scholarship on journalistic field, the agency and structure debate are discussed in relation to socialisation against autonomy (Elder-Vass, 2010). The concept of autonomy is one of Bourdieu's underexamined logics on which his thinking about literal fields, habitus, doxa, and capital intersect. For Bourdieu, fields become constituted through a historical process of atomisation and differentiation (Speller, 2011). The starting point of atomisation and differentiation is the existence of actors or agents who are entitled to give informed judgements in certain domains based on their social and institutional accredited status as specialists. The social authority that these specialists acquire underpins their justification of the atomisation of their activity and explains the gap that results between them and laypeople. The rise of self-regulating specialists or individuals with an accredited status such as in the journalistic field, it is argued, arises from such differentiation of social spaces, and media is among them, in the same way that judges and the judiciary are deemed autonomous from the other organs of state and the public in general.

3.1.4.2.4 Autonomy as A By-Product of Structuring Structures

In Pierre Bourdieu's outline of the theory of practice and his concept of the field, 'autonomy' does not exist independently, but relative to other conditions. 'It is not a given, but a historical conquest, endlessly having to be undertaken anew' from time to time (Bourdieu, 1996). For Bourdieu, social structures are unconsciously assimilated into the habitus, while the practices of agents objectify externally the interactions between agents into social relations in the field (*ibid*). The suggestion here is that 'external structures' play a role in the differentiations, gaps and resulting interactions in the social domain. By the same logic, therefore, the perceived autonomy of actors (in the case of my study, journalistic autonomy in practice) ought not be treated in a simplistic and reductionist fashion but must necessarily account for the organising role of 'external structures', i.e., structuring structures such as the 'economy', 'politics' and most importantly the 'dominant beliefs held by the actors and embedded in the social domain' or in Bourdieu's parlance, the 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions' that function to organise the field' (*ibid*). Vice versa, autonomy must also account for the 'externalised practices and representations' of the actors, which can be objectively adapted in interactions with other actors.

In 1996, Bourdieu presented two television lectures in which he argued that there is far less 'autonomy, or freedom' on television, than is believed (Szeman, 2000²³; Bourdieu, 1998). In his view, the hyper-commercialisation of television in pursuit of 'higher ratings' and 'advertising revenue', imposed a kind of "invisible censorship" in the same way that a statutory authority would through political intervention (Szeman, *ibid.*, p. 2). Bourdieu highlighted the routine practices by television producers such as the preinterviewing of actors in coverage in public affairs and news programmes so as to ensure effective sound bites, and the resultant emphasis on the sensational and the spectacular, which invariably leads to the exclusion from participation of people with complex or nuanced views. In this way, Bourdieu laments the 'moderator decides who speaks, and he hands out little tokens of prestige'²⁴. Szeman, I. (2000), in her review of 'On Television', identifies personal stakes held in the field by the individual journalist and the fact that for Bourdieu, the effect of all this is a kind of social 'construction' of reality – arising from 'transposable dispositions' – which can reinforce or undermine certain notions, 'mobilise or demobilise people, by, for example, making them think that there is a trend in one direction rather than another (like increased crime) or that most people are concerned about one problem (like nuclear power) rather than another (like growing poverty)' (Bourdieu, *ibid*). Bourdieu's 'on Television' analysis is built around the concept of habitus, indicating that social actors evolve ways and means of engagement that are designed to align with the structures of in their social spaces. These structures include but are not limited to shared journalistic conventions - norms and values regarding the newsworthiness of a story and are embedded in news institutions to ensure the efficient production of news.

3.1.5 Conclusion

In summary, Bourdieu's field theory and reflexive sociology sketch how actors within social spaces compete for symbolic capital and its associated power. According to Bourdieu, social spaces are systematically ordered according to distinct fields, each uniquely characterised by principles governing conduct, hierarchies, and power structures that are understood by all participants. Bourdieu argued that actors in each

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*. Trans. Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson. New York: The New Press, 1998. 104 pgs.

²⁴ <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/first/b/bourdieu-television.html>

field master the rules of the field (**doxa**), which enables them to operate efficiently within that field. This he posited can result in different degrees of symbolic **capital** and a resultant influence for each actor. Bourdieu emphasised the role of **habitus**, and the various ways through which it accords advantage or disadvantage. The key take-aways in Bourdieu's conception of the field lies with the exposition of the arbitrary nature of practice, the positions individuals take and success or failure within a field. These field concepts are helpful for exploring journalism practice inside the SABC – characterised in this study as the journalistic field.

Bourdieu, like Habermas, acknowledges the uniqueness of society and its features of deliberation and communication. However, Bourdieu' starting point is to illustrate that such deliberation and communication happens as highlighted in Habermas, in the context of an interplay of activities, dispositions and structures (Benson, 2009).

For Bourdieu, however, unlike in Habermas' universal public sphere, it is critical to account for the unique features of each field and how it or they relate with other fields; because each 'field' has its unique approach to practice that is focused primarily on sustaining in society a specific understanding or vision of the social world (Benson, 2009). Of course, notably, Habermas does reformulate his original conceptions in his later studies. For example, he makes the distinction between the "lifeworld" and "system." His view is that the challenges of late capitalism are a result of the "colonization of the lifeworld" by a configured social order. In his subsequent works, Habermas argued that the public sphere is part of the 'lifeworld' in which individual actors exists; and the "system" refers to the market economy and the state apparatus which is assumed to structure everything that happens in the 'lifeworld' (Habermas, 1989). Importantly, Habermas, as in Bourdieu's conception of the overlapping fields, rejects any analysis which does not recognise the mutuality between social actions and social structures in the context for political power. This view is shared with Bourdieu, but with an added nuance in which the various mechanisms in the public sphere that make particular outcomes in the social domain possible are identified using three interconnected analytical field theory concepts, field, habitus, and capital. Like Habermas, but with more focus on the economy than on the state, Bourdieu highlights the dialectic between lifeworld and system by showing how the latter, represented by the autonomy of the fields is compromised by the system of norms, dispositions, and forms of capital; thereby impacting the rational debate and critique that may otherwise

be generated in the ‘lifeworld’. Bourdieu’s thought translates to a theory of social reproduction as a process that operates through dispositions, but in a manner that is not obvious when it happens, or sometimes mistaken for something else, while his defence of the existence of fields resonates with Habermas’ own resituated critique of the public sphere. Both authors view Lifeworld and system in terms of prototypes of the communicative forms and channels of a properly democratic society (Crossley, 2004)

Next, I discuss PSB from the point of view the public sphere theory of Habermas (Analytic Framework Two). This theoretical framework focuses specifically on the public sphere notions of deliberation, inclusion, representation, and informed citizenship in the mediation of pluralist politics, which are the chosen tools to explore PSB claims at the SABC. Below, I outline some of the arguments drawn from Habermas concerning the validity of using the public sphere as a tool for studying PSB.

3.2 Analytic Framework Pillar Two (2)

3.2.1 PSB and the Public Sphere Theories: Normative Assumptions

3.2.2 Introduction

The concept of PSB dates to 1927 when BBC was established to cater to citizens independent of government and economic powers. The early model was funded directly by citizens through a statutory licence fee with a mandate to cater for the public, especially with adequate, impartial, and the best information available so as to promote democratic citizenship. This as with the SABC, assigns a prominent and crucial role to PSB Current Affairs and News programming (Orgeret 2005). However, in the digital and hypercommercial age, the PSB concept has become increasingly ambiguous and contested. For example, content production is no longer confined to radio and television but now permeates all possible platforms, including the internet. The funding models have also become diversified, depending on which part of the world it is practised in. While programming was initially idealised in terms of ‘public interest’ that is not constrained both political and commercial demands, today, such positions are debatable in scholarship and in practice (Larsen, 2014).

3.2.3 Characteristics and Mechanisms of PSB

Scholars and PSB advocates such as Larsen, H. (2014) and others generally agree that there is no unified definition of the PSB since its practice varies from one country to

another depending on the obtaining political, technological, and economic conditions in the specific location. There are scholars who argued that PSB has similar attributes to the normative public sphere. To an extent, this work applies some of the arguments in scholarship that suggest that PSB helps to sustain the public sphere since it aspires towards its normative principles. In Case study two of this work, attempt is made to address PSB in relation to the SABC claims and statutory framework. The study explores how the SABC mediates current affairs and news through the lens of public sphere principles such as representation, inclusion, and informed citizenship. The way the SABC conducts its news coverage of politics and current affairs is theorised in terms of journalistic conventions that are located within the notion of the public sphere. McKee (2005) states that ‘the concept of the public sphere is a metaphor that we use to think about the way that information and ideas circulate in large societies’ (McKee, ibid., p 4). Below, I provide a historical outline of the concept of the public sphere and some of the arguments for and against its validity.

3.2.4 The Public Sphere: An Overview

In his classic thesis, which later developed into the work titled ‘The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere’, Habermas (1962) described the historic rise and decline of a public sphere in Western European nation-states. In his conception, Habermas outlined the public sphere as realm of our social life in which ‘unrestricted’ public debate is enabled, and something approximating public opinion could be formed (Frazer, 2014, p. 59), with access guaranteed for all citizens to associate and deliberate on mutual matters (ibid.).

Habermas’ public sphere is distinct from the notion of the ‘public’, connoting groups or individuals who gather in a social space – suggesting the public sphere cannot be characterised merely as a crowd or gathering. Rather, as a key feature of the public sphere, participants engage with one another in an ‘unrestricted fashion’, i.e., the freedom to access the public sphere is guaranteed, as is in the freedom to associate, hold and publish opinions, without hinderance from central authorities. Below I present select arguments on the shared aims between the notions of the public sphere and PSB. These conceptualisations are extracted from Habermas’ theory of the topic, which positions the public sphere concept as a valid tool for exploring PSB.

3.2.4.1 Normative Arguments in Favour of PSB

As with several scholars before, this thesis suggests that it is possible for PSB to sustain the public sphere values of deliberation, inclusion, representation, and informed citizenship and that indeed PSB provides one of the most important realisations of the normative public sphere (Ramsey, 2017). In Habermas, the public sphere is a ‘space for rational and universalistic politics’ (Garnham, 1986, as cited in Moe & Syvertsen, 2009, p. 41). PSB that free from direct state or market interference is highly suited to objectify the public sphere (*ibid*). Building on Habermas, Scannell, as cited in Moe & Syvertsen, 2009, argued that PSB is possibly the only way by which informed citizenship through sharing of common knowledge as a public good for all could be sustained (*ibid*). Curran (1991) concurred – suggesting that the British PSB, despite its historical flaws, had nonetheless epitomised the ideal example of Habermas’s articulation of the public sphere. Curran posited that the practice of the BBC was nearer to Habermas’ formulation of reasoned discourse, particularly its normative commitment to the idea of ‘disinterested professionalism’, typified by efforts aimed at journalistic values like fairness, objectivity, impartiality, and carefully balancing opposing viewpoints and uncensored news and current affairs talk shows (*ibid*). Indeed, similar claims have been made with respect to the SABC.

3.2.4.2 Appraising Habermas: The Case of Multiple Public Spheres

Notably, Habermas resituated some his own arguments, but still holds that the bourgeois public sphere of the early 19th century offers a starting point for conceptualising contemporary societies and its communicative actions (Habermas, 1997; Habermas, 1989). The list of scholars who have meaningfully appraised Habermas’ outline of the public sphere includes Susen (2011). Her critique demonstrates that while Habermas’s offers useful analysis of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere in the early modern period, the theory does not adequately address public spheres in contemporary societies. Susen (*ibid*) is particularly critical of Habermas’s failure to account for emergence of social classes in social life into multiple public spheres with varying experiences and argues that not all participants possess the same level of commitment, means and information to engage in all debates (*ibid*). In respect to South Africa, for instance, and in adopting Habermas’ original notion of the public sphere in the South African context, critical analysis must acknowledge the distinct social

positions on key issues arising from the unequal distribution of economic and political resources.

The SABC current affairs and news coverage, owing to the broadcaster's statutory PSB status, is ideally suited to characterise this country's social structure, which structure typically presents huge social and economic disparities between social groups. However, linking PSB to the public sphere theory presents several challenges. For example, while acknowledging that Habermas' original conception does in many ways offer useful insights, his universalist notion of the early public sphere is not sufficient as a tool to understand the public norms or ideas on all aspects of a society like South Africa which is confronted by the challenge of multiple public spheres with distinct interests and ideological complexity. For Susen (*ibid*), the context to which norms are applied or accounted for is very important, noting the multiple configurations of social structures in modern societies that has arisen as a result of the gradual differentiation of social life, which in turn has led to the proliferation of multiple public spheres (Susen, 2011). As seen, Habermas' idea of a singular public sphere is contested among several critical social theorists. Specifically, Susen (*ibid*), Garnham (2007), and others have rejected Habermas' idea of a universal communicative action, arguing specifically, that its 'inclination towards agreement' is over rational. These scholars argue that the latter generally denies the basic and conflict -ridden character of politics whenever it ignores significant other potential contributors from public deliberation and disregards the different obtaining modes and registers that public actors adopt 'to express and debate their opinions' (Garnham, *ibid*, pg. 210; Pantzerhielm, 2016). In this way, critical scholars maintain that Habermas fails to acknowledge some of the complexities and contradictions inherent in the production 'of meaning' as well as 'the concrete social settings and cultural resources at work' (Dahlgren, 1991, pg. 6). The earlier work of Garnham (1986) outlines several omissions in Habermas' conception of the public sphere, ranging from his outline of the institutions that reproduce public deliberations, including mass media, while Jakubowicz (1997) points to the omission of any public body that can potentially contribute to the fostering of 'public opinion' (pg. 155). These omissions are compounded, for example, whenever individuals and groups in society coalesce around one public sphere or when united and integrated on the common values of the social order, whereas according to Jakubowicz (1990), the more divided society becomes, 'the greater the likelihood of the various groups within it creating

institutions of will and opinion formation constituting different public spheres' (pg. 195), in which different positions are facilitated to contest the dominant social arrangement, regardless of whether or not the social order is organised around one or more public spheres (*ibid*). Jakubowicz (1990) aptly sums up the idea of different and sometimes overlapping public spheres. 'Ideas circulating within the different public spheres are likely to overlap to some degree, while other public spheres are likely to merge into one' (p. 195 – 196).

3.2.4.2.1 Habermas Resituated

Much to Habermas's credit, he himself admitted that the bourgeois public sphere is in some instances exclusionary, particularly in relation to historical divisions of class division, class politics, and gender. By so conceding, Habermas prepared the ground for deepening his own thoughts and, by extension, allowed for the resituating of his public sphere concept to include a range of publics (Susem, 2011; Garnham, 1986-2007; Jakubowicz, 1990-1997). Here and throughout his argument, Habermas insisted on the validity of a universal public sphere – even as he conceded that it was constrained. Furthermore, he insisted on evoking the principle of a universal communication ethic and democratic frameworks that could be deployed to account for the complexity and challenges of the modern public sphere, which include media access, participation, representation and deliberation or lack thereof. Borrowing from this conception, the journalistic practice at the SABC and its Current Affairs and News output is required by the Broadcasting Charter to relay information, values, and diverse points of views and to facilitate the participation of a range public participants in order that effective public deliberation can occur. Deliberation, according in Dahlberg (2001), is a verbal interchange of ideas and reciprocal critique of normative positions that are supported with reasons rather than merely asserted. Regardless of whether the information is true, it should still be backed up by reasoned justifications and visible sources so that people can validate such information in cases of doubt and uncertainty (*ibid*). In Case Study Two (2) of this work, the results of the sampled SABC newscasts and current affairs programming are presented to address questions relating to how the SABC mediates news from the perspective of PSB that linked to the public sphere and specifically how the SABC mediated pluralists' politics during the 2016 local government elections; and how the issue land was presented in the SABC news texts. Notably, and as indicated earlier, critical theory scholars have taken issue with the idealised conception of the

public sphere theory as the best canon to facilitate deliberation among social constituencies, specifically between state, the economy and society broadly. The critique of Habermas is that he tended to ignore the evident coexistent expansion in the form of the nonbourgeoisie public sphere that operates ‘alongside and in opposition’ to the bourgeois public sphere (Garnham 1992, p.359). As a result, journalism practice that solely focused on the unrevised ‘bourgeois’ public sphere or liberal conceptions of the role of PSB risked not only excluding other significant public spheres from the picture (Susen, 2011; Garnham, 1992) and in fact worked to consolidate the dominant positions within the bourgeois public sphere considering, paradoxically, that ‘it promotes a discourse of universal interests of human beings, while in practice serving the particular interests of the dominant groups in society’ (Susen, 2011, p.16). Thus, every time an interlocutor is included in a news or current affairs story, the public is viewing someone’s version of reality or exposed to the interests of a particular social constituency, not the public as a whole. Whatever is broadcasted, much more will have been left out. The issue, its framing, and the actor in coverage would have been selected from an enormous number of alternatives that the editors and their media organisations would have decided were less interesting for the viewing public. However, such a public sphere touts emancipation and universality of access while underestimating the significance of the repressive features and systematically excluding other ‘collective spaces created and shaped by other social groups, whose existence and influence play a pivotal role in the construction of modern public life’ (*ibid*). The sociological effect of such a public sphere is that it reflects in its discourses the hierarchical power relations in the wider society, including the ideological thrust of public discourses that are entrenched in way that material resources are distributed or shared in society (Susen, 2011). In short, therefore, and related to Case study two of my work, critical theorists argue that any focus on the public sphere that conceptualises itself in terms a ‘communicative realm of rational-critical intersubjectivity’ must also aim to understand the real influence of ‘interest-laden hierarchies on the constitution of communicative interactions in stratified societies’ (Susen, 2011, p. 20; Susen, 2018; Calhoun, Ed., 1993; Garnham, 2007). With respect to the SABC, there have been numerous calls for the broadcaster to become inclusive, participatory, and representative, unlike the state instrument of social control that it once was before 1994 when the new dispensation officially started.

3.2.5 Dumbing Down and Celebration of News

The problems with the practice of PSB globally widespread, particularly on the issue of the ‘commodification’ the material broadcast texts generated and the resultant deviation from the ‘public service’ ethos. While some scholars have argued that the BBC and its Reithian model remain a good yardstick for PSB, others have documented evidence of complicit conduct by the broadcaster in practices that undermine deliberation and opinion formation. Indeed, scholars have documented instances wherein the BBC is identified with what Habermas has characterised as ‘the simplification of complex matters, and the vivid polarisation of conflicts’ (Habermas, 2006: 26-27) – emanating from the greater marketisation of media and the resultant limits imposed on ‘public communication’, especially the kind of journalism that is expected of a statutory PSB such as the BBC. However, as argued in much of the literature discussed in this study, an ‘ideal’ PSB – one that is committed to ‘public interest’ – remains much closer the idea a ‘normative public sphere’, while the latter also remains critically a very useful theoretical account for sustaining arguments in favour of an independent PSB (Ramsey, 2010; Ramsey, 2017; Garnham, 2007; Dahlgren, 1991; 1993; Habermas, 1981).

3.2.6 Public Sphere Perspectives on the Notion of Independence

Several academic studies argue that the journalists’ conception of independence ought to move beyond formal structural factors such as the distance of the institution in respect of media laws, powerful interest groups, political or commercial institutions, etc.; and that in particular PSB must consider independence beyond discourses of the prevailing beliefs systems (Moe & Syvertsen, 2009; Garnham, 1978; Hall, 1977). For example, Hall (*ibid*, p. 346 as cited in Moe & Syvertsen, 2009, p. 403) rejected the conception of a PSB epitomised by a ‘neutral force in society’; while Garnham as cited in Moe & Syvertsen (1978, p. 404), wrote about the ITV and the BBC thus:

“What in fact we have is a system in which two powerful institutions responsible not to the public but to the real, though hidden, pressures of the power elite, government, big business, and the cultural establishment, manipulate the public in the interest of that power elite and socialise the individual broadcaster so that he collaborates in this process almost unconsciously” (*ibid*).

Such as described above resembled the ‘defeudalized’ public sphere - the term Habermas used to describe the decline of the ‘Bourgeoisie’ dominated Public Sphere in medieval Europe. (see Fraser, 1990). In its medieval construct, the Bourgeoisie Public Sphere is a poor reflection of the normative public sphere model that is proposed in my thesis. Of course, it remains an academic enterprise to operationalise this ‘ideal type’ public sphere in a manner that responds adequately to issues of ‘public interest’.

There are two interrelated ideological paradigms worth discussing briefly, i.e., the free-market economy and the social democratic paradigm. The free-market economy ideology views broadcasting as a marketable good or commodity – like any other, provided for or supplied to consumers; and positions consumers as the best judges of their own welfare (Scannell, 2005). Therefore, the market paradigm invites PSB to stay relevant to its audiences by answering to audience needs in ways they can recognize as useful and interesting. The social democratic ideal argues a different role for PSB, mainly conceiving its audience as a public as opposed to a market or as citizens instead of consumers (Raboy, 1996; Ramsey, 2010). In Western Europe, PSB was commonly understood in terms of the primary responsibility to address the audience as rational citizens who share collective interests, unlike commercial media that conceives its audiences as individual consumers, simply following personal interests (Raboy, 1996; McQuail 2003; Scannell 2005). Nonetheless, the impact of these two paradigms and the range of associated concerns challenges the conventional and, arguably, narrow view of politics, taking us back to Habermas’ theory of the public sphere, and the associated critique that too often his idealisation of a universal public sphere has privileged some people, topics, or discourses; while excluding or minimising others (Calhoun, 1993; Fraser, 1990; Eley, 1992). In this way, for example, commercial broadcasting may include news and current affairs production, sports or whatever is required to generate mass audience (actual and potential) for the market (e.g., advertisers), contrary to PSB that is expected to be distanced from all vested interests (Evens, et al., 2013). Notwithstanding, that even as the consumer marketplace presents an array of competing products, it nonetheless does not guarantee all citizens the unconditional right to enter the market first and foremost. The profit incentive often results in programming that is directed at only the niche profitable audiences owing to their capacity to pay to the detriment of economically disenfranchised communities. This selection of who enters the public sphere in the first place, produces the risk of social polarisation between the

information rich and information poor communities – identified by Keane (1991) as the 'privatisation of the public sphere'. This connects us to Habermas' original concept of "feudalisation" of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962), in the sense that a caste system determining who participates in broadcasting evolves as those with capital resources overshadow those without capital resources. Raboy (1996) maintains that it is only the PSB model, that is linked to the normative public sphere concept, which places social interests before market interests. However, much as several scholars have addressed the consequences of market orientation, there is the tendency to ignore the complexities arising from the negative portrayal of market-oriented media. Berger (2002, p. 27) alerts us of the potential countertendencies to political logics and positive competition that emerge from the involvement of corporate and commercial media. In Berger (*ibid*), a market has the potential to ultimately dilute the monopoly of media otherwise held by governments. Further, Berger argues that private media has the potential to open up more space for journalists in the private media, and to pursue a watchdog role, while for those in the state-owned media may struggle towards a social democratic role that is not hijacked for political ends (*ibid*). Berger is by no means suggesting that PSB's claim to public interest is not feasible in African conditions; but instead argues that commercial media, when enabled, and regulated in the public interest, can potentially promote democracy by catering for alternative voices and viewpoints in society (Berger *ibid*).

3.2.7 SABC News Bulletins and the Public Sphere

The work of Habermas and scholarly critiques of his public sphere theory were used to develop an interpretation of the data that was generated from the sampled SABC news bulletins. Throughout all his argument, Habermas insisted on the validity of a universal public sphere – even as he conceded that it was constrained. Given that this study sought to understand news making at the SABC from the perspective of the public sphere, the questions outlined below provided useful indicators for analysis and interpretation:

- To what extent do individuals or groups with no institutional accreditation become fully fledged participants in the public sphere?
- In the context of the SABC, how and to what extent are citizens enabled to deliberate in the construction of news and, by extension, in the formation of public opinion?

- Does the SABC guarantee unrestricted access to citizens on topical issues?
- Who gets access to the SABC platforms and what they see to be talking about?

Critical scholars such as Dahlgren (1995 - 2001) have argued that media democracy tends to assume that media is accessible to all, and that everyone, regardless of social position, is able to participate in public discussions. This thesis explores all these issues in the context of the SABC (see specially Chapter 10 and 11 of this thesis).

3.2.7.1 PSB, News Values and the Public Sphere

According to Habermas (1989), the ‘refeudalisation’ of the public sphere by the state and the market has severely constricted the pace of participatory communication (*ibid.*, p. 201), thereby transforming the public deliberation of key public issues into media content that is passive and is consumed by media audiences without interacting with it. Although it is not the focus of this thesis to consider the extent to which the market has specifically impacted Current Affairs and News making at the SABC, several scholars have argued that commercial media practices and ways of retaining audiences fail to deliver to the electorate relevant information to encourage the electorate to exercise their choices as informed citizens (Curran, 2011; Gurevitch, Levy & Roeh, 1991). According to Curran (2011), market choices primarily serve to make money, while those of public service broadcasters serve to ‘serve society’ in ways that optimise general public voices in line with the normative public sphere concept. (Curran, *ibid.*, p. 58). The SABC faces this paradox due to its PSB normative model, which considers social transformation, development and other public imperatives and values on the one hand, while ensuring its financial sustainability through its statutory licence funding model, commercial programming, audience ratings, on the other (see discussion in Dlamini, et al., 2017; Dlamini & Chiumbu, 2016). As stated, purposes of public accountability, the Broadcasting Act outlines two separate divisions, namely the public service and commercial operations, all controlled by the Board, but administered separately. The commercial service division is treated the same as other commercial broadcasting services, while the former is subject to special statutory obligations.

The existence of this riddle of ‘commercialisation’ versus ‘public good’ at the SABC compromises its public sphere role. For instance, the SABC is expected to balance the interest of its public’s values of ‘independence and impartiality’ with the developmental

imperatives of the government of the day, nation-building and promoting democratic citizenship, while at the same time responding to its commercial imperatives. This tension is embodied inside the newsroom as the through Bourdieu's habitus.

'I have a professional obligation to serve the public interest. If my editor chooses the interests of politicians, businesspeople or any powerful lobby, my own professional integrity is threatened. On principle, I must remind my editors about the editorial code of ethics that was endorsed by the SABC Board' (SABC Interview 9)

'You can pay the bills, promote development journalism and be professional at the same time. It is not an issue of either or' (SABC Interview 4)

According to Hanitzsch (2007:369), the specific set of practices, beliefs, and ideas by which news reporters, intentionally or sometimes instinctively, validate their function in society and render the significance of their profession for themselves and others will inevitably impact their news coverage. Therefore, even as the SABC ostensibly follows the PSB model, by examining its news product, we can generally identify a duality in the types of journalistic orientations. On the one hand, encompassing a strong market model in which audiences are deemed individually capable of choosing their own fair and is profit oriented, while on the other, the social democratic model with its limited market focus in which public interest is prioritized and audiences are conceived as citizens. Several scholars focusing on the role of PSB have relied on the BBC's experience as a yardstick of best practice (Raboy, 1996; Raboy, 2003; Scannell, 1990; McQuail, 2000; Croteau & Hoynes, 2001)., Lord John Reith, the first Director General of the BBC, outlined in book (*Broadcast over Britain*, 1924) the ideological proclamation of the broadcaster—later called the 'Reithian model.' Lord Reith acknowledged four main elements of public broadcasting: among them, the rejection of commercialism. However, the BBC of today, through commercial operations is oriented towards profits in several markets – and in other instances the BBC uses the licence fee income to sustain its offerings; in others, it uses its commercial operations that have linkages with its licence fee activities - for example, by making available resources for programme making, joint funding of programmes, trailing of commercial products, and so on (Cave, M., Collins, R., & Crowther, P. 2004)

3.2.7.2 PSB and the Mediation of Pluralism in Politics

The concepts of pluralism and diversity have been theorised in a variety of ways in media policy debates (Karppinen, 2013). In a range of other fields of enquiry, pluralism denotes the multiplicity and diversity of actors as opposed to uniformity or exclusion (Bohman, 2006). In media studies, the values pluralism and diversity are widely accepted in principle (Karppinen, *ibid*; Bohman, *ibid*). In this work, as in the referenced studies, media pluralism in the public sphere denotes the distribution of communicative power. In this way, pluralism is also conceived more generally as the inclusion of a range of actors and a diversity of views. For example, during elections, the SABC, owing to its PSB mandate, is expected to use all its traditional television, radio and online channels to reach all citizens, political constituencies, in a manner that closely mirrors equitable access to its communicative infrastructure to campaign and to represent their issues and views impartially in news bulletins.

This study acknowledges that ‘media diversity’ and ‘media pluralism’ are conceptually distinct values; and yet both have convincing clear and logical similarities. As a result, both terms are often applied in tandem in media performance and policy discussions (Karppinen, 2013) – in media, the only distinction being that diversity is often used in context of multiple actors in coverage, whereas pluralism is applied in descriptive sense relating to engagement between actors in a social setting. In this way, diversity is the acknowledgement of differences in views and opinions, while pluralism is about presenting a range of fixed structural differences, e.g., social demography, constituency, race, political affiliation, etc., that exist in a heterogeneous society. The notion of media diversity, therefore, is generally used in a more empirical or tangible meaning, whereas pluralism refers to a more diffuse societal value or an underlying orientation’ (Karppinen, 2007 p. 9–10).

Last, in Karppinen (2013), diversity and pluralism can also be viewed in terms of the distinction between ‘media selection’ and ‘media presentation’, i.e., through the examination of ‘what is covered and how it is covered’ (p. 105). In the words of Hall et al. (1978), as cited in Karppinen, (2013), sets the agenda in terms of what is circulated to the majority of the population, but, also, how the agenda is interpreted by offering ways to understand what is being communicated (*ibid*), as was characterised by Garney (2014)’s examination of political debate around climate change policy in Australia.

Fowler (1991), as cited in Karppinen (2007), posits that media' strategic partiality is an outcome of unequal access to media coverage, exemplified not merely in what claims and attitudes are covered in media, but also the manner in which reports are framed or curated (*ibid*). In this, Fowler (*ibid*) argues that it is matter of ideological and philosophical orientation (pp. 22–23). This perspective is buttressed by both Street (2001, p. 18, 23) and Groeling (2013, p. 134) in their highlight of the distinction with regards to the selection processes and ways of interpreting (as cited in Karppinen, *ibid*), referring to the media bias in terms of either the preferred coverage or the character of the coverage. For Groeling (*ibid*), another analytical category emerges, i.e., the category bias in regard to 'selection', which may include misrepresentation of a sample of reality, and the bias in terms of the category of 'presentation', relating to a false account or distorted view of reality. In sum, according to Karpinnen (*ibid*), both Street (*ibid*) and Groeling (*ibid*) recognise the difference between the diversity of social causes and influences as they physically exist and the implicit plurality of views within society as contained in media reports. However, because pluralism and diversity are mostly applied normatively as well as descriptively and based on the cue from Karppinen (*ibid*), this study chooses to use both terms: 'media pluralism' and 'media diversity', interchangeable.

Pluralism and diversity are particularly central in this study since the provision of a multiplicity of voices encompassing the entire society and the range of issues, views, and opinions are seen as the normative foundations of a PSB that is underpinned by public sphere theory. In this regard, the SABC is expected to serve as an example of an ideal PSB through the wide reach of its Radio and TV programmes, news, and online content. Even so, the PSB ideal worldwide has been subjected to pressure to adapt to a format that is responsive to the demands of the market, society elites and political power holders (Sparks, 2009; Jakubowicz, 2011). However, these demands are just but a few of many. There are several factors that challenge the traditional meaning of PSB and its various models of operating. For example, in many countries, socioeconomic differences along value systems, stratifications between social groups based on race, gender, social class, etc., all determine the level of access and at times restrictions to decision-making processes. All these factors all constitute threats to the PSB's normative ideal of mediating pluralist politics and its mission to encourage a myriad of voices through the inclusion of a diverse range of actors or citizenry. This also means

that more actors or citizens, particularly minorities, and the poor are therefore marginalised away from mainstream political processes (Sparks, *ibid*; Jakubowicz, *ibid*). This therefore calls on the SABC to deploy its PSB mandate by not only embracing its enshrined statutory PSB duties but also engaging with the social, economic, and political relations that were inherited from old racial policies of segregation and discrimination, and this therefore calls for the expansion of the definition of citizenship to include new forms of participation in the public sphere (Horwitz, 2001). Within this framework, PSB is required to assume the role of an enabler of the public sphere – one that facilitates the challenge of all forms threats to democratic citizenship, through mediated discourse in which every citizen or group community is encouraged and facilitated to participate, regardless of social location or even political orientation (*ibid*). In short, the very success of the public sphere is entwined with the ability of PSB to facilitate pluralism, diversity, and robust, rational, and critical debate, in which ‘everyone’ (including group communities or institutions of the public), is an equal participant and has equal opportunities to convince others of the strength of their arguments.

3.2.7.3 Promoting Deliberation

Although the definition of PSB varies from country to country because of historical, economic, political, and technology changes, the SABC as a statutory PSB is expected to facilitate deliberation as part of its mandate to strengthen the various forms of democratic civic participation. The SABC is generally expected to broadcast information that potentially results in informed citizenship. For example, the SABC Editorial Policies (2020), the IBA Act, the Broadcasting Act, all recognise the importance of ‘providing information that is substantial, and analysis that is authentic and meaningful to ordinary, enquiring South Africans so that they can form their own opinions’ (SABC Editorial Code, 2020, p. 19). Providing the infrastructure for deliberation is important in Current Affairs and News products, especially its role in connecting the public, even those with dissident views or conflicting interests. Oxford Languages, one of the world’s leading dictionary publishers, defines ‘deliberation’ in terms of ‘a long and careful consideration or discussion’. On this, Habermas (1989) holds that the quality of the media is at the core of the public sphere and notes the absence of distinctive attributes in media devoted to deliberation. In his idealised

framework, the ‘discourse theory of democracy’, such deliberation must feature elements such as ‘the rational-critical’ debate (*ibid*, p.58 – see also Olson, 2011). According to Habermas, for citizens to make informed choices and for interlocutors to participate in ‘rational-critical debate’, freely, regardless of social position, PSB must provide information on legitimate issues of governance, including content of a serious political nature (Habermas, 1989).

It is necessary for the SABC to achieve integrity with the process of deliberation. Take, for instance, when covering individual actors during the election campaign. Ensuring deliberative engagement is not synonymous with reporting an electioneering event. The latter is all about covering the campaign promises while facilitating deliberation calls on the media to ensure that people, i.e., citizens, residents, and affected individuals, are enabled to make sense of the affairs of government and to process them. Through information that is constructed by the media and delivered in the story presentation, the audience must be enabled to critically test information that is delivered by decision makers. Ideally, the media, especially PSBs, is expected to facilitate as much information exchange as possible by ensuring the coverage of a range of perspectives, inputs, and evidence to generate information that approximates ‘public opinion’. This is not the same as ‘asking people what they think when they are not thinking’, which often produces uninformed responses. Instead, from the viewpoint of the public sphere, the underpinning role of PSB is to bring out from the public informed, quality, in-depth, meaningful, and diverse perspectives from different sources. For this to happen, the media, especially PSB, is called upon to communicate information that is neutral, diverse, and balanced. This is a complex undertaking given the many pitfalls associated with deliberation.

3.2.7.3.1 Pitfalls Associated with Deliberation In PSB

As already stated in Case Study Two (2) of this work examined the SABC’s English language main national newscasts in terms of PSB principles (See Chapter 10 and 11 of this work). In this situation, the SABC was a crucial site for inclusive deliberation. In theory, the SABC, because of PSB status, was expected to facilitate informed interactions among citizens by providing education, knowledge, and culture. It is often wrongly assumed that citizens, including those accredited as knowledge experts, have broader horizons, and better understand themselves, others, and the world. Furthermore,

PSB is required to resemble a place where all citizens, regardless of social status, are encouraged to assemble, and thoughtfully consider public interest options, using of logic and reason. However, critical scholars have highlighted many accounts in which the media not only accommodate socially privileged speakers who often possess elite opinions, but also cultivate the construction of public opinion, including how it is framed and consumed (Halloran, 1970; Lang and Lang, 1968 as cited in Livingstone and Lunt, 1994).

For Habermas, the concern is whether or not the instruments of communication, such as the media, can equitably and inclusively connect and mediate deliberation in a dispersed public. This is exactly the normative vision that he advocates. It is a vision in which, through acts of communication, social actors can context positions on public issues, and in this way contribute towards the formation of public opinions, or at least how such opinions are articulated (Habermas, 2006). For Habermas, the role of PSB, particularly as the provider of quality and unbiased information, is central to the formation of public opinion, and by extension to his concept of the public sphere. Quality and unbiased public communication is the glue that holds ‘informal opinion-information’ together with the institutionalised structures and avenues of social position taking (Habermas, *ibid*). Instances of such processes include presenting useful information during elections or on key topic issues such as the ‘land restitution’ debate in South Africa, but in a manner that is accessible to all. As such, the public sphere is not only crucial but also imperative. However, scholarship is still an ongoing regarding the extent to which mass media, particularly PSB, provides a public sphere within which all social actors may deliberate on common issues and through which PSB and media in general, may hold society power holders to account and at the same time increase democratic governance for the public. In this study, representativity is used to infer the extent to which actors in coverage are accorded time to deliberate. The assumption is that journalists select actors in coverage believing them to be conveyors of reasoned information, enlightened opinion, and ideas. The concern in critical scholarship is the overrepresentation of certain social constituencies, e.g., society elites, authorities, and other representatives of established power, at the expense of ordinary people, women, the differently physically abled, and other traditionally excluded social constituencies (Hjarvard 2013; Fisher 2018; Berkowitz 2019, and others). PSB is expected to foster an involved socially representative public. The interest here is not

only the frequency of coverage but also what issue the actor is seen to be talking about. There is a difference between communication and deliberation in a social structure that is dominated by the views and opinions of elite representatives of established power, vis-à-vis facilitating the inclusive representation of all, including ordinary visions of the social world which constitute mass opinion. The ideal public sphere draws on the collective intelligence of all members of society and results in decisions that qualify as public opinion and, as such, are potentially better supported by the wider public.

3.2.7.4 Facilitating Representation

In this thesis, this debate centres on how to conceive of representativity and how to impartially mediate the informed views and opinions of all citizens. This is a complex challenge worldwide, including in South Africa, owing to the history of race divisions, class, and wealth inequalities. The SABC, given its PSB mandate, has the responsibility, through its broadcasts, to create a new diverse, inclusive, and representative public sphere and, by extension, to construct a more democratic society.

In its normative articulation, PSB is a tool for providing information that benefits society, which may otherwise not be provided by other forms of media, e.g., commercial media. The defining feature is that it is intended for all members of the public and ideally accessible to all, regardless of their social or economic status (Raboy & Taras, 2007). However, given the differing levels of access to power and how it is expressed in society, it is critical to communication and deliberation to examine who ‘owns’ the media, who gets to speak on behalf of whom, and to what end? Unlike commercial media, which often treats audiences not as citizens but as consumers and targets those with purchasing power, how does PSB ensure that the public sphere is not ‘defeudalized’ as warned in Habermas? PSB in its normative form is expected to be inclusive of everyone, including minorities, and to offer a range of opinions and views, including dissident views and opinions. An example in this regard would be an election during which the SABC is expected to produce pre-election stories highlighting information on all contending candidates, previous election results, predictions of public interlocutors and other related information. Unless the media, particularly PSB, meets this condition, democratic citizenship is not guaranteed, and the public sphere is threatened. How the SABC performs this function is one of the concerns of this thesis.

3.2.7.5 PSB and Production of News and Current Affairs

While this role is not restricted to PSB, criteria under which Current Affairs and News programmes are produced can make a fundamental impact on a nation (Van Zyl, in Mpofu, 1996) and, by extension, the public sphere. It ‘can either be part of a process of empowerment or dis-empowerment’ (*ibid*, pg. 202). In this regard, there exists a significant body of literature that points to the limited ways in which the media system influences the construction, expression, and consumption of public opinion, often through dissemination of the political views of power elites or dominant groups (Habermas 2006; Scannell, 1989 - 1991; Garnham, 2007; 2013; Keane, 1995; etc.). In contrast, the construction of informative, creative, and thought-provoking news requires participation of diverse social actors, assembled either individually or as public representatives, who are knowledgeable and who possess an ongoing chance to be listened to in the marketplace of opinion, views, and ideas, irrespective of their socioeconomic status or social or political affiliation (Keane 1995; Curran 1991; Schudson 1995). It is therefore incumbent of PSB that is underpinned by the public sphere to facilitate the freedom to choose on important matters that impact their social welfare in a logical, and well-reasoned manner. Citizens thus must be enabled to test, demonstrate, and analyse all existing public information. Their ability to participate in this way is epitomised by a set of basic rights that include ‘freedom of opinion and speech’, and untrammelled media access (Habermas, 1989, p.83). The failure of PSB to do so therefore has the resultant effect of robbing the public of ‘the centrepiece of deliberative politics’ (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). Among the objectives, Case study two (2) examines how the SABC as a PSB facilitates public sphere principles such as ‘deliberation’, particularly in its reconstruction of Current Affairs and News programming.

3.2.7.6 Online Platforms and Deliberations

It is not the scope of this thesis to consider the use of online digital platforms by PSB, but it suffices to highlight that these platforms extend the current deliberation boundaries. The extent to which this expansion takes place is shown as problematic in a range of scholarship (see Davies & Gangadharan, 2009; and others). There is a concern that these spaces are dominated by elite public representatives and the exclusion of the majority, who often lack access to digital connectivity and tools. This engenders ‘elite democracy’ in which communication and deliberation takes the form of propagation of

the ideas and opinions of the powerful in society – producing what Habermas calls the ‘pseudo public sphere’. In this way, elite views masquerade as ‘mass opinion’ – a direct affront to the ‘ideal type’ public sphere. Thus, while the SABC has an obligation to accelerate the take-up of digital services, the PSB remit demands that the broadcaster also promote inclusion by providing PSB content on all its platforms, including online. That said, it can be argued that the SABC has embraced digital innovation by creating its own online news service that offers additional access to content produced by the SABC's TV and radio journalists, as well as producing exclusive multimedia content of its own. The SABC online service is present on social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube and provides additional potential for greater deliberation. The SABC as a brand is not complete without its online presence among a wide range emerging online content providers, and one could infer that this impacts the public's reception of broadcaster and its content. At the time of writing, The SABC as a broadcasting service was ranked first in the category of Government Enterprises: State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) at the 11th edition of the annual Top Companies South Africa (TCSA) Reputation Index Results²⁵. Indeed, the SABC has not been spared from the structural challenges of ensuring universal access for the digitally unconnected.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the key elements of the public sphere theory that are applicable in the context of PSB and in efforts to understand the challenges associated with news making at the SABC. It began by discussing the public sphere as widely articulated by a variety of scholars and relied on existing scholarship that has either positioned or reformulated the concepts of PSB and the public sphere as crucial theoretical constructs (Hall, 1977; Garnham, 1978; Scannell, 2005; Curran, 1991; Keane, 1991; Keane, 2009). In essence, the public sphere concept is used in a range of PSB scholarship to analyse the extent and ways through which participation and deliberation are enacted in democratic societies (See Ramsey 2010; Larsen 2014; and others), particularly in societies in transition such as South Africa (Tomaselli & Tomaselli 1994; Fourie 2013). McKee (2005) states that the public sphere concept ‘is a metaphor’ representing how information and ideas that circulate in large societies ought

²⁵ <https://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/media-statement-the-sabc-wins-in-top-companies-south-africa-reputation-index-results/>

to be considered (*ibid*, p.4). For this thesis, the consideration is to understand the extent to which the SABC, as a statutory PSB, upholds its promise of delivering Current Affairs and News information to the public and how? Among the key objectives is the exploration of the SABC's internal newsroom culture, which includes the identification of some of the often taken for granted institutional and professional rules, routines, and shared assumptions regarding professional values, beliefs, and practices.

3.3.1 Some Initial Points of Departure and Commonalities

As already alluded, two critical scholars, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jürgen Habermas, are the main proponents of field theory and public sphere theory, respectively. On the surface, these scholars appear not to have much in common. Both are instructive for study of how power is expressed in society and how it is configured by social practice, and through dominant and countervailing beliefs. Furthermore, both conceive society in terms of differentiated social spaces or spheres (fields for Bourdieu & publics for Habermas), for example, the journalistic field, economy, state, and so on (Calhoun, 2010). Both scholars argue that while these spaces or spheres are related, they ought to be considered autonomous and that no one has a complete monopoly over others. Both Bourdieu and Habermas acknowledge the role played by social structure, politics, economics, and culture, including periodic challenges to the status quo by social movements. Locating the concept of the public sphere in this way is therefore useful, but equally, therein lies the point of departure for Bourdieu. He critiques earlier dichotomic conceptualisations of the interface between spaces or spheres and between agency and structure, and this applies to how power is expressed within institutions. In short, Bourdieu strives to develop new ways of perceiving or understanding institutional culture by arguing for what he terms 'the theory of practice', which fundamentally rejects both 'subjectivism and objectivism'. Bourdieu (1989) argues that subjectivism views the social world only in terms of 'mere representations or constructions, neglecting the structural basis for different subjective representations' and makes the 'scientific knowledge nothing but an 'account of accounts' (Bourdieu, *ibid.*, p.15, as cited Schultz 2007); while on the other hand, 'subjectivism' sees 'social facts as things' (Bourdieu, *ibid.*, p.14 as cited in Schultz, *ibid*), thus neglecting that 'facts' are also objects of knowledge and cognition embedded in discursive practices (*ibid*, p.6). Instead, Bourdieu proposes self-reflexivity, which focuses on the intersubjective interactions between individuals. His approach emphasises 'causative structures' that

operate beyond the limited perceptions and consciousness of individuals. Bourdieu holds that the field epitomises a site of power relations (Bourdieu, 2020), but one in which economic forces are subordinate to cultural roles when it comes to how hierarchies of power are formed and sustained across all social domains. In this way, therefore, Bourdieu argues in favour of conceptualising structure and the agency of individuals and groups in terms of a ‘fluid’ and dialectical relationship – one in which ‘capital’ (status) and ‘economic control of the means of production’ are among the key factors that contribute towards the maintenance of dominance hierarchies. Therefore, the paradox is not with selecting what is primary or what comes first, social structure or agency - the ability of individuals or groups to make free choices and to act autonomously? Neither is it a case of the ‘subjectivist’ versus the ‘objectivist’ position (Wacquant, 2004); in the same way that the ‘subjectivist approach’ tends towards the reduction of structures to ‘visible interactions’, while ‘objectivism’ often infers that ‘actions and interactions arise from the structure’ (Bourdieu 1989, p., 17 as cited in Schultz 2007). Bourdieu conceives the relationship between agency and social structure in terms of a dialectic relationship – a relationship between two theoretical approaches. To simplify this view, Schultz (*ibid*) uses a metaphor to describe ‘social structures and subjective representations’ – characterising both as two sides of the same coin, i.e., the ‘social world’ (*ibid.*, p. 5). The concept of the field is anchored in this dialectic between these two approaches and seeks to challenge the traditional conceptualisation of agency and structure in terms of a dichotomy between the two. Bourdieu’s insights on the fluidity between agency and structure are adopted in this thesis as a way of understanding and explaining the constraints and processes involved in news making within the context of the SABC – making sense of the interactions between what the news workers do – their ability to influence the social structure, but also how the social structure impacts agency. Like Bourdieu & Wacquant 1993, I discuss each of these two concepts of agency and structure, particularly noting the relationship between the two and not as isolated concepts.

In raising these common positions between Habermas and Bourdieu, this study does not suggest that it has overcome all the unanswered questions on either of the two scholars. The fact remains that field theory and the public sphere theory are not the only historic and encompassing approaches in sociology; neither does this work aim to examine or discuss both theories and their exponents comprehensively. In fact, both Habermas and

Bourdieu were not the first researchers to pin-point the most important elements of field or public sphere theory. Nonetheless, both theories are perhaps among the most ideally suited for this study and possess a credible pedigree in sociology, cultural and institutional studies. As such, while there are notable commonalities and deviations in Habermas and Bourdieu's conceptualisation of the social world, this work attempts to find convergence between the two scholars in order to achieve a deeper view of news work at the SABC.

3.3.2 Blending Field Theory and the Public Sphere Theory

To map the embedded norms, dispositions, and relations inside SABC newsrooms and to make sense of the constructed SABC news and current affairs products, a synthesis of these two outwardly different theoretical approaches, field theory and public sphere theory.

First, the field theory of Bourdieu, which I have unpacked in relative detail in this chapter, is employed to explore the SABC Current Affairs and News Division as a journalistic field, its constraints, and its existing power relations. The theory allows for the conceptualisation of embedded institutional norms, routines, the role of professional values, and the beliefs of journalists as they go about their everyday work. Overall, this work relied on field theory to explore the internal dynamics inside SABC newsrooms. Bourdieu's theories of the journalistic field, habitus, and newsroom capital are important for understanding newsroom culture, particularly for the systematic understanding of both the implicit and explicit structures that guide institutional practices and particularly how news making is pursued. The central theoretical point of agreement in this study lies in the conception that while newsroom culture is subject to formal rules, culture in general is nonetheless also influenced by informal rules. The institutional culture of an organisation may encompass a range of challenges, some new, and others that were resolved in the past but now require new approaches. Journalists and their practices are products of professional norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs that influence and are influenced by their defined roles in the context of their work setting, within which relations between actors interact with the embedded institutional structures of news work.

Second, the theory of the public sphere is operationalised in this work to infer on SABC's mediation of news owing to the broadcaster's PSB claims. In the latter, normative public sphere conceptualisations are adopted to outline the characteristics and practices that are expected from an ideal PSB. As discussed earlier, conceptually, the SABC is considered in terms of Habermas' public sphere notion, owing to its institutional approach as a PSB service. The role of the public sphere and the PSB is crucial for the mediation of important societal issues, including the facilitation of pluralist politics, particularly during elections. According to McNair (2000), an increasing number of political actors, individually and as groups are cognisant of the strategic role of media coverage and, that explains why they pursue the media to communicate their plans. Habermas' public sphere framework provides the template to examine the SABC's claim of PSB, particularly as practised through the mediation of Current Affairs and News.

The Field and Public Sphere theories provide this work with the analytic framework to explore the distinct pillars of this study, namely, newsroom culture and journalistic practice at the SABC (Case study 1), and offer the tools to investigate the extent to which the broadcaster's newscasts fulfil its role as a PSB, specifically through mediation of pluralist politics and the coverage of topical issues in Case study 2, drawing from the normative assumptions of the public sphere. As outlined in this chapter and the subsequent conceptual and theoretical chapters four and five respectively, the public sphere is defined as the social space where individual citizens or social groups meet to exchange opinions concerning matters of public interest, deliberate, debate, and ultimately achieve something approximating public opinion (Habermas, 1964), while the field concepts of Bourdieu focus on the way individuals and groups formulate social fields, including opinion formation; and importantly, the varying way through which social fields affect the way individuals reproduce themselves in practice. Below, I discuss each of these concepts in detail, starting with an outline of the field theory of Bourdieu and how it has enabled this work to understand the intrinsic aspects of news making at the SABC within context.

Chapter Four

Conceptual Framework

4.0 Introduction

The objective of this study is two-pronged: Firstly, I examine the factors that shape newsroom culture at the SABC. Second, by bringing to the fore the empirical aspects of journalism practice through the analysis of News and Current Affairs outputs, I highlight the identifiable values, norms, and structures that shaped the SABC newsroom culture at the time of this research. As already highlighted in the introductory Chapter One (1) of this work, this research responds to the following primary and secondary questions:

- 1) Which news-making processes, practices, norms, and values are identifiable at the SABC? This question addresses how newsroom culture at the broadcaster is shaped by journalistic practice, norms, values, and other embedded social structures.
- 2) The next key question examines the different ways through which institutional management and policy issues influence news making at the SABC. This includes exploring issues of hierarchy and power within SABC newsrooms.

These elements are the focus in Case study 1. By encompassing an understanding of newsroom culture, one is able to draw conclusions regarding the dominant institutional norms, journalistic practices, beliefs and perceptions held by SABC journalists as they go about their everyday work, and by analysing the SABC news and current affairs products/texts, Case study 2, one is able to infer on how Current Affairs and News are mediated at the SABC, notably, the degree to which the texts conform or fail to conform with the PSB mandate from the perspective of the public sphere. Specifically, focus was directed on the way the SABC mediated pluralists' politics during the 2016 local government elections and how the broadcaster mediated the land restitution issue. In sum, this work argues that to understand the SABC as a journalist field, newsroom culture matters because it is intertwined with the actions of news makers, their practices, and their beliefs. Equally, journalism output (News and Current Affairs

products/texts) can offer insight into the modi operandi and dominant ethos within media institutions (Schultz 2007; Arndt 2007; Willig 2013). Therefore, in this work, newsroom culture is conceptually intertwined with the norms, practices, values, beliefs, and perceptions of journalists inside the SABC newsroom and the News and Current Affairs content that is subsequently produced by the broadcaster. This view presupposes an interaction between newsroom culture and news output and between agency and structure in respect of journalism practice. This mode of thinking and understanding is accommodated under the banner of reflexive sociology as the domain of invisible structures that either enable or constrain the practice of journalism or, in Bourdieu's parlance, 'the playing of the game'. Bourdieu (2007) develops the notions of 'habitus', 'capital' and 'field', which this study employs to help explain, among other objectives, the existing relations between SABC journalists, their professional dispositions, and the embedded institutional culture inside the SABC newsrooms.

4.1 Field Theory and Reflexive Sociology in the Context of the SABC

Field theory and reflexive sociology have greatly influenced institutional studies in recent years, including studies on journalistic practice and studies on newsroom culture broadly. In the ethnographic study of the SABC newsroom culture, journalism practices and output, this has implied an interest in the embedded logic of practice that journalists generally assume to be true without question. There is a body of scholarship that has analysed the beliefs of journalists and editors about themselves and professional roles. It through such professional self-understanding that decision-making relating to story selection, framing, including decisions on ought to be interviewed and for what duration, all appear obvious to the practitioners (Willig, 2013; Schultz, 2007; Thomsen, 2018).

Bourdieu's outline of theory and practice (1977 – 2013) challenges the assumptions that journalists and their editors take for granted. Instead, Bourdieu accounts for the role played by habitus in its various forms that feature in the constitution and maintenance of power relations. For Bourdieu, the unconscious nature of relations and interactions represents the social structures installed by the habitus (*ibid*). The structures or schemes, according to Bourdieu, are initially laid down subjectively but not individually as outlooks, dispositions or tendencies, and function all together through behavioural conduct and thinking. Furthermore, these structures or schemes operate as

tools for the navigation of social worlds, contributing to how the individual thinks, perceives, and acts (*ibid*). Because of this, Bourdieu notes that habitus allows us to view rules (as is the case with this study – journalistic norms, embedded institutional practices, professional values) as 'themselves the product of a small batch of schemes enabling agents to generate an infinity of practices adapted to endlessly changing situations, without those schemes ever having been considered as explicit principles' (Acciaioli, 1981, p.31). To this point, Bourdieu effectively moves beyond the agency and structure dichotomy to embrace the fluidity of both agency and structure. In this work, Bourdieu's conception of 'fluidity' is adopted to make sense of the macro and micro levels of the SABC as a journalistic field. In Bourdieu's conception, there exists a relational 'distinction between ... interactions and structural relations ... constitutive of a field' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 218 as cited in Fox, 2014, p.6). As seen, Bourdieu exposes the flaws associated with the conception of agency and structure in terms of a dichotomy and chooses to resituate the interaction between agency and structure in terms of the field or social domain. By doing so, Bourdieu avoids the flaws inherent in the agency/structure dichotomy approach, especially its production of a simplistic, reductionist interpretation of interactions and social positions. He does this by highlighting how societal structures develop into mental cues for the individuals who experience them (Bourdieu, 2009), and second by arguing that these schemes or structures invariably become identifiable by the manner in which the actors or agents equally retain and engage with the same schemes or structures that are in themselves constantly undergoing reproduction owing to a range of internal and external factors. These perspectives are adopted to understand and infer developments, norms, and embedded practices inside SABC newsrooms, as presented in this study.

Conceptually, we may therefore explain the dissonance that was experienced in the SABC newsrooms during my fieldwork in terms of Bourdieu's field perspective and reflexive sociology. For example, we can infer that the disposition of the SABC8, particularly their attitudes towards management hierarchy at the SABC, emanated from their understanding of what is possible in the field (their social reality) and likely to resonate with others in the newsroom; however, the same applies with respect to the management team. Both the journalists and their managers reproduce what Bourdieu terms 'cultural arbitrary', which is expressed through embedded norms, values and

often taken-for-granted practices that work inside the newsroom (field) to produce perishable products (News and Current Affairs products) but in very unpredictable ways.

The routine practices are evident and consistent at the SABC – characterised by the use of highly structured diary plans, quick presentations at the editorial conference meetings and minimal debate in the newsroom. As observed, and by operationalising Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992), the formal newsroom activities (diary meetings, etc.) function more as a form of ‘hidden persuasion,’ ‘exerted, quite simply, by the order of things’ (*ibid*, p. 168). This frequently entails simplifying practice into easily discernible categories or steps and routines that easy to apply. In practice, the editor may systematically introduce to the reporter bits of information or offer the treatment of a story, and the field journalist/reporter completes the storyline with selected elements from the coverage or common facts (*ibid*). However, concerning journalists such as SABC8, we can infer that their occasional disregard of what their managers demanded of them and sometimes even their own established routine was a result of experience, engrained habits, and shared dispositions, including their accrued cultural capital in the field. We can further infer that the SABC8, nor the protagonists in the management hierarchy, quite likely acted without presupposing a conscious expectation of the outcome or subsequent consequence. From the Bordieuan perspective, we can say that the disregard or contrarian attitude by the SABC8 was made possible through existing structures of the field in the form of established values and routine practices that had come to attain a doxic status. By doxic status, this study, drawing from Bourdieu, refers to a situation in which ‘the natural and social world appears as self-evident’ (Bourdieu 1977, p.164) or resembling common-sense (*ibid*).

Writing about ‘social space and power’, Bourdieu can be understood to suggest that the habitus functions to generate and regulate both the reproduction and, simultaneously, the concealment of relational power that may be linked to one’s accumulated forms of symbolic capital or positions of privilege. On the 11th of September 2019, the second day of the commission of enquiry chaired by then deputy chief justice Raymond Zondo, the SABC management, through its then chief operating officer, Hlaudi Motsoeneng said the broadcaster would continue to broadcast stories featuring violent protests but would desist from showing violent images in line with the Broadcasting Act and the SABC’s

commitment to social cohesion²⁶. The SABC8, unsurprisingly, rejected this call for ‘a developmental approach to journalism’ citing a bucket list of professional expectations and established practices (doxic rituals). In this, they were supported overwhelmingly by a network of media activists and civil society groups, such as the SOS: Support Public Broadcasting Coalition²⁷, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), and others. To use Bourdieu’s parlance, the positions of the dissenting SABC8 were buttressed by peer recognition, experience, and the ‘social structures’ within the journalistic field. Conceptually, without inferring judgement on the specific response in support of the SABC8, we can draw from Bourdieu’s views on ‘disinterested’ logic, which proposes that ‘political morality does not fall from heaven’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 144). Rather, the ‘construction of legitimacy strategy’ is invoked as a ‘social mechanism’ for ‘winning the game’ - a process whereby ‘an act’, or those who act according to the rules, values or norms in a given society achieve legitimacy by virtue of ostensibly adopting a ‘communal norm’... ‘universally’ acceptable and normative to a group or audience (*ibid*, p. 142).

4.2 SABC and the Public Sphere

As outlined in the preceding theoretical Chapter three (3), this study combines PSB and Habermas’ public sphere perspectives, together with Bourdieu’s field theory to investigate, interpret and infer what the SABC Current Affairs and News product reveal in terms of newsroom culture and journalistic practice at the broadcaster. Researchers commonly use a variety of techniques to understand institutions and inherent practices. For instance, on the one hand, I have combined insights from Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology to explore the conventional ways of organising news work at the SABC newsrooms and editorial meetings, and as such, the fieldwork experiences offered a productive evidence-driven view of how the negotiation, selection and ultimately the framing of Current Affairs and News content was shaped. On the other hand, the content analysis of the sampled contents has provided an opportunity to examine the SABC’s normative claims of PSB and how the various routine ways of doing

²⁶ <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/decision-to-ban-violent-protests-was-informed-by-law-says-motsoeneng/>

²⁷ <https://soscoalition.org.za/mma-sos-support-SABC-8-and-condemn-further-threats-to-our-democracy/>

(journalistic practices) affect the construction the broadcaster's Current Affairs and News output and indeed the newsroom culture.

4.2.1 PSB and the Mediation of News

The above principles, as outlined by the BBC Broadcasting research unit in 1985, are employed as a yardstick for assessing how the SABC functions from a public sphere perspective. Below, I unpack the relevant principles as put forward in a range of policy documents, scholarship, and commissions globally, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation included (Banerjee & Seneviratne, 2005).

4.2.1.1 Informed Citizenship

PSB guided by the public sphere principles is expected to all facilitate citizens or social actors to steer the laws and policies of government. In this way, it is argued that the only legitimate governments are those that guarantee all platforms that encourage citizens to deliberate informatively. PSB, therefore, is required to conform with the normative Habernanisian public sphere principles of mobilising and engaging citizens through facilitation of the discourse within which rational discussion takes place. Indeed, several contemporary scholars often present a narrative of continuous decline from the ethos of the normative public sphere and PSB towards a weakened citizenship – one that is lacking in virtues such as access, universality, inclusion, representativeness, etc., but instead ‘refeudalised’. For Habermas, this happens principally when small numbers of individuals (society elites) embody the public sphere to become the primary definers of the ‘public interest’ – what Habermas characterised as ‘representative democracy’. In this study, ‘re feudalisation’ is assumed when the media, including the SABC, confer special attention to individuals who institutionally or officially accredited, organised interest groups such as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), political parties, and other similarly privileged entities.

4.2.1.2 Geographic Universality

Universal distribution is one of the basic makers of PSB (Scannell, 1989 - 1991). The definition of geographic universality in broadcasting is quite broad. In South Africa, it was formulated in 1995 by the then-broadcasting regulatory authority, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), which was replaced by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) in 2000.

In principle, PSB is expected to be accessible and to cater to all individuals in society, regardless of their social, political, and economic position and opinion. Accessibility relates to the recipients of information and extends to the type of information, the extent, and requirements of access. Open access is contingent not only on there being channels available but also on their effective distribution and affordability (Duncan, Minnie, Bussiek, 2009).

4.2.1.3 Inclusion

Inclusion is a key attribute in Habermas' public sphere concept and PSB. A healthy PSB rests on its ability to ensure its programming, particularly Current Affairs and News output, diversity of opinion, including dissident views and the widest range of participants or social constituents, regardless of social standing. For Habermas, the principle of inclusion relates to unconstrained participation and 'access to the public sphere to all citizens' (Habermas, 1997, p.105), i.e., regardless of gender, position in society, etc. This role is particularly more important in developing countries, wherein literacy levels are very low and large numbers of people reside in rural areas. In remote parts of Africa, for instance, access to television and generally ICTs is limited, and radio remains the most available primary communication medium (Banerjee & Seneviratne, 2005). In sum, the normative PSB model is expected to provide an inclusive environment for the public sphere to strive.

4.2.1.4 Representativeness

The manner in which PSB portrays the content it produces ought to be representative of all accounts available in the normative public sphere, linking to the debate on the mediation of pluralist politics. In this role, PSB is expected to provide the means through which broad 'opinion' can be formed. Habermas holds that interlocutors within the public sphere have the potential to formulate what approximates 'public opinion' but that PSB have the responsibility to ensure the quality of such opinion by actively seeking out information and issues and catering to all voices, including avoiding patriarchal limitations in which the voices of women are excluded, contrary to the notion of the public sphere.

4.2.1.5 Universal Appeal

As a principle, universality implies that PSB ought to be open to all. However, unlike in the initial phases of the development of PSB, scarcity in broadcasting frequencies no

longer exists. The days when a few terrestrial stations were the only offering available to all potential audiences are gone. Universal service, therefore, is longer associated much with the ability to reach everyone at the same time but rather with the capacity to offer PSB in ways expected by the audience. Increasingly, audiences are demanding increasingly thematic and personalised/individualised content, in addition to traditional generalist services. Therefore, the delivery of content needs to be understood in terms of multiple programming and not the ‘uniform’ programming in a few broadcast channels, i.e., both universal provision of programming on different channels that appeals to the generality of the population, and also content that is tailor-made for specific audiences as part of a wider range of programming services. Important, nonetheless, is the requirement to uphold basic tenets the traditional PSB, which includes commitment to facilitating informed citizenship, access to deliberation platforms for all actors and social constituencies, provision of ‘neutral’ and ‘independent’ coverage of information and opinion, quality and ethical programming, pluralistic mediation, and all the new tasks for PSB that are performed in response to the changes social and technology circumstances.

4.2.1.6 Special Provisions for Minorities, Especially the Disadvantaged

Among the basic set of principles or characteristics that define PSB is the ultimate belief that broadcasting can and must be used to nurture society. Minorities are thought to be underrepresented in media and often marginalised in processes related to the crafting of policies, decision-making and development. PSB therefore embodies the potential to afford media space to the voiceless. This does not mean that PSB must but rather ensure that issues facing ‘minorities’ come into mainstream discourse. To the extent that is feasible, this work considers who gets covered, the social position of actor in coverage, and what they are seen to be talking about, in line with its PSB claim. The study does not focus specifically on how minorities are portrayed by the SABC but is able to present an overview, for example, of the extent to which the SABC news has accorded coverage to the generality of the population, including minorities, especially disadvantaged communities.

4.2.2 Distance from All Vested Interests

Several scholars have relied on the BBC experience as the yardstick for PSB. The ideological proclamation of BBC as authored by Lord John Reith was later referred to as the ‘Reithian model’ (Scannell, 1990). Among the top elements of PSB identified in

Lord Reith's model was the rejection of commercialism (cited in Tomaselli, 1996, pg.,127) and direct control by the state. Indeed, according to the Reith philosophy of broadcasting, the BBC was designed to serve public, and its ethos was aimed at achieving an independent voice, unconstrained by government or by the markets (Newby, 2006). Needless to say, most PSB models have been developed primarily as a response to challenges emanating from two broadcasting models, one controlled by the state and the other being the profit-oriented commercial model (Banerjee & Seneviratne, 2005). It is generally assumed that because of the social, cultural, and political potential of broadcasting, any direct involvement by powerful interests in a field related to thought and expression is not desirable (*ibid*).

4.2.2.1 Distance from the Market

The idea that commercial broadcasting pursuing private interests could equally serve public interest has not found favour in many countries (Jakubowicz 2007). Several studies have highlighted the powerful threats facing PSB arising from increased competition for audiences among broadcasters and the extraordinary power held over the media by those constituencies that leverage the commanding heights of the economy (Fourie 2003; Tomaselli and Tomaselli 1996; Jakubowicz *ibid*). In this regard, and in light of the several challenges confronting the SABC, including securing sufficient funding for its PSB obligations within the context of a competitive market environment, how does a PSB broadcaster ensure that 'he who pays the piper', whether it is big commercial interests, advertisers, or the government treasury, does not ultimately 'dictate the tune' or covertly try to structure news content behind the scenes?

4.2.2.1.1 Impact of Advertisements

On the 21st of March 2021, a local weekend newspaper, the Sunday World ran with a story in which it featured an email dated February 22, reportedly authored by SABC economics editor Thandeka Gqubule-Mbeki, and addressed the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF). The story reported that the State of the Nation Address (SONA), presented by President Cyril Ramaphosa was interrupted on SABC 3, the broadcaster's English Channel to accommodate a commercial advert. According to the report a 9 pm bulletin was cancelled to make way for a paid-for German soccer game

sponsored by a major bank²⁸. These were among the examples listed by senior editors as examples of the pervasive role of commercial interest at the SABC. In a written complaint to the South African News Editors Forum (SANEF), senior editors lamented what they called ‘chequebook’ journalism’ at the SABC. They argued that commercial sales pitches were increasingly driving editorial judgement at the broadcaster. This study considered this incident in light of the arguments advanced by SABC management, primarily arguing that the genre does not have a ‘Free-To-Air Channel’ and it forms part of the SABC’s mandate. A cursory look at the SABC daily news bulletins and current affairs programming revealed a collection of stories organised into beats and supplemented by public information announcements and advertisements, but no adverts. This distinction between stories, beats, announcements of public information and advertising mirrors the habitus at the SABC. In this sense, public information and advertising were viewed in terms of their functional roles and notwithstanding their potential as an impediment to quality journalism or the public service function of the SABC. The question that I posed to SABC journalists was whether PSB should accommodate public announcements, such as those relating to social campaigns, e.g., health or environmental awareness, and room for commercial advertising and sorts.

‘We are not a commercial broadcaster. Our mandate is public service broadcasting’
Interview 10

‘SABC does not receive government subsidies. How are expected to perform our mandate?’ Interview 6

Commercial advertising and forms of advocacy information by a range of interest groups have been identified in scholarship as having the effect of diluting the quality and flow of credible news and professional journalism (Fourie, 2014; Karppinen, et al., 2008; Cowling, et al., 2007 - 2008). The role of commercial factors in structuring media output and professional journalistic practice was investigated by Cowling et al., (2008). Their study highlights the ‘ongoing critique of commercial media’s relationship with advertising interests’ (p.100-119), particularly the widely held view in critical

²⁸ <https://sundayworld.co.za/news/news-driven-by-money-not-policy-at-sabc/>

scholarship that commercial considerations have resulted in the decline in journalistic standards, characterised by the lack of adherence to professional values such as fairness, impartiality, etc., and consequently compromised the media's normative role (bid; see McChesney, 2016 on hyper-commercialisation of the media in the US context). The work by Cowling et al. (2008) is important to this study because it considers the issue of commercial pressures and the resultant conflation of advertising with editorial responsibility by exploring the role of embedded factors relating to structure and practice within an institutional framework of a media operation. The approach is relevant in that, although the focus is on the print media, the study zooms on the consequences of commercial considerations on the ethical practice of journalism and indeed, this has resulted to the decline of public confidence on the reliability and trustworthiness of media operations. In respect of the SABC, a 'fiscal squeeze' is generally identified as contributing to the deterioration of PSB. However, this is only one perspective. Perhaps the most important question for my work is how the news product distinguishes its function and upholds its role as the provider of objective, impartial, accurate, nonpartisan, and commercially and state-free information. These issues have been identified in a range of scholarship as imposing constraints on the quality, trustworthiness, and impartiality of news bulletins (McChesney, 2016; Karppinen, et al., ibid; Banerjee, I. [Ed. 2005]; Moe & Syvertsen, 2009), but others have called for a media system supported by a strong PSB system that accommodates an appropriate range of senders, channels, or owners in the system (McQuail, 1992). In this work, therefore, while noting that the activity of news making co-exists with other information neighbourhoods such as public announcements and commercial advertising, the analytical focus is limited only to the examination and the understanding of the processes, routines, institutional values, norms and perspectives of journalists and editors, specifically how this structure the SABC Current Affairs and News output.

4.2.2.2 Distance from the State

The prevalence of state broadcasting systems in most countries has often resulted in a tendency to equate PSB with State broadcasters. The latter is viewed in a range of media scholarship and commissions as rather more oriented towards public service than its commercial counterparts; and this has resulted to a 'common conflation between PSB and state broadcasting systems' (Banerjee & Seneviratne, 2005, pg. 13). This is

because while attempts at driving social transformation are considered a responsibility for PSB, the same has been the responsibility of the post-apartheid state. Such has been the predicament for the SABC in respect of its independence from the political activities of the state (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1994; Nicholson, 2006; Orgeret, 2008; Fourie, 2010; and others). However, the SABC is uniquely positioned here – given that its operations are regulated independently by a statutory instrument that guarantees its independence. In this regard, the SABC cannot be classified as a state broadcaster but rather as a PSB. This distinction is important because even as state-controlled broadcasting systems regularly cover public service activities, including national public events such as debates in parliament, their unregulated influence from governments, who are also the media regulators, compounded by a dependency on state financing, absence of institutional autonomy and programmes that are not neutral, all work against the promise of PSB. Indeed, much as state broadcasters are good sources for informing relating to government development and social transformation activities, they nonetheless fail to measure up convincingly on the other expectations required of an authentic PSB, and as such do not qualify to be defined as real PSBs (Banerjee & Seneviratne, *ibid*).

After 1994, the SABC transitioned from a broadcaster that was operated and controlled by the apartheid state as a tool for social control, to become a PSB in line with its broadened scope to meet the demands of a transforming society (Kupe, 2005). Furthermore, the overlap of the PSB role with that of the state has in some instances resulted in the abuse by government incumbents who have used PSB services to promote personality cults and other related activities that have denied citizens democratic participation in social and political spaces (Raboy, 2003; McCauley et al., 2002). The converse is also true in the sense that examples of government abuse of PSB services sometimes misrepresent the normative model of a genuine PSB and, by extension, PSB institutional values (McChesney, 1997; McChesney, 2014; Banerjee, 2005). In this way, commercial values find promotion, while the idea that it is the obligation of the state to provide public goods and services in society is disfavoured (Banerjee, 2005; Banerjee & Seneviratne, 2006). That noted, the need for arms-length distance in relation to PSB versus all vested interests is unchallenged – be they commercial, governmental, religious, or selective personal and group interests. This goes to consolidate the view that PSB is best achieved when it is orchestrated from a

position of independence and autonomy. It is therefore assumed in this study that programming that is funded by commercial advertising necessarily orients content to niche audiences in the promotion of a product and in pursuit of consumer ‘eyeballs’, while funding from powerful group interests or advocacy groups usually seeks to promote specific ideas, selective interests, or particular visions of society. Furthermore, in the absence of public interest regulation that guarantees independence and autonomy of PSB, it is presumed that the funding by the state often results in programming that is tone deaf on topics that are critical of the government.

4.3 Supplementary Frameworks

In this work, the Field and Public Sphere approach is supplemented by literature from academic fields such as cultural studies and institutional studies. Indeed, studies on newsroom culture and journalism practice emanate from a range of scholarly fields, extending to cultural studies to sociology, anthropology, and institutional scholarship (Couldry, 2004; Benson, 2009; Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch (Eds.). 2009). This rich scholarly diversity deepens the knowledge about the profession of journalism and further justifies inquiry into the practices, norms, and structures in the media institutions through which news is constructed. Furthermore, there are growing insights from the literature relating to news-making processes, news text analysis, journalists’ self-narratives about their own roles, including the organisations for which they conduct their daily news work. This work explores some of these insights, structures, and other factors, including norms and values that operate internally in SABC newsrooms – which often impact the overall culture of the broadcaster. As a result, it is harder to zero down completely on the central theoretical frameworks that inform this particular study.

As already mentioned, there exist a significant number of studies, peer-reviewed journals, documents, and commissions that focus on media and journalism studies specifically. Notable examples that this study has relied on include essays in ‘The Handbook of Journalism Studies’ (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009) and newsroom studies such as the field perspective on newsrooms by Willig (2013), ethnographic case studies by Schultz (2007), the field work of TV stations by Thomsen (2008), and other related classical works in journalism and media studies. These works underpin the status of media and journalism studies as an autonomous and authoritative field of scholarly enquiry. The insights are condensed and included in the broad conceptual

categories that are employed in this study and adopted from cultural, institutional and newsroom studies.

Below, I discuss the broad categories of analysis employed in this study – mainly those that interact inside news organisations and are deemed to shape journalism practice and output at the SABC.

In this dissertation, consideration was given to studies that have investigated the self-understandings of South African journalists' concerning their own roles in a media ecology that is undergoing transformation from the vagaries of the apartheid system (Rodny-Gumede, 2014), while journalistic professionalisation was measured against broad liberal criteria and PSB notions such as inclusion, deliberation, diversity of opinion and actors in coverage, autonomy, other distinct professional norms (see also Halin and Mancini, 2004). Indeed, as is highlighted in this study's findings, practice at the SABC does reveal deviations from some of the main ideas of both PSB and the professionalisation of journalism in Western liberal frameworks of journalism. The latter is not the scope of my work, although broadly, this study reflects on how perceptions of journalists regarding professionalism transact to shape relations inside news organisations and, by extension, how the quality of PSB, its content output, is influenced in the case of the SABC. Below, I discuss the concept of journalistic autonomy within notions of the field and the public sphere.

4.3.1 Journalistic Autonomy

Autonomy is presumed when private individuals or groups converge in an unrestricted fashion to confer in the public sphere – ‘with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions’ on issues relating to public affairs without interreference from any authority (Habermas et al, 1974, p. 49). Specific to the practice of journalism, Örnebring & Karlsson (2019) define journalistic autonomy in terms of an independent institutional arrangement in which individual actors within, e.g., journalists in the newsroom, are not constrained by unwarranted interference from other social structures. In sociological analysis, ‘independence’ is often applied interchangeably with ‘autonomy’, and consideration of both the public sphere and journalistic autonomy is linked to the manufacture, circulation, and accumulation of symbolic capital (*ibid*). Specific to this thesis, the production and

circulation of symbolic capital directly relates to news-making practices and output at the SABC from a public sphere perspective. What follows is an outline of autonomy from the perspective of field theory, which is employed here as a tool to explore processes of news making in the journalistic field and the resultant news output. Despite some deviations and the partial incompatibility of the way the term ‘autonomy’ is used in both public sphere and field theories, there are notable areas of overlap and possible linkages.

4.3.2 Journalistic Practices at the SABC

Journalistic practices in this work refer to peer recognized forms of behaviour, for example news-making practices, values, and other ways that are adopted by various actors inside the SABC newsroom negotiate what content to include in the bulletin or current affairs programming and how such content is framed or packaged. In Chapter 9, I focus specifically on the latter, particularly on how the SABC news bulletins and current affairs programmes mediate content from the perspective of the PSB that is linked to the public sphere concept. The interest in how the SABC news texts mediated pluralist politics during the 2016 local government elections. What are the identifiable characteristics in the sampled bulletins? Furthermore, on the controversial issue of ‘land restitution’, from which social constituency are the identifiable actors sourced in the subsequent sampled bulletins? The analysed news bulletins reveal factors that are useful for understanding of the SABC journalistic culture.

It is important at this point to highlight that this focus on the SABC news bulletins is limited to only highlighting some of the intrinsic features of the culture in sampled news bulletins and to supplement the data arising from the interviews, document analysis and observation of the SABC newsrooms. Of course, the results here confirm not a static institutional culture but one that is subject to change, for better or worse, as the SABC transforms. The aim is to infer on some of the evident practices and values, beliefs, as well as to prepare ground for future research in the field.

4.3.3 Journalists’ Perspectives and Beliefs

In this work, perspectives are limited to what journalists at the SABC believe to be their role, i.e., their shared professional beliefs concerning their everyday work at the broadcaster and what they perceive to be their mandate. The examination of norms and values is focused mainly on the construction of news. Although the contextual

background work paints a rough picture concerning PSB from the point of view of the public sphere, particularly the independence from advertisers or the multichannel environment that has emanated from the rapid developments in digital technologies and the pressures arising from some state actors, interest groups, etc., there is nonetheless no intention to delve deeper into these global challenges that continue to receive significant scholarly attention, including in South Africa. All these debates are ongoing, and the problems have often been clearly articulated. There also exists a consensus regarding what will happen. Arndt (2007) outlines the following proposed interventions that have emerged from academia, for example, ‘diverse media markets, public funding for public broadcasters (a different funding model for the SABC), media ethics training for journalists, etc.,’ (Arndt, *ibid*, p. 37). The focus of independence in this work is therefore limited to editorial interference or autonomy in the newsroom.

The nature of this work is conceptually built on Bourdieu’s conceptions as the key proponent of the field theory but is also informed and inspired by several existing scholars that have utilised his concepts to explore news-making practices inside the newsroom (Shultz, 2007). Similar to this study, we have explored the argument that journalists’ practices are a result of their beliefs and professional orientation and that when producing news, they follow identifiable institutional and professional routines and basic mandates that they perceive or believe to be right. However, as an important point on Bourdieu, that such routine practices and norms are constantly evolving – undergoing production and reproduction – and in the process shaping and reshaping what journalists consider professionally appropriate. Specific to my study, I explore how such constantly evolving beliefs/perceptions contribute to or structure practice and, by extension, impact news output at the SABC. These beliefs/perceptions of journalists (what Bourdieu refers to as ‘dispositions’) help to understand both the enabling and constraining effects within media practice while also providing evidence on the subjective interplay between journalistic agency and media structure that are all often expressed through identifiable norms, routines and basic mandates required to produce news. In this study, conceptual arguments in the literature showing the role played by journalists’ own beliefs/perspectives of what is expected of them are therefore used to understand their practices and ultimately, how such practices impact the structuring of Current Affairs and News output.

4.3.4 Embedded Norms and News Values

Harcup and O'Neill (2017) present a reviewed list of news values that are applicable to this study despite some of the evident challenges facing PSB and the journalistic field currently, not least the exponential rise of social media, digital technologies, hyper commercialism, and the debate on whether liberal conceptions of PSB and journalism can be sustained. The most commonly held news criteria are the unexpected, impactful, prominent, timely or current, and relatable. Impact, for instance, considers the number of readers who will likely be affected by a story, while large events may be identified as influencing the current thinking in society. The assumption is that the more people are involved or the larger the event, the more interest a story will generate among media consumers. There are other news values: stories that embody conflict between an antagonist and a protagonist; negative stories such as a grim accident or bad weather; and the opposite for tabloids, who normally prefer feel-good stories or the sensational.

However, while these news values are accorded a high position in journalism practice, newsroom ethnographies offer empirical templates on which to advance research (Shultz and Thomsen, 2008). On their own, they do not provide the research categories proposed in Bourdieu's conception, but they do serve as entry points to address the research questions (*ibid*). For Bourdieu, conclusions from ethnographic research categories are important but are not sufficient if not accompanied by a study of the different cognitive structures (*habitus*) that are used to advantage agents in the 'field', in which both the embedded norms inside institutions (e.g., taken-for-granted routines, norms, etc.) interact with the ingrained dispositions, values, etc. (including their view or conceptualisation of their own role within the social domain) of journalists to produce practices; these practices in turn tend to reproduce themselves in a 'dialectical process' (Bourdieu, 2001).

4.3.4.1 News Sources as a Structuring Scheme

The challenge for journalism, media and not least PSB is to get the story right. This is a particularly perplexing challenge in a setting in which it is impossible for journalists to be present at every occurrence they report on or where the nature of knowledge is under daily development, revision, and redevelopment. Journalists are ideally the conduits between sources who are talking about issues and translating what they are told to the public. Here, a tradition has evolved in which journalists always defer to authority or

so-called reliable accredited sources. Thus, when journalists receive information, the default position is often to try to find persons who are authorities on the subject. The problem then becomes the overreliance on resourced sources, mainly government officials or accredited representatives of large institutions. These sources tend to have long-standing relationships with journalists that ensure continued reliance. This makes the routine reliance on news sources an important value or part of news making. Sources are often the starting point in most news stories. Through sources, journalists are made aware of events, actors in coverage, places, and other information that may be unknown. Anyone or source that provides news information assumes the status of the news source. Journalists rely on sources to support the reliability of news stories. Types of sources include conference proceedings, press releases, institutional representatives, eyewitnesses, or anyone who provides knowledge about something. In contemporary journalism, Radio and TV, newspapers, the internet, social media, speeches, pictures, and any verifiable documents are considered sources of information.

How journalists relate with their sources is shrouded in complexity – ranging from the responsibility to ensuring that information received from sources is accurate, contextual, up to date, and verifiable. A study by O'Neill & O'Connor (2008) explored the influence of sources on the production of news and observed evidence of the degree to which sources influence and, in some cases, dominate news coverage. Specifically, the study that examined the range and frequency of sources used in a sample of nearly 3000 news items in four mainstream newspapers in the United Kingdom showed the comparatively limited choice of routine sources, indicating journalists had relied less on other news sources and that issues that were irrelevant to the readers had been elevated to significant positions much to the detriment relevant and more relatable stories. Furthermore, the study revealed that alternative viewpoints were ignored. In this situation, the effect of overreliance on a limited number of sources resulted in a biased representation of information dictated by sources. Understanding interactions between sources and the media is therefore important for the scholarly field of journalism and news-making practices, even as we explore news-making in the context of PSB. This study on the SABC considers news sources relative to professional journalism values or schemes that shape or structure news output. Journalists are expected to gather accounts of events and interview sources and, without fail, ensure that facts are accurate, contextual, and impartial, all under the pressure of deadlines. From a myriad of

available first-hand stories and sources of news, they must select what is considered newsworthy, i.e., what is interesting enough to warrant reporting. There are fewer studies on the SABC looking at these ‘structuring’ features of news making. Often, in regard to story selection, the choice is between competing ‘truth-claims’. The routine ways of news gathering appear sufficiently ‘unbiased’, even if the final news product displays an unfair tendency to believe that some people, ideas, and opinions are better than others (Roshco, 1975; Schultz, 2007). Often, mainstream news gravitates in favour of ‘official’ news and ‘prominent’ sources and conflict (Becker, 1967; Roshco, 1975; Tuchman, 1972; Schudson & Anderson, 2009). In this, the SABC as an institution, together with its news workers, is implicated.

4.3.4.2 Framing the Story

The examination of actors that are covered in the SABC news programmes is one of the aims in this study, particularly what the participants are seen to be talking about and the extent to which the broadcaster mediates topical issues. Sometimes, even in cases where a story is upheld and published, there are consequences relating to how it is presented. Constructionist studies allow us to view news as a symbolic system that presents stories about reality rather than presenting reality itself. Framing can therefore be understood as both the journalist and the media institution’s influence within a context and does not suppose a total account of an event but rather a frame through which the social world is routinely organised and projected (Tuchman 1978). Insights from Entman’s (1993 and 2007) conceptualisation of news framing allow us to see news as just but a story, like any other, except that news involves an editorial selection process, quality control, and framing, based on agreed professional values and norms. According to Entman (1993), to ‘frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition... interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described’ (Entman, *ibid.*, p. 52). Framing therefore defines how a news story is presented with a view to encourage certain interpretations or to discourage others. Thus, decisions within a news institution that ‘enable some occurrences to emerge as news but banish others from public consideration’ (Tuchman, 1978, p.50) constitute the process through which the media contributes to the reproduction of culture through its socialising influence (Bourdieu, 2018) of news making. For example, whereas there is potentially a nuanced way to cover an election from the perspective of PBS, through

news framing, the Current Affairs or News item can be reconstructed and published either as conflict between individual candidates or, in the case of the study that this research undertook, the coverage can narrowly focus on the celebrated, already known, and powerful national leaders, the majority of the male, as opposed to the actual contesting local community leaders and the issues they represent. Indeed, common in newsrooms, personalisation and conflict are agreed upon criteria when deciding on the newsworthiness of a story. Journalists and news institutions routinely apply these criteria in the expectation that such values are effective in attracting and holding the attention of media consumers. However, such practices should not be understood in isolation from the complex needs of journalists, news institutions and their audiences. News criteria belong to a collection of inclinations or established outlooks through which journalists anchor their mental social map (Bourdieu, 2002). Such preferences are ‘durable’ and ‘transposable’ and the same time, depending on the social context (*ibid*). For example, critical scholars such as Schultz 2007 have noted the extent to which journalists’ own definition of their practice often introduce as much ambiguity about news selection as they seek to reveal, while others have suggested that the existing news taxonomy requires application that is adapted for context.

4.3.4.3 ‘Deadlines’ and ‘Strategic’ Values Which Impact News Output

Owing to the pressures of getting the story quickly and the biases of the journalist, a playbook (way of doing) and value system (professional code) develops in newsrooms that normalises the relationship with sources. Biases include how journalists perceive and prescribe what is newsworthy. From the PSB and the public sphere perspective, Current Affairs and News content must resonate with media consumers and connect to the significance of the issues that the public should know about. However, several media scholars have shown the many ways the construction of the Current Affairs and News product has tended to be more preoccupied with the novel, the exceptional angle or only the ingredients of a story that ensure people’s attention (audience or readership ratings) and less with normative public interest issues. Instead of exploring an issue deeper and broadly, journalism is often tempted to look for the next big story.

At the SABC, fresh professional identities and practices amongst the rank and file were identifiable in the largely shared professional values that were unleashed during the period of changes in senior editorial management at the SABC that coincided with my

fieldwork. However, even then, there were notable frustrations among some journalists and editors relating to the functional end of the broadcaster to ensure the predictability of Current Affairs and News within the stipulated deadlines. We can thus infer that dilemma helps account, for instance, for the overreliance on official or institutionally accredited sources in the News and Current Affairs programming, despite rhetorical commitment by nearly all journalists to include the voices of ‘ordinary’ persons. At the SABC, such sources were easily accessible on deadline by existing databases in the news research department (Newsnet) or other predictable means, such as press reports. Thus, this work has shown that even when the SABC journalists empirically displayed commitment to ‘inclusion’ and ‘diversity’ of the range of news sources in coverage, institutionally embedded routines and professional values got in the way of actual ‘practice’, largely due to the imperative of ensuring deadlines were met. In the daily newscasts, professional values such as getting the story ‘right’, i.e., accurate, or sourced from an accredited actor, were subordinated to getting the story ‘on deadline.’ With such practice, news values trump consideration of social or public significance – meaning, rather than amplifying issue, journalism at the SABC sometimes focused only on stories that attract a large number of audiences or merely ticked the box to ensure that the story was ready before the deadline. Ideally, journalists and their editors must determine which information is newsworthy and filter out that which they consider of little interest, and often by applying a set of guidelines or criteria, they decide what material will make the best stories. Unfortunately, there are instances in which that which is deemed ‘newsworthy’ diverges from what is socially significant and, in some instances, only works to prop the existing social order (McQual, 2010). According to Arndt (2007), ‘diverse and conflicting news values affect broadcasters’ positioning vis-à-vis government’, and this has implications for how editorial independence is conceived and, in the case of the SABC, has resulted in conceptual clashes inside the newsrooms between journalists, editors, and management. Arndt (*ibid*) further notes that it is these ‘markedly different perceptions among staff and management of the SABC’s role and of what is newsworthy naturally led to interpersonal or even inter-group conflict’ (Arndt, *ibid*, p. 46) and that ‘while it is usually management who determines what is formal and even informal policy, ‘conformity [on the part of staff] is not automatic’ mainly because of the existence of a journalistic ethos that, if invoked by staffers, cannot easily and openly be bypassed by managers’ (Breed 1955, p. 107 as cited in Arndt, *ibid*). As was the case involving the SABC8 and management, similar

dynamics as highlighted in the study on newsroom dissent at the SABC by Arndt (*ibid*) obtained, in which dissonance emerged between journalists and management. My study builds on Arndt's work by offering additional empirical examples of how the conceptual clashes at the SABC newsroom were expressed through specific ways of doing (habitus).

4.3.4.4 Internal Practices

Conceptually, this study shares the views in Bourdieu's field theory and institutional studies that suggest that norms embedded in institutions, engrained beliefs, and values together influence the different practices of journalists as they perform their daily work. As noted in Arnad (2007), this includes mores relating to 'news decisions with regard to specific stories or issues, the way conflicting role perceptions and values are being negotiated within the SABC, and not least the overall level of enthusiasm, dedication, and organisational commitment in terms of the SABC's mandate as shown in daily work routines' (*ibid*, p. 44). Conceptually, this study understands the role of such ingrained behaviours, outlooks/perceptions/beliefs, and ultimately subjectivity in everyday journalism practice in terms of Bourdieu's logic of practice. According to Bourdieu, practice is a social process through which meanings and interpretations (including story framing) are products of the reproduction of individual and group practices, especially through the 'socialising influence of major institutions', especially embedded institutional norms. To understand these kinds of driving forces is to perceive the logic or assumptions that drive both the practice of journalists and what often becomes the imperatives of media institutions. Embedded institutional norms include taken-for-granted routines or expected behaviour that is acceptable within an institutional environment – often presented as professional norms – and these include rules based on values such as the obligation to defer to accredited sources; other professional rules – usually conceptual – such as editorial or journalists' 'independence or autonomy'; and other craft-related rules and standards. In a newsroom environment, institutions exert normative pressures to influence the practices or modes of behaviour and structures that are embedded in that setting. These ways of doing are said to be institutionalised when they are sanctioned and engrained within the group or agents in the setting. Journalists at the SABC share these features, which in turn influence and are influenced by SABC's own social contextuality – not least relating to the fact that the broadcaster operates within the complex context of a multicultural society in transition in which it

has a specific statutory obligation to provide the public with ‘information they need’ to take part in the building of a new democracy, post-apartheid (Broadcasting Act 4 of 1999 as amended). It can be inferred here that the call for public service journalism and its national development ethos, as distinct from the traditional liberal approach to journalism, can be conceptualised as a new game - a new game that is distinct but not totally different from the traditional game or approach to journalism in the sense that both are rule-based (doxic). For the journalists at the SABC, while the customary ways of doing, routines and practices all seem universal, ‘second nature’, they are still compelled to respond to the new context. This constitutes a new paradigm that is distinct from the one in which they are used to participating in. Bourdieu writes: ‘when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself as ‘a fish in water’: it does not feel the weight of the world and it takes the world about it for granted’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127 as cited in Lehmann, 2007). However, ‘when the rules of the game change’ to the demands of the moment, ‘new forms of habitus and cultural capital become more highly valued’ (*ibid*). Thus, the demand for the SABC journalists to ‘play the public service game’ might be understood in terms of engaging or understanding the new role to only a minimal degree, rather than swimming in the water’, or striving for excellence but with an expectation of great difficulty in playing the new game. Although the public service role (new game) mandated to the SABC is enticing and desirable, the ‘schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members’ noted in Bourdieu (1977, p.86) are challenged inside the newsroom. In other words, the ingrained habits, skills and dispositions or the way journalists are used to perceiving their social world and reacting to it is no longer a perfect fit with the call for a PSB that is tied to the public sphere. This is compounded by another difficulty: that of attempting to adapt to the ‘new game’, in this instance, PSB that has a public sphere ethos, into an existing ecology with its distinct embedded practices and structures. Journalists at the SABC, vow to produce credible content in line with known norms values of journalism of informing and holding power to account; but this by no means an easy task, given the challenge of reconciling conflicting demands of PSB journalism in non-Western environments – also considering the pull of normative discourses which several scholars have shown to contribute to the marginalisation and discounting of the potential of non-mainstream voices (Curran, 2000; Wasserman & de Beer, 2009; and others)

4.3.5 Journalistic Independence and Autonomy

The whole history of PSB has been characterised by the argument that the public is best served by independence from all power structures – be they political, economic, religious, or otherwise. It follows therefore that the political and economic architecture of this principle is such that PSB content producers must be supported to make programmes that are good in their own terms, regardless of their intended audience; however, wide, or narrowly, the net is cast – for as long as the content is believed to be in the interest of the public (Jakubowicz, K., 2007). This principle is key to PSB and essentially involves a commitment to producing content that, whatever its intended audience, is morally good in its own terms. In the making of programmes for PSB, there should be no ulterior purpose or motive other than PSB principles. It is axiomatic to this principle that the funding of PSB should, in total and in the absence of any strings attached, encourage rather than curtail the independence enjoyed (*ibid*).

The subject of 'independence' features predominantly in media discourse. 'Independence' is enshrined in the Broadcasting Charter that establishes the SABC as a PSB. However, the understanding of the term interpreted and understood differently by both the public and media practitioners. There exist divergent conceptions of 'independence' among audiences, regulators, media managers and even within the SABC. This ethnographic study of the SABC newsroom, which is the main goal of this work, is to explore the newsroom culture at the broadcaster, including various practices, routines, and journalistic beliefs inside the SABC newsrooms. To this end, this study explores particularly the journalists' own understanding of what independence and autonomy entail. The staff of the SABC individually explain the term 'independence', based on their self-understandings of both internal and external factors that impact the way they work - such as political control, journalist autonomy in the newsroom, freedom to choose actors in coverage and the capacity to initiate stories without inhibition. That said, the study argues that regardless of how the values of 'independence and autonomy' are conceived or contested, of particular importance to this principle is the ability for PSB to support the freedom, independence, and autonomy of content producers from any form of interference in their work. This is because without the guarantee of independence and autonomy from the state, the economy and powerful interest groups, it is impossible to ensure PSB; for that reason,

the role of PSB is tied to the guarantees of autonomy and independence from the larger matrices of power.

4.3.6 *The Editorial Code*²⁹

The SABC Editorial Code first came into effect in 1993. The code outlined PBS assumptions, which today constitute SABC's programming values. Application of this code is considered an accountability measure which is covered under ICASA regulations. Overall, the clauses in the editorial code provides editorial staff and journalists at the SABC protection from any undue control but holds requires of them to produce broadcast content that is appropriate for the whole society. Broadly, the SABC editorial policies are generally endorsed by media stakeholders across the board and commended in a range of areas, particularly the specific interest in children. Two core editorial values relating to editorial independence and public accountability are equally supported widely, although some media activists have raised concerns regarding the interpretation of some of the provisions contained in the code. For example, the policy of 'Upwards referral' was specifically challenged, and the nomination of Mr Hlaudi Motsoeneng, first as the acting chief operating officer (COO), compounded the problem. It was during his term as COO that the SABC witnessed unprecedented management, staffing, financial and editorial challenges (MISA, 2003; SOS: Support Public Broadcasting Coalition, 2016; Media Monitoring Africa, 2017; Broadcast Complaints Commission of South Africa, 2019; SABC Board Commission, 2019).

4.4 Conclusion

In essence, this work is an ethnographic study of the SABC newsroom that incorporates theoretical underpinnings from a variety of fields and approaches. The main plot for this exploration of the SABC newsroom and the subsequent analysis is based on internal dissonance that erupted at the SABC newsroom involving the famous SABC8 and the way management dealt with the incident. The discussions about nationhood, presidency, and politics in South Africa are highlighted because of their relevance to the discussion on editorial independence at the SABC.

²⁹ http://web.SABC.co.za/digital/stage/editorialpolicies/SABC_Editorial_Policies_2020.pdf

Section Three

Methodology and Research Design

Overview

Ethnography continues to be relevant as an important source and inspiration for newsroom studies and its cultures, processes, routines, and practices. As an approach, ethnography is generally suited for the collection of data relating to how individuals and social groups interact, behave, and perceive the world around them. Data are collected in context, and utilised to draw conclusions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993; Hammersley, 2006). It involves studying ‘at first what people say and do in a particular context’ (Hammersley, 2006, p. 4) and documenting social arrangements, belief systems, and practices (Hammersley, *ibid*; Yin, 2014). It is capable of combining distinct data collection and analysis tools ranging from participant observation, open-ended interviews, and analysis of relevant documents, artifacts, and all data that are produced within contexts (Larsson, 2006).

In the case of this study of the SABC news work culture and journalistic practices, the ethnography focuses on where the culture unfolds inside the newsroom, bringing to the fore various dimensions of news making, which include daily routines, embedded norms, values, and practices (Cottle, 2007) as well as where it ends, in news bulletins and current affairs programmes. Hammersley, 2016 notes that the use of audio and video recorded data may support the ‘ethnographers to carry out detailed microanalysis of what was actually said and done on particular occasions’ (*ibid*, p.6). However, it is important that the recorded data originate directly from the research location and context and is situated these within a larger picture (*ibid*).

The analysis of related documents, texts, interviews, and field notes takes us to another important consideration in ethnography, i.e., triangulation. There are several variations on the term. In this study, triangulation relates to the use of two or more distinct processes within the same research to enhance the comprehensiveness of conclusions drawn from the collected data, to contextualise the interpretations, and, in some instances, to explore the research issue further (Bryman, 2004 - 2008; Hammersley, 2008; Bergman, 2008). The aim of triangulating in this work is not as commonly

applied in navigational or quantitative approaches, often to validate each data point by linking to another. Instead, in Bergman (2008), ‘by drawing data from sources that have very different potential threats to validity it is possible reduce the chances of reaching false conclusions’ (*ibid*, p. 23).

A characteristic of the mixed-method approach is when researchers merge more than one type of data emanating from different paradigms – qualitative and quantitative (Creswell, 2015, p.3). In this study, much as a limited degree of counting (quantitative) was used, but only as a technical tool for the purpose of generating analytic categories. In essence, however, the study itself is primarily a multi-method qualitative study – suggesting that different qualitative techniques have been used in the two case studies covered in this work. An attempt to thoroughly explain how this work has predominantly applied ethnography as a multi-method research design is essential, not least to justify its application in this study. Hitherto, in Section 3 and Chapter Six (6) on methodology, I discuss how this study has combined different qualitative techniques for the collection, interpretation, and analysis of fieldnotes, interviews, and relevant documents and how, minimally, the study has embraced basic counting of themes and the frequency of actors in the analysis of the sampled SABC Current Affairs and News output (product) only to generate analytic categories that were in turn analysed qualitatively.

Creswell (2015) defines a multi-method qualitative approach as ‘research that uses multiple forms of qualitative data, for example interviews and observations or multiple forms of quantitative data such as survey data and experimental data’ (*ibid*, p.3). The multi-method approach ‘enables the qualitative researcher to study relatively complex entities or contexts and to explore and understand the perceptions of individuals or groups regarding social or human problems ‘in a way that is holistic and retains meaning’ (*ibid*). The relevant set of qualitative tools are many, and the choice of assessing and connecting these multiple tools is often complex to the extent that assigning the idea of multiple methods to the standard domain of qualitative work has achieved relatively significant currency and resonance Creswell (2015), but not without challenges.

The one challenge with the multi-method approach concerns the relationship between interpretativism and constructivism. For instance, on the one hand, interpretativism is normally concerned with ‘meanings’ inferred by and for the research subjects being studied and ordinarily uses an emic viewpoint, i.e., subject - centred; native point-of-view or insider approach, rather than an etic viewpoint (observer-centred or outsider approach). A study conducted in an exploratory manner is considered an interpretive study considering that there are fewer studies that have explored the same research objectives previously. Researchers who have done similar work point to the challenges experienced with collecting the data first-hand (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Constructivism, on the other hand, focuses on how patterns of organising, relations, and practices are socially constituted by the same actors (Collier & Elman, 2008). It is argued that these approaches can be connected to (a) interpretivism offering an account of a process, enabling the researcher to explore how realities or meanings are individually experienced (Aldridge, 2018); (b) exploratory due to its flexible and open-ended nature; and (c) constructivism concerned with how individual realities, perceptions and practices are socially constructed (*ibid*). The key point emphasised in Collier & Elman, 2008) is that there is the ‘interconnections between qualitative and quantitative research tools’ are growing together with ‘the relationship to interpretative and constructivist approaches’ (*ibid*, p. 3).

However, distinct to the multi-method approach referenced above, the use of multiple data sources within ethnography relates specifically to supplementing the observations of the researcher, with observations considered as the primary data. According to Hammersley and Atkison (2007), ethnography offers a thoughtful cultural lens to study groups, communities, and organisations, understanding the embedded norms, habits, rituals, and practices. This approach allows this study to ask the following question ‘What is going on at the SABC newsrooms?’

In regard to ethnography, Willig (2013) notes the challenges associated with theorising and empirically investigating context. Taking cues from Willig (*ibid*), Shultz (2007), Thomsen (2014), and others, this study employed Bourdieu’s analytic framework of ‘journalistic field’, ‘news habitus’, ‘doxa’, and ‘newsroom capital’ to simultaneously explore newsroom culture, and the embedded structures that impact news work at the SABC. These concepts are primarily used in Case study (1) of this work as the

framework for generating relevant insights and as a guide to help address the research objectives. Consistent with the ethnographic focus, this work not only limits itself to where the culture begins and unfolds inside the newsroom but also extends to where it ends, i.e., in the form of the sampled news bulletins and current affairs programmes. To this end, general patterns in sampled bulletins were identified and analysed, and the notions of PSB and Habermas' theory of the public sphere were used to analytically develop a generalisation about how the SABC mediated pluralists' politics during the 2016 local government elections and, further, how the SABC mediated key national issues. Therefore, the tandem use of both ethnography and the case study approach is justified in terms of this study's research objective outlined above.

In this section, **informed by literature**, the important elements of both ethnography and the case study approach as applied to my own study are discussed. **For example**, Cottle (2007) suggests research stages for what he calls 'good' participant observation, which in his case can be equated to ethnography. These stages include (i) research design, (ii) securing access, (iii) negotiating field relationships, (iv) collecting and recording data, (v) analysing data, and (vi) **write-up**. (Cottle, *ibid*, p.5).

The previous chapters outlined the reasons for selecting tools and the set of procedures that are used to guide this study, including the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that inform this study. The literature review is embedded in the discussions. The methodology and research design of this work are outlined in this chapter. Two broad chapters are covered in this section. The first Chapter (Chapter Three-3) outlines how I managed to access the SABC as a journalistic field and sustain the fieldwork. I discuss my positionality with respect to the study and describe how I conceptually and theoretically navigated the dilemma of being both an 'insider' and 'outsider' at the SABC. Ethical issues are discussed, including doing no harm and protecting the autonomy, safety, and dignity of my research participants. Chapter four (4) presents the research methodology that was applied in this study. It presents the research design, details the research types(s) that are used, and outlines how and why they were selected. I proceed to justify the choice and relevance of the data collection methods deployed in this work, and thereafter I discuss the data analysis and interpretation techniques, including the limitations encountered. I employed all the above in my effort to answer the following three (3) central research questions:

4. Which news-making processes, practices, norms, and values are identifiable at the SABC?
5. In what ways do institutional management and policy issues influence news making at the SABC?
6. How does the SABC mediate news?

Particular focus is directed towards an exposition of how ethnographic research methods, complemented by the case study approach, were applied to my own study of the SABC newsroom culture and journalistic practice and shows how the field perspective of Bourdieu and Habermas' notions of the public sphere offers a useful analytic framework to investigate context. Consideration of the weaknesses associated with both ethnography and the case study approach in the study of journalism are limited for reasons of space and focus. The two cases that constitute this ethnographic study are elaborated in sections four (4) and five (5).

Data Saturation

The data that was used in this research was collected purposively – meaning the choice of which population or sample of documents to analyse, bulletins to explore and who to interview as part of the research – all was done deliberately according to purpose and practicalities of my research. Important considerations included access to data, and data saturation. The latter suggests that I was mainly triggered by the goal of ensuring an adequate sample – large enough to help generate new information in line with my research objectives, and at the same time avoiding redundancy and data saturation.

Granted, the theoretical construct of data saturation is contested. When applied in the broader sense, saturation implies a stage during data collection when the prospect for new insights or issues is considered unlikely and when data begins to repeat itself (Clarke and Braun, 2021). However, and importantly, failure to reach data saturation may also affect the ‘quality and validity’ of research outcomes. According to Clarke and Braun (*ibid*), research ought to ‘dwell with uncertainty and recognise that meaning is generated through interpretation of, not excavated from, data’, and as such decisions relating to ‘how many’ data items, and when to stop ‘data collection’, are inescapably situated and subjective, and cannot be determined (wholly) in advance of analysis (*ibid*,

p. 201). However, given there is ‘no one size fit all’ in respect to data saturation, and this study has not encountered any practical guidelines for when data saturation may be reached, therefore only general principles have been considered. Scholars such as Guest, et al, (2006) have for example recommended no less than six interviews; while Dibley, (2011) has suggested that it is perhaps better to think of data saturation in terms of rich and thick, rather than size (Burmeister, and Aitken, 2012 as cited in Fusch, & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). ‘The easiest way to differentiate between rich and thick data is to think of *rich* as quality and *thick* as quantity. Thick data is a lot of data; rich data is intricate, detailed, nuanced, and more. One can have a lot of thick data that is not rich; conversely, one can have rich data but not a lot of it. The trick if you will, is to have **both** (Fusch, & Ness, ibid, p. 1409).

Chapter Five (5)

Accessing the Field and Issues of Positionality

5.0 Introduction

Methodologically, this study leans more towards the explorative approach, although there are elements of both the interpretive and constructivism approaches in the presentation of the conclusions from the collected data. The approach proceeds from the premise that the issues under investigation are unknown and yet socially constructed, subjective and embody multiple perspectives. From this prism, this work is inherently shaped by what the researcher makes of the observed phenomenon or data that is emerging from the research. In short, this work brings my own subjective and reflexive view to what is observed based on my own personal experience or understanding. This lens was necessary to guide the two case studies conducted in this work considering that I was the research instrument in this study. In this role as the researcher, inevitably, my prior experiences, assumptions and beliefs were bound to influence the research process, and that positionality is significant to acknowledge. Scholars who have employed reflexivity in qualitative research allude to benefits of the approach, which include accountability, reliability, richness, clarity, ethical treatment of those being studied, and more (Geertz 1967; Stake, 2010). According to Stake (*ibid*), as in this work, it is expected for the discussion to require interpretation or to be framed in a manner that helps readers understand the activity as experienced by humans or agents in an activity, and this sometimes involves making causal relationships between objects and subjects that only an insider can best articulate. The point, however, is that interpretation and description is inherently a subjective process but one that has advantages if properly handled in qualitative research (see discussion below on etic vs emic – Chapter 5.1). The literature is still developing, as there are aspects of insider research that remain under-researched, for example negotiating prior relationships as a qualitative researcher, particularly how the insider researcher inadvertently shapes the research and ultimately its quality, especially in relation to interpreting the data that is collected. Bourdieu's reflexive sociology is applied in this work, i.e., as the research instrument, I have deliberately factored the practice of reflecting on my own personal

association with the SABC and my social and career history which encompasses professional of journalism.

5.1 The Emic vs the Etic

The emic and etic approaches to understanding social settings are long-standing in social science and are often viewed as being at odds with each other. The terms “etic” denoting the outsiders’ perspective and “emic”, traditionally associated with the insiders’ perspective, were coined decades ago by the linguist Kenneth Pike. Both concepts have a pedigree in the study and understanding of social settings and are assumed to supplement the ethnographic method of investigating groups within contexts. However, a common tendency is to reject insights from either of the perspectives based on perceived conceptual or methodological witnesses (Martin, 2001). The position in a range of scholarship is to conceive perspectives and methods not as absolutes. At times it is necessary for an insider to collect data on social settings using quantitative methods and to analyse the same using quantitative techniques which are synonymous with the etic approach (Farh, et al., 1997). However, it is acknowledged that the divide between these two distinct concepts (emic and etic) continues in contemporary scholarship between proponents of interpretivism such as Geertz (1973 – 2008) and political science comparativists such as Lambach (2011). On the one hand, the emic approach, which involves direct participation by the researcher within a culture, is often discredited on the grounds that it is very much ‘subjective’ and carries the risk of misconceptions from persons inside the culture (Warner, 1999). On the other hand, etic, denoting the perspective of an outsider looking in on a culture without participating in it and relying solely on observation, is often dismissed because the researcher is seen as disconnected from the research participants and potentially insensitive to how participants experience their own circumstances because of too much dependence on preexisting theories (Geertz, 2008; Thompson, 2001), while emic focuses on the observed research participants as the best source of information on the culture (*ibid*). However, not all scholars agree that emic and etic approaches are opposed to one another. In fact, several scholars have argued in favour of selecting between approaches, depending on the stage of the research.

As a journalist and former staff member at the SABC, it was not easy to remind myself of my embodied subjectivity emanating from prior experiences, assumptions, and

biases. The point here is that as an insider, ‘subjectivity’ is inevitable and thus important to declare upfront my rather intimate degree of closeness to professional broadcast journalism and in particular to the culture at the SABC. Following my postgraduate study in Journalism and Media studies at Rhodes University, I joined the SABC, first as a news researcher, and eight (8) years later, I was appointed to the role of Planning Editor: News and Current Affairs Research, Politics and Policy Analysis. I therefore have an insider status at the SABC newsrooms because I share some group identity with the participants. Prior to commencing this research, in my capacity as Research Planning Editor at the broadcaster and I was responsible for news, current affairs research, politics, and policy analysis in the News and Current Affairs Division of the SABC. Thus, I was not a stranger to several of the participating group members and had previously worked directly with some of them. Although my research was formally introduced at the editorial and programme planning meetings, there were occasions when some participating group members assumed I had returned to my former role in the news department. ‘Therefore, you’re back’ was a common remark during the course of my research. However, at times I slightly embodied the outsider position at the SABC because, although I am familiar with news making and current affairs production routines generally – having performed roles as a current affairs producer/director and studio technical operations at another broadcaster, specifically at the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) where my journalism career began, I have not once worked as a field reporter. Thus, I have always been curious about how journalists at the SABC perceive their own news-making experiences and roles as field reporters. A core feature of this work is that it requires satisfactory explanations of the constantly evolving practices, values, norms, and other social activities and that requires a significant appreciation of the perspectives, culture and ‘world views’ of the SABC journalists and editors.

Conversely, I was no longer practicing as a journalist at the time of conducting the study and had long departed from my role at the broadcaster. It is therefore assumed that lack of personal connection rendered the potential for an etic sense of disembodiment. With the help of the reflexive communication model by Bergman and Lindgren (2018) and the work of Morris et al. (1999), focusing on the combined effect of emic and etic approaches to research on social settings, I have used their useful insights to inform my study. The most important lesson is the use of the integrative

approach that combines the perspectives of both the insiders' and outsiders', often resulting from strong bonds between the researcher and the research subjects and conscious reflexivity to facilitate research rigour. According to Morris et al. (*ibid*), the nuanced position is to appreciate that the emic and etic perspectives are not two opposites. Rather, they both belong to a theoretical field which requires the benefit of combining emic and etic understandings. The indispensable position for purposes of academic rigour is to account for the role and associations of the researcher(s) in the field of enquiry, and particularly social setting that is being studied but also on the extent to which the researcher self-examines his or her own assumptions about the object of research (reflexivity). The graphic below is applied by Morris et al. (1999) in the study titled 'Views from inside and outside: Integrating emic and etic insights about culture and justice judgment'.

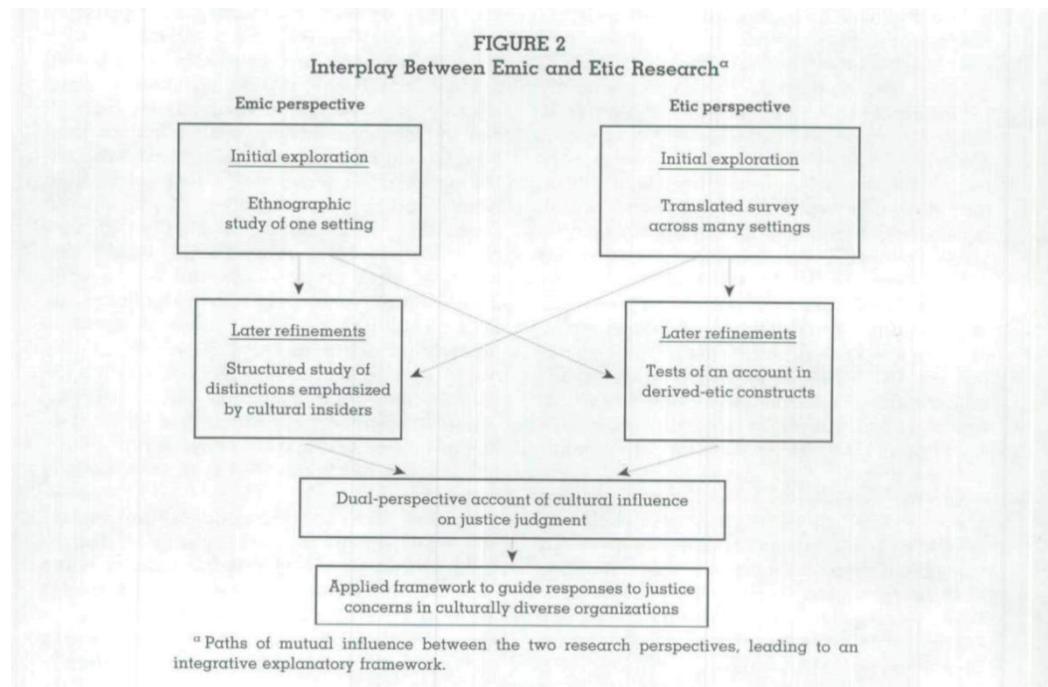


Figure 5- 1: Interplay between Emic and Etic Research

Source: Morris, et al., (1999)

In my study, the extent of my participation in the SABC newsroom and editorial meetings could be described as emic in the sense that my role was limited to observing the institutional culture of news making at the broadcaster and specific to understanding

how journalists inside the SABC perceive their own professional roles with respect to their PSB mandate. Their beliefs and dispositions were my main sources of information, and there was no intention to analyse and test the constructs of the participants in the same manner across any other group. This is different from the etic approach, which would have to consider universal behaviours or universal explanations for the conduct of journalists across various domains and jurisdictions. However, this did not stop me from making use of conceptual categories and knowledge of the discipline as key to understanding what happens at the SABC. Thus, although this work makes no claim of ‘objectivity’ but attempts to present accurately both the ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ point of view, preexisting theories, such as Bourdieu’s reflexivity concepts, assisted in guiding my exploration the SABC newsrooms and also guided the interpretation of what was observed. For this reason, while my interpretation of the observed phenomenon is culture specific, defined only in terms what was before me, and benefits from preexisting theoretical frameworks, experiences from other cultures, it is equal acknowledged that the SABC newsrooms were subjectively experienced, owing to my positionality as a former SABC employee who spent several years working in the newsroom – in some instances, working with the same individuals who later became subjects of my research. I elaborate on this methodological and theoretical approach in the discussion below.

5.1.1 Insider vs Outsider Dichotomy

Fetterman (2008) says that ‘the ethnographer enters the field with an open mind, not with an empty head’ (*ibid*, p. 288 as cited in Jordaan, 2020, p. 77). The process begins with the ethnographer acknowledging his or her responsibility towards the participants and unconditionally accepting the fact that one’s position will mediate how these participants will be depicted through the research and the knowledge that is generated. Such considerations relating to ties between researcher and participants, data generation and analysis lead to an important discussion in social research, often characterised as the insider-outsider dichotomy. According to Berger (2015), on the one hand, the ‘familiarity’ of the insider ‘may enable better in-depth understanding of participants’ perception and interpretation of their lived experience in a way that is impossible in the absence of having been through it’ (*ibid*, p. 13), limiting potential inhibitors, and encouraging research subjects to express themselves more freely. Furthermore, it can provide the research a holistic view of the issue in question, allowing ways of

identifying relevant and valuable data which could be otherwise be difficult for an ‘outsider’ to decode (Berger, *ibid*). However, on the negative side, an ‘insider’ position may also distort data and its meaning, particularly in situations where the researcher imposes his or her experiences on the participants or group under investigation, deploying personal experiences as if there were a universally applicable and appropriate for understanding the phenomenon being explored (Berger, 2015).

However, as already highlighted, to produce a reliable and ethically sound study, it is imperative for the ‘insider’ researcher to constantly reflect on one’s potential biases in respect to the issue or participants under investigation (Jordan, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this work, ‘objectivity, autonomy and independence’ are recurrent themes as guiding values in journalism practice. Proponents of the qualitative approach have concluded that objectivity is nearly impossible in qualitative research, given its nature and approach, and that while ‘subjectivity’ is an inevitable element of any act of understanding, they have equally questioned whether ‘objectivity’ is useful or achievable as a guiding principle when considering a contribution to knowledge. What is proposed is for researchers to acknowledge their subjectivity within the research process. This contributes to the validity of the research as opposed to delegitimising it. Rigour and transparency are as such the hallmarks of good qualitative research whereby the assumptions, agency and the inevitable subjectivity are acknowledged and viewed as an integral part of creating and presenting knowledge or research analysis (*ibid*).

5.2 Inductive vs Deductive

This study employs the inductive approach and some elements of deductive reasoning to generate a comprehensive understanding of the explored research issues. While both approaches involve immersing oneself in the data and processing it with a view to make sense of the whole set of collected data and to determine what is happening, present or absent, the relationship between theory and research is different for each approach (Simon, 1996). This study is more synonymous with inductive reasoning than with deductive reasoning, especially because there is no intention to test the theory or generalisations that are developed from this research work. However, there is a significant body of literature that has shown that even though the inductive and deductive approaches are quite not the same, they can also be complementary (Simon, 1996; Hyde 2000; Daymon and Holloway 2010).

In summary, inductive reasoning can be understood in terms of generalisations relating to multiple logical processes and instances, interpretations of observations, all assumed to be true or established true more often than not - unlike deductive reasoning, which begins with generalisations and then explores if the assumed premises are applicable to specific situations (Simon, *ibid*; Hyde, *ibid*; Daymon and Holloway, *ibid*). Given what appears to be diametrically opposed approaches, researchers are divided as to which of the two constitutes legitimate inquiry and valid knowledge in specific situations. Nonetheless, it is increasingly common in contemporary scholarship to combine both approaches in one study, depending on the research objectives or stage of research. In some research designs, such as in this work, the generalisations or patterns that emerge from inductive reasoning are expanded upon through deduction, i.e., by connecting them to existing studies, or to additional collection of data and analysis. Below, I outline each of the approaches and highlight how each differs from the other. I then proceed to discuss how, taking the cue from literature, the two approaches were jointly used in this work, particularly how they potentially complement one another.

5.2.1 Inductive Approach

The inductive approach is employed in Case study 1 and in the subsequent ethnographic work in Case study 2. In both instances, relevant data were initially collected in the form of news bulletins, field notes, documents, and interviews, and once an adequate sample was achieved, a decisive break from data collection was made to allow the analysis to begin. For example, in Case study 1, a sample of news bulletins was collected at the start of July 2016, covering 30 days of the election campaign period leading to the SA municipal elections that were held on 3 August 2016. These bulletins were subsequently coded into broad themes. By looking at the general patterns in the sampled bulletins, the case study was able to develop a generalisation about how the SABC mediated pluralists' politics during the municipal elections of 2016 from a public sphere perspective and, further, how the SABC mediated key national issues. The study concluded with an inference that the public broadcaster had 'failed the public in its coverage of the election' (see also Dlamini and Chiumbu, 2016; Dlamini, et al., 2017). Because the general conclusion from this specific case study arises on the basis of an inductive method, this allowed for interpretations of the data as it emerged and whenever a piece of material cued the study in a particular direction. This is unlike in the deductive approach, in which interpretations are based on the total completed

analysis to see elements of the collected data perceptively (Berelson, 1952 as cited in Krippendorff, 1980). The same approach was employed in the second case study, and as such, it is argued that both case studies of the SABC news-making processes (Case study 1 and Case study 2) were approached inductively, although elements of deductive reasoning are also discernible. The key advantage of the inductive approach is that the weight of preconceived notions was avoided and that the data that emerged from the observation were decoded free of any existing hypothesis. As a matter of course, the themes and patterns that emerged from sampled news bulletins in Case study 1 and the mapping of embedded routines and dispositions inside the SABC in Case study 2 were both achieved and completed separately – and only then was I able to infer or generate a contextualised meaning from the collected data. In other words, I entered the field with respect to each case study with an open mind – for example – in Case study 1, without the empirical knowledge of how the SABC news texts would mediate pluralists' politics during the 2016 local government elections and the extent to which the SABC news bulletins would or fail to reflect public sphere principles. It was not possible to know in advance the social constituencies of the actors that would be covered in the news and what they would be seen talking about – neither would I have known which of the values, e.g., impartiality, autonomy, or independence, etc., would emerge or connect to the overarching theoretical frameworks of this study. The emerging patterns from both Case studies 1 and 2 enabled the development of a more general set of propositions or inferences that were later triangulated to generate a new theoretical position on the SABC and to address the research objectives of this work. Typical of studies that employ inductive reasoning, my study ended ordinarily when most deductive investigations began.

5.2.1.1 Deductive Approach

Unlike the inductive approach, which seeks to develop a theory, hypothesis or general conclusion, the deductive approach seeks to test an existing theory. That said, because there was no intention from the onset to validate or test the general conclusions from this study, the operationalisation of both the public sphere and field theory frameworks was used merely to guide this work. Thus, in summary, inductive reasoning was the dominant approach in this study, although a few elements of deductive reasoning may be recognisable. For example, while the arising themes and generalisations were determined from the arising data, i.e., inductively, the units of analysis (codes) that

were used to identify patterns in the sampled news bulletins were somewhat deductively predicated on existing theories, i.e., public sphere and field theories. Thus, while there was no intention in this study to find the same themes in the theoretical frameworks that guided this work, the codes and categories of analysis were loosely anchored on very clear theoretical frameworks, i.e., deductively relatable to the empirical world and existing theories, e.g., Habermas' public sphere concept and Bourdieu's field theories. Even then, although effort was made to operationalise these existing theoretical frameworks, the focus remained firmly rooted on developing my own generalisations, inferences, and frameworks based on my own findings from the collected research data through inductive reasoning.

5.2.1.2 Complimentary Use of Inductive and Deductive Reasoning

There are studies that have integrated inductive and deductive reasoning owing to limitations imposed by each approach. For example, the inductive approach has been criticised for being too subjective, nonreplicable, and often lacking in transparency, especially in respect to how samples are selected, data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2004; Daymon and Holloway, 2010), whereas in deductive research, there is a well-defined role for existing theory and the resultant measures that the researcher intends to use (Neuman 2003 as cited in Neuman, et, al., 2006. In short, the inductive approach begins with the need to develop theory and the other (deductive) to test theory (*ibid*). This creates a dilemma for researchers who may be faced with a research question where theory exists but may not be fully appropriate in their particular circumstances. This is the challenge that this work faced. For example, I was interested in understanding SABC-specific news-making practices from a public sphere perspective, and whereas there exists an extensive body of literature on how PSBs such as the BBC and others in Europe, have acquitted themselves in terms of public sphere theory, the same could not be applied willy nilly in the African context, particularly in South Africa – a nation characterised by a unique political history and challenges that date back decades before the official end of Apartheid 1994 (Wasserman, 2020). Similarly, some Western notions of journalism that dominate existing media theory tended to be at variance with the non-Western ethos and practices in journalism, which are often associated with nation-building and are considered to be socially transformative in the African context. Drawing upon studies that have argued in favour of integrating both the inductive and deductive, it was prudent to incorporate both approaches (inductive

and deductive) into the research design of this work - the benefit of which was that each brings a valuable attribute to research, more so in newsroom ethnography. On the one hand, the ‘inductive approach’ allows for flexibility, whereby the researcher enters the social setting or context with an open mind and less presumptions (general principle – see also Jordaan, 2020), allowing broader generalisations and theory to develop from the data (Simon, 1996). On the other hand, the deductive approach offers the possibility of testing the overall assumption, established causal relationship and theories (special case), and then identifying supporting evidence until only valid conclusions remain (*ibid*). In other words, the deductive researcher has the theory, tests that theory, and then confirms it with conclusive empirical results. The positive feedback therefore is that both the inductive and deductive approaches can be integrated to enhance each other within a particular study.

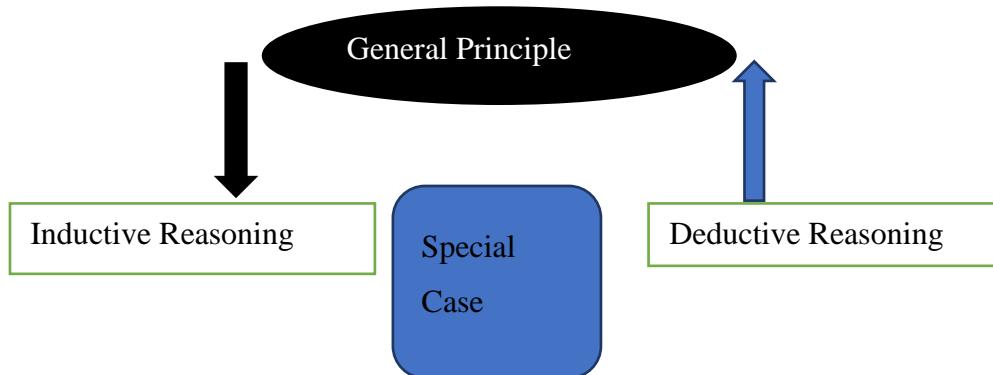


Figure 5- 2: Inductive and deductive reasoning

The integrative approach was not fully explored in this study of the SABC. Rather, the individual studies conducted in this work primarily utilised inductive reasoning since the exercise was never concerned with producing nonfalsifiable or testable conclusions or hypotheses. As such, a comprehensive application of deductive reasoning would have been impossible since conclusions of a deductive study can only be considered credible if all the premises set in the inductive approach have to be true and the terms clear.

5.3 Towards a ‘Thick Description’

According to existing records, the concept of ‘thick description’ was first introduced in 1968 by British philosopher Gilbert Ryle in his class work titled *The Thinking of*

Thoughts: What is ‘Le Pensueur’ Doing? He describes the strict dichotomy between ‘thin’ and ‘think’. The latter, ‘thick’, is presented in relation to those descriptions and interpretations that add context to conduct or behaviour, while ‘thin’ is focused only on ‘surface-level’ observations of conduct or behaviour. In his seminal Geertz (1973), taking leaf from Ryle (ibid), argued that the enterprise of ethnography, should not be defined by the data collection tools and procedures like choosing research subjects, taking, and transcribing fieldnotes, classifying fields, etc. Rather, according to Geertz (1973) – see also Geertz (2008), the credibility of the ethnographer’s interpretation falls short if it does not offer the full description of the observations and context. Ethnographic description is interpretive, it involves trying to rescue the ‘said’ from the obscure and diminishing situations, and ‘fix it in perusable terms’ (Geertz, 1973, p.318). But in Geertz, there is another characteristic, i.e., the description is also ‘microscopic’ (ibid), provides the setting, details, reactions, and the configurations of social interactions in complex cultural situations (see also Ponterotto, 2006). ‘Thick description’ therefore includes the variety of ways employed by human beings to collectively organise, understand, and live in the world. Equally, ‘thick descriptions’ of the research subjects/actors are necessary to illuminate the data and analysis (ibid). Ponterotto (2006), borrowing from Geertz (ibid), says it is an interpretation of what is implied by an observation, occurrence, or conduct, and that regardless of how small, there are voices, feelings, actions, and meanings. Ethnographically, the researcher is participating, engaged in listening, witnessing, and reflecting on the field or experiencing an immersion or encounter in both actual and approximate ways (ibid). In the case of this work, the SABC is ‘the field’, and methodologically, the researcher is attempting to bring some of the experiential, embodied, and engrained aspects of the field. The goal is not just to describe and interpret a situation but also to include for the readers important details about the ‘kind of intellectual effort’ that is as elaborate as a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, ibid, p. 6).

Geertz (1973) offers the concept of ‘thick description’ as a methodology - calling on the researcher – more especially the ethnographer to recognise the ‘obscure’ in social interactions, such as the actions individual undertake to gain respect (accumulate symbolic capital), etc.; what Narotzky and Besnier (2014) describes as a ‘chaotic landscape of complexity’. Geertz (ibid) advises ethnographers who wish – as is in this study of newsroom culture at the SABC – to give voice to the concerns of ‘ordinary

participants' (the low rank field reporter at the SABC) or according to Geertz (1973 as cited in Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2014), 'small facts' (e.g., unsolicited remarks or documents), that may include 'context' to such 'small facts that speak to large concerns' (*ibid*, p., 23). This is important, given that in ethnography, there are often other bits of information that the research may unintentionally stumble across – may well be just as important for the overall goal of the research (Cottle, 2007; Jorgensen, 1989). In this ethnography of the SABC newsrooms, for instance, participant observation in the SABC newsroom notes the 'unexpected' – the 'said' and 'not said' – including the unusual aspects or patterns that emerge from collateral document material such as the daily SABC news diaries, current affairs programme plans, Standard Operating Procedures, etc. To this end, Geertz (1973) wants ethnographers to direct their attention beyond immediate social practices towards the nuances, range of meanings, the unspoken words, and to 'whatever it is one has to know or believe' (*ibid*, p.11) in order to offer a discernible interpretation or description.

The type of data interpretation in this work, therefore, resembled the two methods used in the case studies, i.e., it included both the narrative form, together with pie-charts, tables, and bar graphs. This approach constitutes the cornerstone for the design and method for this study. By employing different approaches, the aim was to achieve what Geertz (2008) called 'thick description' or 'holistic perspective' – one which is 'reflexive', and 'context sensitive', i.e., 'locating findings in a social, historical and temporal context'; and encompassing 'complex interdependencies and system dynamics' that can only be understood as a product of a non-static system that is more than the sum of its parts (Denzin & Lincoln, (Eds.). 2011).

5.3.1 Reflexivity

Reflexivity may be a conscious activity, although often it is not. Rather, it is a 'reconstruction' or 'interpretation' of the 'social world', which connotes conscious thought (Beck, et, al., 2003). As this chapter, as well as the subsequent chapters that present and discuss the collected data, shows, there are numerous factors that impact the work ethnographers and ultimately how it is understood by those work read it. Reflexivity is therefore an important enabler of 'critical' qualitative research (Marland, et, al., 2009) and has much to do with how the researcher mitigates one's own biases on the findings. It is common for researchers who employ reflexivity to be criticised for

not measuring up to the same standards of rigour because often the researcher knows the participants. Such was my situation at the SABC. Below I discuss issues relating to my previous proximity to the SABC, wherein I had previously worked for several years and had been intimately involved with the profession of journalism. I concede that this positionality offered significant advantages but also that it indeed reshaped my role and experiences, and presumably those within it. According to Primeau (2003, p. 9–16), reflexivity contributes to the quality of research in the sense that it extends our appreciation of how our subjectivities and interests as researchers impact all phases of the research process. Parahoo (2006), as cited in Sherwood (2011), defined reflexivity in terms of an unending process of reflection by the researcher, acknowledging that they implicated in social setting being researched. Hertz (1997), as cited in Marland et al., 2009, argued in favour of detachment, internal dialogue, and constant scrutiny of 'what I know' and 'how I know it'. In other words, to be reflexive in research, the researcher must be mindful of the one's role in the process (Haynes, 2012). The role of the researcher in the process should consist of no more than observing, probing, prompting, and encouraging participants' views of their experiences (Marland, et al., *ibid*). Such is important for the reliability of the outcomes of this work, and whereas an impersonal approach is often encouraged in other research approaches and specifically recommended when providing the account of a social setting in which the researcher is embedded, contrary, I here declare my positionality in the context of the SABC newsroom and the profession of broadcast journalism. In other words, I adopted a reflexive and discursive reconstruction of collected data that was available in the form of news texts, literature, documents, interviews, and participant observations inside the SABC newsroom, and in the process, I inevitably accepted the possibility of subjectivity towards the claims and expressions that I deemed important. This approach is different from reflection, which presupposes a mirror image of what is observed or studied. Rather, reflexivity entails thinking about our experiences and questioning the way we do things (Haynes, *ibid*).

This was helpful, for example, because in this work, both the newsroom ethnography and the content analysis of news output were used to uncover not only what is often projected outside about the SABC but also what happens inside the institution – part of which was familiar to me as the research instrument. Reflexivity was therefore necessary because, unlike reflection, which only considers the data as collected, the

interpretive element accounts for the assumptions of the researcher, ‘their values, political values, and language’ (Haynes, *ibid.*, pg. 75). Thus, in this study, the collected qualitative data or evidence was reflexively examined not only in relation to the context of news making at the SABC, the broader history PSB in South Africa, and both the public sphere and field theories but also with the awareness that ‘whatever, no matter what topic or area or what methods we use – we are all... picking and choosing to pay attention and ignore... excluding, including concealing, favouring some people, some topics, some questions, some forms of representation, some values’ (Cals & Smircich, 1999, p. 664). The key question remains, can any researcher conduct their work in ways that are not ‘self-aware’ and to use a metaphor, avoid bringing ‘the dust on their feet’ to the research setting? For Braun and Clarke (2013) that is what reflexivity is all about. It enables the researcher to reflect on how he or she shaped the research. Furthermore, reflexivity is not ‘whether’ but rather ‘how’ the research was shaped by researcher’s situatedness in context, not excluding the insider and outsider positions that may exist (Gallais, 2008 as cited in Braun and Clarke, *ibid*). Rather, it is about the researcher recognising and accounting for one’s own position in the study and the potential impacts on the subjects being researched, type of research questions, the data that is sought, and how it gets interpreted (Berger, 2015 as cited in Dodgson, 2019). Thus, using the above conceptualisations, we can summarise that reflexivity is a type of critical reflection about the position one takes as a researcher and particularly how this stance has been accounted for in the research.

5.4. Anonymity vs Confidentiality

In a range of literature, ‘anonymity’ has generally been conflated with ‘confidentiality’ or adopted interchangeably (Kaiser, 2009; Tolich, 2004). The two concepts are closely connected in the sense that anonymity is one method of ensuring confidentiality. However, the two concepts are distinct. In this study, confidentiality is understood in terms of keeping private or secret data emanating from research subjects, the things they say, most of which may only be achieved through one deliberately deciding to not communicate some of the collected data (Van den Hoonard, 2003). On the other hand, anonymity is employed in practice in terms of an idealised view that presupposes the research subject will not be easily identifiable through the presented data – that information on the identity of research participants such as names, job description, place of residence, etc., be excluded from the final research reports (*ibid*). This is

usually done to protect research subjects from harm, stigmatisation embarrassment, and in some cases, legal compliance, or avoidance of possible litigation. Exposing the identities of research participants can result in harm, particularly in cases where content is controversial. Given the controversy surrounding some of the elements of my research and the moral responsibility and obligation to protect the participants, anonymity was therefore not only the choice of the research subjects at the SABC but also a safe option to encourage participants to be free to express extreme views. However, in practice, the quandary associated with most cases relating to anonymising data and sources is that ‘researchers typically underuse all the data they have collected, whether fieldnotes or interview transcripts’ (Van den Hoonaard, 2003, p. 148).

5.4.1. Deploying Anonymity and Confidentiality in Practice

In this work, following Scott (2005), the deployment of anonymity and confidentiality was managed as a range - from complete to partial anonymity, and fully accredited. This was done in consideration of the principle of respect for participant choices. In some instances, participants opted to be anonymous, while others preferred otherwise, i.e., desired to be identified and associated with their own comments. Often, data were shared with confidence. In such circumstances, privacy entailed protecting the individuals’ right to determine the extent, time, and circumstances under which their participation could be shared in the final report or partially shared (Holland, et al, *ibid*). Such necessitated making assurances to those participants concerning how their contribution would be protected. Furthermore, a balance between competing priorities was prioritised as part of the study protocol.

Notably, some interview participants were concerned discussing ‘insider’ knowledge relating to specific newsroom arrangements, unwritten rules, and intimate knowledge pertaining to their colleagues and managers. This presented a challenge in terms of what Tolich (2004) characterises as ‘external’ confidentiality – a term used in relation to ‘protection against identification’. In his paper titled: ‘Internal Confidentiality: When Confidentiality Assurances Fail Relational Informants’, Tolich explores the limit in the principle of confidentiality and demonstrates how informants’ connected relationships can lead to impaired or diminished autonomy. According to Tolich, there is a risk to anonymity as some ‘insiders’ are likely to recognise what their peers or other ‘insiders’ may have said to a researcher in a private interview (*ibid*). Thus, it was equally a risk in

my study that some of the participants who opted to be anonymous could be traceable and their identities potentially identifiable since only ‘insiders’ were likely to possess certain forms of information. A further complication to anonymity was the accessibility of records of court cases, media and other documents in the public domain detailing certain incidents that are highlighted in the study, including the use of social media by the participants themselves to push certain narratives. In such cases, the identity of participants was cited as presented in the documents, particularly the identity of names. In instances whereby the participant requested anonymity, the most common form of anonymisation used was assigning pseudonyms and collective identifiers. For example, the term ‘SABC8 or member of the SABC8’ is used frequently as a collective identifier of information that was shared by one or more participants who were part of the SABC8 group but did not want to be individually identified or perhaps shared confidential information. However, because the comparability of what may have been said with the anonymised version of the same was difficult to achieve without breaching anonymity, in this study, some of the anonymised versions of the same information were presented as shared. In his paper titled: ‘Anonymising Research Data’ (Clark, 2006) outlines some of the issues surrounding the anonymisation process and discusses the rationale for anonymisation, offering some practical and substantive issues and raising some concerns about how best to go about the practise of anonymisation.

5.4.2 The Challenge of Anonymising Data

Several official research ethics guidelines propose the anonymisation of research subjects who share restricted, personal, and sensitive information, particularly about third parties, but also concerning themselves. With this in mind, this work endeavoured to keep the identities of such participants anonymous to the extent possible - excluding names or other identifiers such as age, gender, and race, including names and the names of all else that could be mentioned, as well as disguising their indicators such as job positions, etc. However, the process of maintaining confidentiality and autonomy requires a reciprocal balance between protection of the participant, individual choice of the participant, and the complex challenge of upholding the scientific and methodological integrity of research. This approach is not mute to the contrary view by Van den Hoonaard (*ibid*), whose findings indicate that it is virtually impossible for researchers to fully protect real identities in datasets, particularly in ethnographic

research. Despite this, it is the view of this thesis that, first, reidentification is not a practical risk because anonymising some participants or the data if done to standard often provides plausible deniability of the risk; and second, this work accepts that while some information can only be partially anonymised or participants pseudonymised, it is still good practice to attempt as much as possible to do so. Increasingly, there exist a body of scholars who maintain anonymity and confidentiality as a ‘rule of thumb’ and posit that research reports ought to be presented always in a manner that privileges the data over respondents. In other words, the protection of research participants should be the main focus for all researchers (Holland et al, 2013). However, even though my study has chosen to anonymise some of the participants and not all, it is not assumed that there are benefits from this approach for all research. In contrast, several studies have shown that some research subjects prefer to be identified and to own the information they provide (Smith, 1999). In fact, some critical scholars have argued that anonymity denies participants the right to own the knowledge they help produce in collaboration with the researcher and that in the process, researchers are shown as stewards of knowledge, while participants are cast as vulnerable and powerless rather than as worthy of being partners in knowledge generation.

5.5 In Summary

As mentioned in the overview of the Methodology and Research Design Section three (3) above, I have adopted a multi-method approach to this newsroom ethnography of the SABC, which includes observation of the newsroom and editorial meetings and fieldnotes as well as the collection of other types of data in the field, such as the analysis of related documents, conducting semi-structured interviews that focus on the perceptions of news workers in the context of their everyday work, and the analysis of Current Affairs and News outputs produced by the broadcaster. The section has highlighted the challenges associated with anonymity, how it was applied in this study, as well as the advantages of researchers participating openly, and the researcher acknowledging one’s own positionality (reflexivity) throughout the research process. As highlighted in Chapters one (1), three (3) and four (4), there are two (2) separate case studies that constitute this newsroom ethnography. Both case studies are elaborated in Chapters six (6) and seven (7).

Chapter Six (6)

Methodology

6.0 Introduction

As already mentioned in Chapter One (1), this study is an ethnography of news making and current affairs production at the SABC. The main focus is on the newsroom culture and journalistic practices at the SABC. I discuss in this chapter, the main motivations for selecting the SABC newsrooms as the research site and elaborate on my social positioning with respect to the study. As a former journalist and employee of the SABC News and Current Affairs Division, I am interested in the inner workings of the broadcaster's newsrooms. I justify the choice of ethnography and the case study approach as appropriate methods to empirically investigate context, beliefs, and practices. Both are two frequently used qualitative research approaches in social sciences. I describe each of the two methods and show how each technique has been appropriated into this research and draw some conclusions.

To draw more valid conclusions, newsroom ethnography, incorporating the two case studies, is conducted to understand the range of factors that impact news-making processes at the SABC, more specifically, the embedded norms, professional values, and journalists' beliefs inside the SABC newsrooms, and to empirically investigate how these factors combine to structure the newsroom culture, including Current Affairs and News output at South Africa's only PSB. The first case study (Case study 1) is a participant observation of the SABC newsroom, supplemented by semi-structured interviews and the analysis of relevant documents. It seeks to identify the discernible structural issues inside the SABC that either constrain or enable journalistic practice at the SABC. The second case study (Case study 2) employs content analysis of public issues and deliberations as mediated in the SABC newscasts. Analytically, this work considers the different ways that routine practices, embedded norms, values, and perceptions of journalists regarding their professional role all combine to influence news making and output at the SABC. In short, newsroom ethnography is employed to gain insight into the internal workings in the SABC newsrooms, while the SABC news output is used to explore how the broadcaster mediates pluralists' politics during an

election and the coverage of key national issues. Both cases were aimed at providing the gateway to the primary interest of the study, which was the exploration of PSB practice at the SABC. In other words, newsroom ethnography was employed as an instrument to generate informed generalisations relating to news construction practices, institutional norms and news-making values operating inside the SABC and to infer the prevailing newsroom culture and the extent of the broadcaster's PSB claims.

6.1 Ethnography at the SABC Newsrooms

To recap, newsroom ethnography in particular provides helpful insights regarding the various factors that impact news making, daily routines, embedded norms, values, and practices (Cottle, 2007). According to Larsson (2006), depending on the research purposes and needs, the researcher does not have to specifically state the length of time spent on location with data subjects but emphasises, nonetheless, the critical requirement of the ethnographer in the research field to build valid claims. In short, the researcher plays critical role as the research instrument in ethnography. ‘The depth of information depends on the researcher’s sense of what is considered relevant and irrelevant to the topic’ (Suryani, 2013, p.123). I discuss how access to the SABC newsrooms – my research site was gained. This is often a major challenge for ethnographers, and access to the SABC is highlighted in previous studies as one of the main challenges (Arndt, 2007, p.11; Ryfe, 2016, p.40). Indeed, there is a reported instance in which a delegation of civil society leaders that was due to meet COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng to discuss censorship at the SABC was barred from entering the premises.

Although this was not my experience, there is a body of evidence highlighting the difficulty endured by several newsroom ethnographers in their quest to access newsrooms, and this is not limited only to the SABC. Ryfe (2016, p.40) attributes this tendency partly to ‘competitive pressures’, which often ‘incline news organisations to ‘secrecy and risk aversion – like the risk of opening their doors to an ethnographer’ (*ibid*). As such, understanding how I gained and sustained access to the SABC newsroom is an integral part of the data generated by this study. Below, I describe the vast machinery that goes into motion to manufacture perishable News and Current Affairs products or to reconstruct ‘reality’ in the form of stories for audiences. I outline how I was able to access the inner workings of the SABC newsrooms. In the process, I briefly shed light on elements of the institutional environment of the SABC and

highlight some of the key structural ‘building blocks’, i.e., the various identifiable elements, departments, and processes of journalistic work at the SABC. For purposes of research validity, it is prudent state here that the SABC has a significant number of documents and written policies that guide its operations. The documents offer useful insights on the norms, values, routines, and rules of the SABC. They include the SABC Memorandum and Articles of Association, Board Charter, terms of reference for the Board Committees, a Delegation of Authority Framework, and an Editorial Code of Ethics. Importantly, these documents are easily accessible in the public domain and directly from the SABC, to everyone, including SABC employees, and retrievable through portals like the SABC official website³⁰.

6.2 Accessing the ‘Field’

News making involves many hands and hence the importance for the research ethnographer to gain general acceptance in the ‘field’ or ‘newsroom’, not only from the institution but also from all the actors that are engaged in the News and Current Affairs production process. The success at data gathering in the newsroom obviously comes with practical constraints that one has to navigate. Fortunately, for me, unlike several of my predecessors, I was well received by the broader staff in the newsrooms and management at the SABC from the onset. A number of scholars on the SABC have alluded to the difficulty of accessing the SABC’s internal environment, specifically key data sources and personnel at the broadcaster, due to a ‘perceived’ culture of secrecy inside the organisation. For example, Arndt (2007) describes in detail the challenges she experienced with accessing internal information, ultimately abandoning her efforts to gather data from the SABC through the official channels. Arndt (*ibid*) reveals that even as access eventually granted, often it was not to senior management levels. ‘Senior editors and managers have time and again implicitly and explicitly stated that they might put themselves at risk by assisting with research that is not welcomed by the MD of news. There seems to be no understanding that the findings could well be of value to the organisation and to management itself’ (Arndt, 2007, p. 29).

³⁰ (<https://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/annual-reports/>)

There are counterarguments, and one such is that the SABC is classified as a National Key Point (NKP) according to South Africa's Act of parliament. Act No. 102 of 1980 provides 'for the declaration of sites of national strategic importance against sabotage as determined by the Minister of Police and the Minister of Defence'. On the basis of such arguments, access is usually entangled in many bureaucratic processes. However, civil society groups, researchers and more have alleged that the NKP is often used by SABC authorities to deny citizens of their right to know and to perpetuate the 'shroud' of secrecy over information that is vital to the public interest (R2K, 2013). Given this context, my experience was uniquely different. Factors that worked in my favour included the fact that I had previously worked at the SABC news and current affairs department for nearly eight years, and this meant that I was already known inside the SABC newsrooms, as well as had a healthy rapport with a significant number of editors, producers, and journalists. Securing access to the organisation took less than a week, starting with an initial approach to one of the executive current affairs producers at the SABC on the 13th of March 2016.

'You can start your fieldwork while we process your permit. I do not foresee any challenge with securing your official access. In the meantime, I will sign you in as my guest' Fieldnote 1

Thus, my fieldwork was characterised by such a semblance of unfettered access, except for the frequent requests by several of my research subjects who opted to participate but remained anonymous. Although it took another four months to receive written permission, on the 17th of August 2016, I was issued with the official consent letter to conduct my study. At that point, I was already embedded in the newsroom. As already mentioned earlier, the fact that I previously worked at the SABC News and Current Affairs Division was useful. It helped significantly to consolidate my rapport with selected research subjects and facilitated my understanding of what had changed since my voluntary departure in 2014, particularly with respect to what existed as internal SABC news and current affairs production protocols and processes.

My positionality was indeed an advantage. Initially, a section of editors and staff thought I was back as an employee of the SABC. Therefore, 'So, you are back' was a common retort from several of them. Such encounters provided me with the opportunity

to briefly outline my purpose and to verbally request support for my study. I am of the view that my research agenda at the SABC newsrooms was clearly understood by those I interacted with, and hence, the degree of access and subsequent maintenance of the internal relationships enabled my fieldwork. I was allowed to enter the SABC building anytime and hang around with staff for as long as was necessary, in their workstations, offices, canteen, and sometimes in the hallways and often at the in-house canteen areas. The latter space is crucial to mention because at predictable times and often after the editorial or programming planning meetings or during breakfast and lunch hours, the SABC canteens would be characterised by a daily buzz from one or more constellations of News and Current Affairs teams, technicians, and other staff members. Although this might seem very much like just hanging around without purpose, being randomly around SABC staff was time well spent. Between formally arranged meetings, the informal settings generated some of the most illuminating insights relating to my study objectives. This turned out to be an invaluable approach for staying in touch with my research informants and for recruiting others to take part, particularly in the semi-structured interviews that were conducted for the study. In short, as already mentioned, all my research subjects were remarkably supportive of this study, even with their obviously active and unpredictable work timetables. Furthermore, I had unrestricted access to the news diaries and other useful information during my fieldwork. As the research instrument in this study, I accept that my field observations relied heavily on my personal perceptions and judgements, and this had implications for the material under study, owing to preconceived notions. To mitigate this challenge, I relied on Bourdieu's reflexive sociology approach to examine my own feelings and motives for acting the way I did and to reflect on my preconceptions.

6.3 Ethical Considerations

The basic ethical principles in ethnographic research, not less in other forms of research, include 'doing no harm and protecting the autonomy, wellbeing, safety, and dignity of all participants' (AcSS, R. I. - European Commission, 2013). For instance, considerable changes in the SABC senior news management coincided with my fieldwork in the newsrooms. It was helpful, in the face-to-face discussions with the then-managing executive of News and Current Affairs, it had been agreed that I would be granted unrestricted access to the newsrooms, allowed to the participant observer status, permitted to interview those journalists, producers and editors who were willing

to participate in my research, but that getting their cooperation would remain my responsibility. Furthermore, it was further settled that I could reference the broadcaster, although the identities of all informants were to remain confidential unless prior permission was granted by the research subject, or the material was already in the public domain. Murphy and Dingwall (2001, p.340), as in AcSS, R. I. (2013, p.3). argue that researchers should only proceed with a study if they ‘can show’ that there are good reasons to do so and that the ‘anticipated benefits of a study outweigh’ the estimated ‘potential’ for harm or ‘risks’ (*ibid*).

In my study, ethical ethnography was assured by an ethics clearance application and approval to the Wits Ethics Committees (WEC), who are responsible for oversight and approvals relating to all humanities research conducted by faculty, staff, and students at Witwatersrand University. The WEC ethics clearance maximises the protection of research subjects while requiring from the researcher the integrity of the data. The protocol comprises the submission and approval of a research proposal, and an informed consent form (Appendix F: Informed Consent Form and Interview questions from 2016 for a duration of five (5) years, Appendix A: Approval of Proposal.

Based on my own experiences at the SABC newsrooms and in consideration of all the above highlights, reflexivity is required for the maintenance of research ethics. Therefore, I concur with Fetterman (2009) that the researcher must be constantly aware of the significance of their actions. In this regard, my research was greatly assisted by what Stake (1981) calls progressive focusing. In each issue under investigation or in every interaction, I endeavoured to embody an open explorative mind. This ensured what Fetterman (*ibid*) characterises as ‘lending a sympathetic ear to troubled individuals’ (*ibid*, p.580). My acknowledged positionality as a former employee of the SABC, mitigated by reflexivity, guaranteed that I was well acquainted with the issues under investigation, and may have assisted in ensuring fair dealing, as well as psychological safety among my research participants.

6.4 Data Gathering and Analysis Methods

As shown above, ethnography is open to a range of research techniques and methods. My approach at the SABC newsrooms was informed by the multiple methods approach that I generally used in this study to facilitate the exploration of the SABC as a

journalistic field within a context using a variety of data sources. In other words, this ensures that the issues were covered through multiple lenses, which allows for diverse facets of the phenomenon under study to be revealed and understood. Thus, from the onset, I have specified that this work uses triangulation to approach the overall research objective of this work. Put differently, a variety of distinct data collection and analysis methods are used in this work to illuminate the different facets of the same study and to ensure the reliability of the research findings is increased. Thus, I reiterate this work is to a larger extent a mixed method qualitative study in that it uses different forms of methods (quantitative and qualitative), together with multiple kinds of data such as observations, semi-structured interviews, analysis of documents, and themes in news bulletins. This is quite different from a quantitative paradigm which relies solely on quantitative data derived from surveys, experimental data, and such like (Creswell 2015, Thomas Kuhn as cited in Anand, et al., 2020; Yin, 2011, Stake, 2010).

When researchers combine two types of data from different paradigms as in the multiple-methods approach – such as in the content analysis of news casts conducted in this work in which two different paradigms – quantitative and qualitative are used in the same focus – this is understood in terms of the mixed method research – which suggests complimentary data is collected and analysed in the same study. This is unlike in the multimethod approach in which multiple forms of qualitative data are used separately, e.g., interviews, field notes from observations or separately multiple forms of quantitative data, e.g., Survey data and experimental data; suggesting each study employs its own paradigm (Creswell 2015, pg. 3).

In this work, participant observation is understood as a qualitative method or approach in which the researcher participates or interacts, to some degree, in the activities or situation being observed, so as to gain or better attain a comprehensive understanding, without altering the behaviour of the group or environment. Emerson et al., (2001) defines participant observation as a research process that establishes a “place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent social life and social processes that occur in that setting” (*ibid*, p.352); while Malinowski (1922) as cited in Atkinson & Hammersley (1998, p. 248-261) points to the fact that ‘some phenomena of great importance cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, ‘but have to be observed in their full actuality’

(pg.18 as cited in Deacon, et al., 2021, p. 259). The advantage of direct observation is the researcher has the opportunity to produce an independent interpretation of what is observed informed by rigor and discipline the researcher brings to the observation process. “There is no time lag between the event happening and the researcher access to it” (Deacon, et al., ibid).

Below, I outline and explain the choices, data analysis approaches and methods of data collection used in this study. Also highlighted are the instruments employed to collect data, and the time and date of the data collection process. Four data collection and analysis techniques that were adopted for this study are as follows:

6.4.1 Participant Observation at the SABC Newsrooms

Participant observation, or what others call the science of experiencing first-hand ‘naturally occurring events’ (Wolcott, 2008, p. 49), was used to explore personal experiences and perceptions of journalists and editors within their setting at the SABC. : In this work, participant observation is understood as a qualitative method or approach in which the researcher participants or interacts, to some degree, in the activities or situation being observed, so as to gain or better attain a comprehensive understanding, without altering the behaviour of the group or environment. Emerson et al., (2001) defines participant observation as a research process that establishes the “place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent social life and social processes that occur in that setting” (ibid, p.352); while Malinowski (1922) as cited in Aktinson & Hammersley (1998, p. 248-261) points to the fact that some ‘phenomena of great importance cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality’ (pg.18 as cited in Deacon, et al., 2021, p. 259). The advantage of direct observation is the researcher has the opportunity to produce an independent interpretation of what is observed informed by rigor and discipline the researcher brings to the observation process (Deacon, et al., 2021). ‘There is no time lag between the event happening and the researcher access to it’ (ibid., p. 259).

In O'Reilly (2009, p.150), a participant observer wants to ‘observe, notice, record, and try to make sense of actions and events’, thereby ‘increasingly directed in the way she collects observations and ask questions’ (O'Reilly, ibid, p.152). In this work, field notes

were used to map the processes, routine practices, embedded norms, and professional beliefs inside the institution. The adopted analytical frameworks of Bourdieu's field theory and its subset, reflexive sociology, combined with Habermas' public sphere theory and notions of PSB guided the direction of observations and questions.

Most participant observers in the literature agree that it is pragmatically useful to be well aware of the 'inherent paradox in the role of the participant observer' (Wolcott, 2008, p.51) to prevent biases in the interpretation of data, suggesting that one has to find a balance between being too aloof or becoming too involved. This study takes the cue from Wolcott (*ibid*) of staying on the 'cautious side', unless one can justify it is absolutely necessary for the collection of data. This enables the researcher to observe and listen more and to fully come to terms with the setting of the research but also lends itself to what Van Deventer (2009) characterises in terms of the 'overt and passive participant observation'. This is common when a researcher as the research instrument also engages directly or participates in the activities of the research subjects and experiences the same as their subjects would.

Overt and passive participant observation was adopted in this study. With the overt and passive approach, 'the subject of the research process is aware that s/he is part of an investigation into a specific phenomenon' and 'within this specific design the research subject also provides 'informed consent' with regards to data collection and research participation. All relevant information associated with the research process should be provided to the research participant' (Van Deventer, *ibid*, p.4).

With the overt participation, I ran the risk of influencing the behaviour of my research subjects through my interaction with them, and the subjects voluntarily changed their own behaviour consciousness that they were being studied. However, the overt approach, combined with passive engagement as a trade-off, unlike the active approach, helped mitigate the above stated risk. Within an overt design, a participant was encouraged to state if they wanted their feedback and identity to be anonymous or not. I discuss the issue of anonymising participants and data in section 4, chapter 5 and in the interview discussion in this chapter.

6.4.1.1 Fieldnotes and Observations

Participant observation requires that researchers collect fieldnotes. Taking notes openly and continuously can be obtrusive and can trigger the guinea pig effect by reminding people that they are being studied (Bracanti, 2018). Typically, researchers start off taking notes frequently, but over time, they tend to take notes more selectively as what is important to record becomes evident (*ibid*). In doing so, Bracanti (*ibid*) cautions that it is important that researchers do not disregard or neglect to record information that does not conform with any patterns that they think are already emerging in the data (p. 178-182).

In this study, considering that I was also the research instrument, reflexivity was critical to the research process. This meant I too constantly and deliberately question how my own beliefs, judgements and practices may have been a factor in the research process. Consideration was taken to utilise a fieldnote code sheet that specified the key data that were being gathered (see appendix C: Coding Form). The code sheet was easy to complete during and after every meeting.

Given the dilemma arising from the weight that is given to the perceptions and beliefs of journalists inside the SABC newsrooms and the interpretive and constructivist nature of the data in this work³¹, it is here clarified that this kind of data has been interpreted from the perspective of the researcher, and thus there is the risk that some perceptions from respondents may be inconsistent and sometimes contradictory, resulting in explanations that may be regarded as valid by one researcher but equally discounted by others. Therefore, despite all attempts to minimise the subjectiveness of the collected data, conclusions that are drawn from the collected data represent only one version of the account, out of several possible narratives of the same that could be considered.

In general, I was cognisant of the fact that fieldnotes ought not be utilised indiscriminately for whatever purpose the researcher elects as this would potentially encroach on the privacy rights of respondents as well as permission for the use of the

³¹ See discussion in chapter 5 dealing the interpretivism and constructivism paradigms that emphasises the concept of diverse realities that may be found in social interactions.

collected data. In this regard, all data generated from the fieldnotes relating to specific individuals were anonymised (Van Deventer, 2009).

6.4.2 Documents Relevant to the SABC

The gathering and analysis of relevant documents, what Wolcott (2008) classifies as ‘Enquiring’, was employed to generate additional insights and to inform the discussions in this work. These documents included media reports, academic reports and internal SABC documents such as news diaries, annual integrated reports, SABC submissions to parliament and more.

As in this work, the analysis of documents is mostly adopted as a method of qualitative analysis (Babbie, 2010). Among the main advantages of document analysis is that the method enables the collection of reliable information without necessarily questioning many people. The method has, however, been criticised for its reliance on secondary data – some of which may contain some inaccuracies or unverified information. Although this method can be used as a primary method, in this work, I use document analysis to complement other methods, especially participant observation of the SABC newsrooms. The following procedures were adopted for document analysis:

Step 1: Before deciding on which documents to use in this work, I had to be clear on what the overall study was about and by so doing define the research questions. I also required clarity on the kinds of data that would best answer my research questions.

Step 2: A decision on the types of documents to use in this work was made based on the following factors:

Medium: I collected the documents that were sampled, which included SABC news bulletins, news diaries, documents outlining internal operation procedures, media coverage of developments inside the SABC (i.e., newspaper cuttings, online reports, etc.), annual integrated reports, magazines, and other literature on the SABC. A book authored by one of the SABC research participants, Foeta Krige, titled the SABC8, and the SABC website were among the key data sources for my work.

Genre: A deliberate choice was made to focus mainly on SABC documents and others that dealt with news making, politics and policy issues from the perspective of PSB. These included a broad range of newspaper articles and websites, such as the ICASA website, which archives the broadcasting acts and other broadcasting policies. Although some of the discussions in this work contain references to audience retention numbers, marketing materials such as advertisements were not prioritised for analysis.

Parameters: The bulk of the documents considered in this work range from the time when the SABC was first established as a PSB in 1936 to the period post 1999 when the SABC assumed the role of ‘Major Public Entity’ in terms of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), with a mandate to inform and entertain the public in South Africa, and the SABC Charter, which enshrines the journalistic, creative and programming independence of the staff and constitutionally guarantees its freedom of expression (SABC Website). Newspaper articles covering developments at the SABC during the period 2016 – 2022 were critical for this work, as some of them provided verifiable information on the issues at the SABC.

Step 3: The collected documents were coded for relevant data/information. For example, the sampled news bulletins were transcribed, and the content therein coded into categories of analysis. The content from the other documents was used more generally to substantiate findings and to richly describe and enhance the discussions and interpretations in this work.

Step 4: I created a separate file for my coded materials, especially for the transcribed SABC news bulletins.

Step 5: I trained an assistant coder to enhance reliability.

Step 6: I manually counted the coded parameters, and I checked for the existence of important intersections and emerging patterns related to my research agenda.

Step 7: I interpreted the emerging data in a suitable and reflexive way – in the process ensuring transparency in reporting the arising findings.

Particular attention was focused on documents that were relevant to my research objectives, the bulk of which were generated during my fieldwork. Also considered were several grey literatures from civil society media groups and others that addressed developments at the SABC – many of them available in the public domain. These documents offered useful information and deepened the insights and broader understanding relating to the context of SABC as the only PSB in South Africa.

6.4.3 Thematic Content Analysis of News Bulletins and Current Affairs Programmes

This work relied on the most commonly used approach of analysing qualitative data that entails identifying, and reporting patterns that come up repeatedly. This process involves familiarization, coding, generating themes, revising themes, defining, and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2015). In this work, it was a good approach for exploring the views, opinions, and practices of journalists at the SABC, and also to infer on how the SABC constructs its news bulletins and mediates pluralist politics from the perspective of the public sphere.

Thematic content analysis, therefore, was used to infer, generalise, and draw conclusions on the data from sampled news texts, interview responses, and analysed documents, by sorting the data into broad themes. In spite of the chance of missing subtle differences in the data, this approach was considered useful in this study because of its potential to illuminate how news is produced at the SABC. Specifically, sampled news bulletins generated during the 2016 local government election campaign period and the coverage of the contentious land restitution issue were coded and counted. The arising units of analysis or categories, patterns and themes were qualitatively analysed, and general conclusions were drawn. Quantitative data were used as part of the content analysis, but this was limited only to the generation of analytical categories that were used to locate the data into themes, patterns, and other general features. The content analysis itself is a qualitative interpretation of themes and patterns of information arising from the news bulletins, but to generate categories of analysis, a basic quantitative approach allowed the research to begin. This approach must not be confused with case study research, which is typically based on any mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence (Yin, 1981 - 2016).

The choice of the English bulletins was made on the account that the main stories in bulletins are all syndicated across all SABC news channels and in all the official languages. From this perspective, the bulletin was considered to be representative and sufficient for generating the connotative conclusions concerning how the SABC constructs its news bulletins. To this end, a sample of news bulletins was gathered in the period leading to the 2016 local government election and assembled into selected categories into which units of analysis were allocated. To supplement the examination of SABC news bulletins, the study explored how the pertinent national issue of land restitution was covered by the broadcaster, particularly to establish the social constituency of the actors in coverage.

Typical of the early days of content analysis when to a large measure emphasis was on generating a systematic and quantitative description of content from volumes of print, based on a coding scheme, a similar approach was used in this work encompassing a set of categories and units of analysis which were used to quantify the frequency of occurrences of each category and unit, in order to determine how often certain indicators were expressed in the sampled SABC news bulletins. However, it is crucial to highlight here that although content analysis has traditionally been used in a range of studies as a method of data collection and for denotative reasons, in this work content analysis was especially employed more as a method of analysis, specifically to infer on the connotative meanings inherent in the sampled SABC bulletins. This required different kinds of approaches to studying media content and institutions – which meant combining quantitative content analysis, albeit at a basic level, with institutional analysis, media democracy theories and thematic analysis – the latter suggesting that common themes – ideas, topics, and patterns of meanings that repeatedly come up in the collected data – were identified (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and counted. Consistent with Berelson (1952), measuring or counting certain textual features can facilitate the answering of some questions, although not necessarily in precise terms. It was therefore useful to employ qualitative content analysis in the form of thematic analysis to make sense of the manifest content as counted. Public sphere theory and select media and democracy theories provided the conceptual framework for the interpretation of the collected ‘objective, systematic and quantitative data’. Categories that were identified in the sampled SABC news bulletins were coded and counted, indicating quantitatively which issues and topics were covered or ignored, while taking the cue from (Becker, et

al., 2012), a basic thematic content analysis was used to interpret such manifest frequencies in the collected data and to reveal some key themes, frames and the social constituencies of the actors arising from the sampled news bulletins.

As already highlighted, the process of interpreting the data from news bulletins began with the gathering of samples of news bulletins that were subsequently hand coded by myself and one independent coder into analytical categories and thematic frames. To infer, generalise and draw conclusions on the extent to which the (SABC) television news mediated pluralistic politics, the sampled bulletins were allocated the analytical categories below in line with the normative public sphere arguments (see also Dlamini & Chiumbu, 2016; Dlamini, et al., 2017):

- **Actor/s:** This denotes the individual actors covered in the report by status – accredited or nonaccredited and by name where possible.
- **Representativeness:** Relates to the diversity principle. This includes access for the voices of individuals and various social constituencies in the public sphere, regardless of the gender of the actor(s). Gender classification is limited for purposes of this study to either male or female.
- **Social constituencies of actor(s):** This relates to the social location of the range of actors in coverage.
- **Issue/s:** Examples of issue-based coverage include stories focused on issues such as service delivery, education, housing, water, or any other election campaign issue regardless of whether or not the story contains personalisation or conflict.

These categories above were applicable, for example, to the question of who is covered in the SABC newscasts, in what frequency, and to discovering the extent to which the broadcaster achieved its PSB mandate during the election campaign. Identifying the analytic categories in text is a suitable way of operationalising content analysis (Holsti, 1969 as cited in Stemler, 2000), and according to Deacon et al. (2021), some very simple counts of who said what, when, and at what frequency can help clarify situations and might indicate patterns that suggest new directions for analysis and research. This potential for revealing patterning and profitable avenues for further exploration is one

of the basic reasons why some research based on qualitative materials has employed some forms of counting or referred to existing statistics.

In this work, each unit of analysis or news item started deductively with a set of predefined textual categories, but as in many case study research projects, additional codes and subcodes were added using the inductive process as more data emerged, and further rounds of coding were carried out. Throughout the process, a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence was used to turn codes and units of analysis into an account of the SABC news work. For example, to address the question of whether SABC news bulletins fulfil the public service mandate (see Chapter 11 of this thesis; Dlamini & Chiumbu, 2016; Dlamini, et al, 2017), my study considered specified categories that appeared in the sampled SABC news bulletins and coded them quantitatively, revealing which issues were highlighted or ignored, and then employed the qualitative method of thematic content analysis to interpret meaning from the content of text data and to extract some key themes and frames from the news bulletins and to further interpret and analyse their implications for the notion of PSB. In this way, quantitative content analysis, albeit as its most basic, was seen as providing an indication of who and what was given prominence in the news product or ignored (Holsti, *ibid*). Both qualitative and quantitative data arising from the content analysis were used to produce interpretations and discussions, to contextualise the dominant news values that influence news judgements and, more specifically, to infer whether the construction of news and the associated practice of journalists at the SABC were in line with the normative ideals of PSB. This technique has been used in a range of scholarship on news making, often by scholars who have sought to understand the key factors that shape the selection of what is ignored or included in current affairs and news bulletins and has produced many responses associated with the requirements for gathering and disseminating news, including a large and growing body of research based on a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches, encompassing newsroom ethnographies, journalist surveys, interviews, case studies, thematic content analyses, and attempts at self-analysis by journalists-cum-academics (Golding and Elliot, 1996; Gans, 1979 as cited in Reese, 2009; Bourdieu, 2005; Shultz, 2007; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Shoemaker et al, 2009; O'Neill and Harcup, 2009; Becker and Vlad, 2009). An important objective for this case study was to explore the causal link between journalism practice, PSB practice and the public sphere. The Case study 2,

like most case studies, served not only as a supplementary effort to understand news making at the SABC but also to illuminate what or how many times certain decisions or practices were implemented and with what effect. Notably, content analysis currently includes all kinds of approaches to examining content. In this study, beyond analysing the SABC news bulletins, content analysis is also used as a method to analyse the responses to the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with journalists and editors at the SABC. Furthermore, content analysis is used to generalise the identified practices, routines and norms that were mapped inside the SABC newsrooms. In all instances, this work relied on a coding scheme anchored on prescribed categories and units of analysis.

6.4.4 Ethnographic Interview

According to Wolcott (2008), interviewing warrants a separate category of its own and as such should not be treated as an element of participant observation. I agree since talking to journalists directly, and more formally, potentially yields more, and often better contextualised, information. However, this work has significantly relied on what Munz (2017) describes as an ‘ethnographic interview’, which refers to an informal interview that happens in a ‘real life’ setting and often as an extension of participant observation. These interviews often happen without scheduling and generally occur between researchers and participants who might already have an established relationship, although not always. In short, as a method, interviews in ethnography are just one of the many ways by which ethnographers collect quality data about a particular setting or group. Often, semi or unstructured interviews work well in ethnography, together with two other complimentary conditions, i.e., a harmonious relationship between the researcher and research participant based on trust and eliciting information or detailed experiences from the perspective of the research participants at a pace that is sufficiently casual (Munzu, *ibid*). Notably, is how to contextualise the data emanating from an ethnographic interview. Several studies have shown that it is helpful to know something about the respondents to a research project. Thus, I can argue that my positionality as a former SABC staffer and as a life-long journalist made it easier to develop and maintain rapport with the journalists who were interviewed. It also enabled this work to recognise and engage with salient data that I may not have noticed under different circumstances.

6.4.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, another form of ‘enquiring’, were conducted specifically to gain first-hand insight into those activities within the SABC that I could not personally see and to collect the perceptions and beliefs of the journalists and editors at the SABC with respect to their own work.

A practical justification in a range of studies is that the best way to determine what people think about something is to ask them (Jensen, 2002 - 2011). The downside, according to Jensen (*ibid*) is that respondents do not always say what they think or mean what they say. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that statements from interviews are necessarily representative of what people say or think but mere ‘data’, which must be teased out by researchers (Jensen, 2002, p. 240). Depending on the requirement of a study, where it is located and time, interviews are broadly classified into different categories. For reasons of space and focus, I outline below the type of interview that was adopted in this study, i.e., the semi-structured interview. I discuss the reasons for electing semi-structured interviews, which in a nutshell was to collect the views and voices of journalists whom I had the privilege to interview and observe in their setting at the SABC. I also briefly discuss ‘how’ the questions were asked and include the full list of closed and open-ended questions in the appendix section of this work.

6.4.4.1.1 Semi-Structured vs Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are used more often in the social sciences. Unlike a structured interview, which is characterised by a set of rigorous questions and often a prescribed order of questioning, a semi-structured interview is understood in this work as an interview that mix predetermined open questions, i.e., questions that trigger conversation, together with a prospect for the researcher to examine further, specific responses and themes. According to Cunliffe (2003), this approach allows researchers to move beyond questioning the truth claims of the interviewee, unlike the structured interview which follows a rigorous set of questions and leaves very limited room for the interviewer to divert from the original questions or even the order of asking the questions.’

In this work, the interviews were conducted conversationally with one interviewee at a time – and a blend of closed and open-ended questions was employed – often allowing the research to trawl around for new issues, to follow-up on truth claims, and to construct meaning on suppositions that I was not sure to have understood clearly. This I was able to achieve because, as Deacon (1999) notes, informal questioning methods do not impose restrictions upon the interviewer (my emphasis), although one still has to have a fairly clear initial research agenda (*ibid*). Because all interview responses are above all merely sources of information and not evidence of what is true or false, this kind of inductive process was very helpful, particularly in terms of the subsequent analysis and interpretation. However, I was careful to avoid too much unnecessary digression and ensured that the issues of concern to the research at hand were adequately addressed.

Thus, to the extent that I could, I was self-aware of my personal attitudes, values, belief systems and subjectivities. This necessitated the ability to listen attentively, empathy, relative use of ‘small talk’ and, in some cases, ‘humour’. It is important at this point to highlight that the study was less interested in the stated opinions of the interview subjects (semantic) but more focused on what their responses revealed concerning their perceptions, beliefs, and social setting (latent). Because of these considerations, and while semi-structured interviews are not restricted by concerns of standardisation and control, I had to make the trade-off between seeking to promote an active, open-ended dialogue and at the same time still retaining control of the terms of the discussion. This I achieved by taking the cue from (Deacon, 2009; Deacon, et al, 2021), who advise interview researchers to generally follow a framework, encompassing the study focus, interview protocol, main research questions, and a list of general questions to be explored. Deacon et al. (*ibid*) argued that such an approach to interviews is better described as ‘conversations with a purpose’. This is all important to ensure that interviews remain within the research aims and that the subsequent interpretations and descriptions thereof are adequately representative of the collected perspectives and voices of the interviewees.

The interviews were comparatively easy to record using the audio recorder on my phone. To account for the conceptual leaps during an interview, often evidenced by the interviewee either repeating issues already covered or digressing completely, each

interview was transcribed and categorised into themes, patterns, and other general features as soon as it was conducted. This required a discursive and, where possible, a reflexive reconstruction of the data being coded during the analysis phase. As in both case studies conducted in this study and in line with recommendations in scholarship, everything that was said during the interview was contextualised and interpreted reflexively – with due sensitivity extended to all interview subjects – for example, ensuring sensitivity to the impression one was creating on the research subjects during fieldwork, especially in dealing with potentially vulnerable participants, and ultimately in producing the research report (Gabb, 2009). Below, I address anonymity and confidentiality as one of the sensitivities that this research had to contend with concerning the data collected from interviews.

6.4.4.1.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality in the Interview Data

Some of the research subjects at the SABC participated in the research on condition that the research report did not link individual responses with participant identities. Thus, having received the interview data that were needed for my work, I still had to assess what I could and could not say or reveal concerning my sources. Generally, effort to safely guard the identity of the research participant is synonymous with ethical research (Wiles et al, 2008). The assumption is that participants not only deserve protection but also desire it (*ibid*). This is a participant-dependent choice but one that ought to be informed by the imperative of ethical research and undertaken in accordance with the belief that research participants have a right to decide whether they want their identity to remain anonymous, their information to be treated confidentially or in the case of others who opted to be fully accredited. To fully address the above challenge, I reverted to Scott (2005) and specifically his examination of the deployment and suitability of anonymous communication in work environments and advice on the appropriate ways to work through questions of evidence. Although Scott himself notes that the subject of anonymity in reports is currently under researched and theorised, there are three main take-aways that I consider useful for my work, and these are as follows.

- **Appropriateness:** Is anonymity appropriate in this circumstance and why? How typical is the data. If not, in what ways may it be atypical and as such helpful to the research task at hand?
- **Authenticity:** How genuine is the collected evidence or claims made?

- **Credibility:** Is the material accurate, i.e., free of errors? Is it based on first-hand experience of what is described? Is there evidence of personal motives or partisanship?

Anonymity must be distinguished from, for example, one going public perhaps as a result of exhausting internal options for registering dissent or cases in which top management are implicated or are not viewed as helpful. We may consider actions like these as similar to ‘whistle-blowing’ or a kind of organisational disagreement, in which an individual expresses opposition to a view held by a majority or those in authoritative positions (Bok, 1982 as cited in Scott, 2005). ‘Because such an act often involves the reporting of substantial wrongdoing, many whistle-blowers will engage in this dissent anonymously in an effort to avoid retaliation for their actions’ (*ibid*, p. 161). This action of anonymity happens beyond the political sphere or events in the news. ‘Its use is an option for individuals in a variety of settings’ (*ibid*, p. 158) — including the SABC and other institutions. Addressing the above issues introduced a useful filter regarding whether or not to use the interview data that I collected and how anonymity or confidentiality was conferred in this study. Below, I discuss additional considerations regarding the appropriateness of employing anonymity and confidentiality in this study.

6.5 Data Analysis and Limitations

The process of analysing data from participant observation was very similar to the process of analysing data collected from interviews, news bulletins and current affairs texts. The first step involves generating categories of analysis with which to organise the data collected from observation (Brancati, *ibid*; Strauss, 1987; Yin, 1992; Lenneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Since the role of observation is usually not to test hypotheses, these categories are developed inductively based on the collected fieldnotes (Bracanti, *ibid*). The choice of categories of analysis is informed by the data, and in this study of the SABC, it includes notes from the daily news editorial meetings, interactions and reactions between news workers, attitudes, perceptions, and so forth.

After defining the analytic categories, taking the cue from Brancati (*ibid*), the data were coded accordingly. In general, all data from the fieldnotes, transcribed interviews, news bulletins and current affairs output were coded in accordance with the study’s theoretical and conceptual framework as much as it was guided by the data itself. The

final step was to identify the emerging patterns or recurrent themes, thus preparing the ground for the systematic interpretation and explanation of the data.

6.5.1 Thematic Content Analysis

According to Braun & Clark (2006), thematic content analysis entails identification of themes or patterns within qualitative data. It is not bound to any theory of knowledge (epistemology), especially in relation to its methods, validity, and scope (*ibid*). The term, therefore, has no clear-cut definition, save for the operative definition found in a range of literature. This makes it an adaptable method, which this thesis has chosen to adopt. In this work, thematic content analysis is understood in terms of its end-goal, which is to identify, interpret and make sense of the themes or patterns in data that can be used to address the objectives. It can be used either as a qualitative or quantitative method, but in this study, it is deployed primarily as a qualitative research method. This study is cognizant of the position taken by (Berelson, 1952 - 2000), which emphasises the element of quantifying the frequency of coded texts in content analysis and, as such, making it a quantitative method. In Berelson (1952), ‘content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication’ (p.1). However, according to Franzosi (2008), as much as counting is an aspect of content analysis, and there is no doubt that it is important for the systematic and objective approach to measurement issues, it is nonetheless not the only critical aspect. Franzosi (*ibid*) connects us back to Waples and Berelson (1941, p. 2) who maintain that ‘systematic content analysis attempts to define more casual descriptions of the content, to show objectively the nature and relative strength of the stimuli applied to the reader or listener.’ Not to overstate the point, content analysis, in Krippendorff (1980), is a ‘research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context’ (p. 21). Today, proponents of content analysis such as Smith (1975) advocate the refinement of content analysis in terms of a mix between quantitative and qualitative analysis. The emphasis is on data analysis and not data collection; and therein lies the confusion. Viney (1986, p.59 as cited in Franzosi, *ibid*) argues that ‘Data collection and data analysis are two separate phases of the process of assessment’ and that ‘content analysis of verbal communications is a form of data analyses, that ‘is applicable to verbal data... collected in a variety of ways’, often qualitatively (Franzosi, *ibid*, p.xxvi). However, for Altheide (1987, p.66, also cited in Frazosi, *ibid*), quantitative content analysis ‘provides a way of obtaining data to

measure the frequency and variety of messages. ... Data collection and organisation (coding)' Content analysis in this view is a method of data collection. Ultimately, is content analyses a quantitative or qualitative method? Smith (1975, p. 218 cited in Berg, 2001, p. 241) suggests that we should assign content analysis to both qualitative and quantitative methods 'because qualitative analysis deals with the forms and antecedent-consequent patterns of form, while quantitative analysis deals with the duration and frequency of form' (Smith, 1975: 218 cited in Berg, 2001, p. 241). Consequently, Berg (2001, p.241) concludes that content analysis is suited for either the qualitative or quantitative features of communication messages. In this work, the qualitative content analysis is used to infer the thematic or recurring patterns in the collected data, while quantitative content analysis technique employed to generate analytic categories.

6.6 Limitations

Similar to the SABC study by Arndt (2007), this study shares one major limitation, i.e., that a significant chunk of conclusions are drawn from the data collected through participant observation. There is always the inherent risk of what Roller & Lavrakas (2015) call 'observer bias', which typically occurs when the observer fails to see what is there but instead sees what they expect to see, or unconsciously not writing from an objective lens: unless they approach the entire research reflexively. It is the responsibility of the researcher to be reflexive, i.e., to engage in constant self-evaluation. Observer bias is especially probable when either the researching individual is an insider in the research environment or has vested interests. 'A reflexive journal' is recommended, detailing instances when the observer' could possibly have influenced the outcomes being researched (Roller & Lavrakas, *ibid*, p. 207 - 212). I discuss how this study has conceptualised and mitigated these issues in this section (see above Chapter Five - 5), which focuses on issues of positionality. However, all findings are considered as provisional. This is because as much as qualitative research potentially provides new understandings into the newsroom culture at the SABC, attaining absolute validity can be a daunting task, if not impossible.

6.7 Summary

In summary, this section has shown that ethnography continues to be relevant as an important source and inspiration for newsroom studies and its cultures, processes, routines, and practices. Ethnography is capable of combining distinct data collection and analysis tools ranging from participant observation, open-ended interviews, and analysis of various documents to understand and explain qualitative data. First, I have defined ethnography generally as a tool to understand the culture of a group, community, or organisation within context through participation and close observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Fetterman, 2010). In this study, it is used to explore the newsroom culture and journalistic practice at the SABC. A significant part of this section discusses how I approached the study of the SABC news work using an ethnographic research design and alludes to how I have extended its insights by employing the analytical frameworks of the field theory of Bourdieu and its subset, reflexive sociology, combined with Habermas' public sphere theory and notions of PSB to guide the direction of observations, interviews, document analysis, and thematic content analysis of the SABC news work products (data collection and analysis tools) and, importantly, to 'empirically' investigate some of the invisible institutional and relational structures that impact everyday news work (I discuss Bourdieu's field concepts and Habermas' public sphere theory in my theoretical and conceptual Section 2, Chapter 3 & 4). In short, I presented my approach to data gathering which I outlined as experiencing through participant observation, enquiring by conducting semi-structured interviews, and document analyses, including the examining and interpretation of news bulletins and current affairs programmes. Data collection and analysis tools were outlined, and related challenges were also discussed, including potentially problematic issues, such as positionality, gaining access, research ethics, and some practical limitations of the study. None of these challenges raised serious stumbling blocks for my study. Accessing the SABC newsrooms was made easier by the previous relationship that I held as an employee and media practitioner at the broadcaster. The Witwatersrand University issued the ethical clearance and this where my research is housed. I have informed consent research forms signed by the individual journalists directly.

As already mentioned, the scope of this study is limited to the SABC newsrooms; even then, it offers only a version of current affairs and news-making experience at the

broadcaster and does not purport to cover all aspects and changes as they unfold. The conclusions constitute a small measure of this work's objectives. The multi-method approach used in this study helps to reveal only some of the key dynamics at play that either have thus far been understudied or overlooked completely with respect to the SABC, thereby preparing further ground for future research. What is evident from this work is that the real world is a complex system that is socially constructed and that includes the SABC as a journalistic field.

Section Four

Data Presentation and Analysis

Overview

In line with my research objectives, this section sketches the SABC News and Current Affairs Division in terms of the various embedded structures, norms, practices, and perspectives of journalists through which the culture in the newsrooms can be assessed.

In all, the chapter takes on an exploratory journey of institutional practices of news making at the SABC, specifically the ways through which journalism is practised in the newsroom and shows how such practice is impacted by a range of factors, including the embedded institutional structures, norms, and ingrained beliefs and values of the journalists themselves. The chapter highlights some of the multifaceted ways of making decisions, negotiation, and collaboration among journalists and their editors. It covers the processes and practices before and after the ideation or sourcing of a story. Because existing research on SABC newsrooms, ethnographic specifically, is so scarce, this study has relied significantly on empirical data generated in the course of my fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews with SABC journalists in the course of their

everyday work. Equally, the availability of grey literature and relevant SABC documents all have enabled the exploration in this work.

Chapter Seven

The SABC News and Current Affairs Division as the ‘Journalistic Field’

7.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an outline of my participant observation of the SABC News and Current Affairs Division as the ‘journalistic field’. A significant focus is directed at the daily line talk editorial meetings and the current affairs production meetings that I was privileged to attend in person and to record as part of my fieldnotes. At these meetings, I documented the ingrained practices, characterised by the taken-for-granted routines, procedures, norms, values, and other embedded mechanisms. One of the primary objectives of this ethnographic work was to map these characteristics and to draw theoretical conclusions. Additionally, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with some of the respondents who were active participants at these editorial meetings. Pierre Bourdieu’s field concepts and their reflexive sociology subset were adopted as analytical frameworks for exploring the editorial meetings and for understanding emerging insights from the overall ethnography of the SABC newsrooms - serving at a methodological level as a tool to account for the ‘invisible’ structures in newsrooms such as the embedded institutional strategic ends, norms, taken-for-granted behaviours, and other practices. In short, newsroom case studies by Shultz (2007), Willig (2013), Thomsen (2018), and others were used as templates. All these studies have applied reflexive sociology, in one form or another, as a strategy, particularly the analytical concepts of ‘journalistic field’, ‘news habitus’ , ‘newsroom capital’ and reflexivity.

7.1 The ‘Daily Line Talk’

The line talk conference served as the central locus for all SABC News productions in several respects. This is where key news editorial decisions took place, particularly for those stories that are syndicated to all SABC platforms as part of the national news bulletin. Although located in Johannesburg, the conference facility was linked to all regional news hubs via satellite transmission. Every day, at least three times a day, regional editors dialled in to join the daily line talk meetings. There are significant differences in the newsroom cultures regionally, owing to varying political ecologies in one region to another. However, the chairing of the line talk rotates between all regions,

giving the news-making process a semblance of national representation and participation. At these meetings, it was not easy to know in advance how a story would be received or its fate. The capacity to monitor unfolding trends in the country's news cycle, particularly keeping tabs on breaking news, appeared to influence the daily line-up of the bulletin.

'A line talk usually starts with a feedback session, in which all the bulletin editors and executive producers of the nine regions can comment on the previous day's production, the stories that worked and those that did not' Krige (2019).

In the Bourdiesian world, the SABC line talk would approximate the 'field of power' wherein the actors bring to play 'strategic options' in each's disposal. Those who accumulate or bring to the field more 'symbolic capital' often command more resources, while strategies of domination are pursued by dominant actors, who deploy superior resources to maintain dominance (De Clercq & Voronov, 2009; Wright, 2009, as cited in Emirbayer & Williams, 2005), while 'subordinate actors' or those with less 'capital' within fields, relative to the dominant actors – 'in lacking the full complement of critical resources, pursue subversive strategies to undermine the positions of dominant actors...' (De Clercq & Voronov, *ibid*; Wright, *ibid*, p. 2; Emirbayer & Williams, 2005; Emirbayer, & Johnson, 2008). Incidentally, the SABC line talk epitomised Bourdieu's attempts to explain the fluidity between structure and agency, through which external structures become part of the internalised ways of doing (*habitus*), in the same way that actors project their actions to the outside social world (*field*). In this way, what began in the SABC newsroom as a conceptual clash between actors eventually culminated in a bitter feud between the group of journalists known as the SABC8 and the SABC management then led by the controversial COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng. The newsroom indeed was the epicentre of a power struggle, efforts by management hierarchy to dominate, and resistance from those who felt dominated; it was also a site for the deployment of the tacit rules, implicit policies, formal and informal norms of story selection, which combined to make some journalists voluntarily accept several constraints to their discretionary powers without perceiving them as such (Sjøvaag, 2013).

The SABC Editorial Code requires editors and executive producers in current affairs production meetings in the SABC newsroom to embody a high degree of ethical standards at all times, and this ought to be visible in the Current Affairs and News stories. The SABC, given its PSB mandate is expected to offer news and current affairs programmes that reflect the interests of the public. Professional news values are expected to inform all decision-making in the SABC newsrooms. However, using Bourdieu's spectacles, we begin to discern how the full weight of superior 'know-how' (capital), including both the normative professional rules of journalism and the acceptable norms of the institution (see discussion on symbolic capital and other resources in Chapter 3.1.3), are deployed in practice as a mechanism to stay ahead of challengers. By a significant measure, the strategies are enabled by the hierarchical positions already held within the newsroom structure and institution.

7.2 The Various Stages of News and Current Affairs

The SABC News and Current Affairs Division has at least three prescheduled news editorial conferences daily, a bulletin every hour, at least one current affairs planning meeting and approximately five weekly current affairs programmes. However, significantly, much of the structuring of news work takes place outside these scheduled meetings. Different staff members would suddenly come together throughout the day, clustered around a computer screen, discussing sources, video footage, audio, or wire stories. Lengthy debates were common among the current affairs teams and much less common with the daily news staff. It was common to see editors and executive producers looming around – talking to reporters, sub-editors, or producers to assess their work or to follow-up on a story. There were several editors and executive producers at the SABC during the course of my fieldwork – all reporting directly to either the programme executive producer or the bulletin editor, who in turn reported directly to Executive Head of News and Current Affairs. Each had a distinctive presence but one that could be classified as extremely civil and accommodating. It was common for each to regularly approach reporters, producers or beat editors and ask for feedback on a potential news issue or unfolding event. Tension and anxiety became visible closer to broadcast deadlines. The sign of relief follows after the broadcast – except in instances where a story triggers an uncomplimentary response from either the actor in coverage, institution, or audience. The news bulletin and current affairs programme were never cast in stone until after the broadcast. It was not unusual to

leave the building after a news editorial meeting or current affairs planning session thinking the bulletin or programme would be cast in some way, but to discover the following day that its the contents and form had transformed totally.

The phrase ‘stages’ should not be taken to suggest each ‘phase’ of the News and Current Affairs production process progresses from one ‘stage’ to another in a single series of steps, or sequential fashion. Rather, the various ‘phases’ of News and Current Affairs production do not unfold according to some preordained order. Rather, in the context of the SABC, the stages are loosely connected to certain routines, some of them often taken for granted, and to milestones and established ways of doing. Even then, there is significant room for manoeuvring within and between distinct stages, and stages sometimes overlap – making the news output and broadcast times guaranteed yet the content ‘unpredictable’. The representation of the distinct stages presented in Figure 8.1 below is not absolute. The figure below shows some of the routine processes and stages this work has been able to identify, comprising the sourcing of the story, the negotiation and development of the story at the line talk and during the production process, and ultimately the broadcasting of the output. The bulk of these routine processes or stages take place inside newsrooms and in offices of editors in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, with input from the nine SABC regional newsrooms.

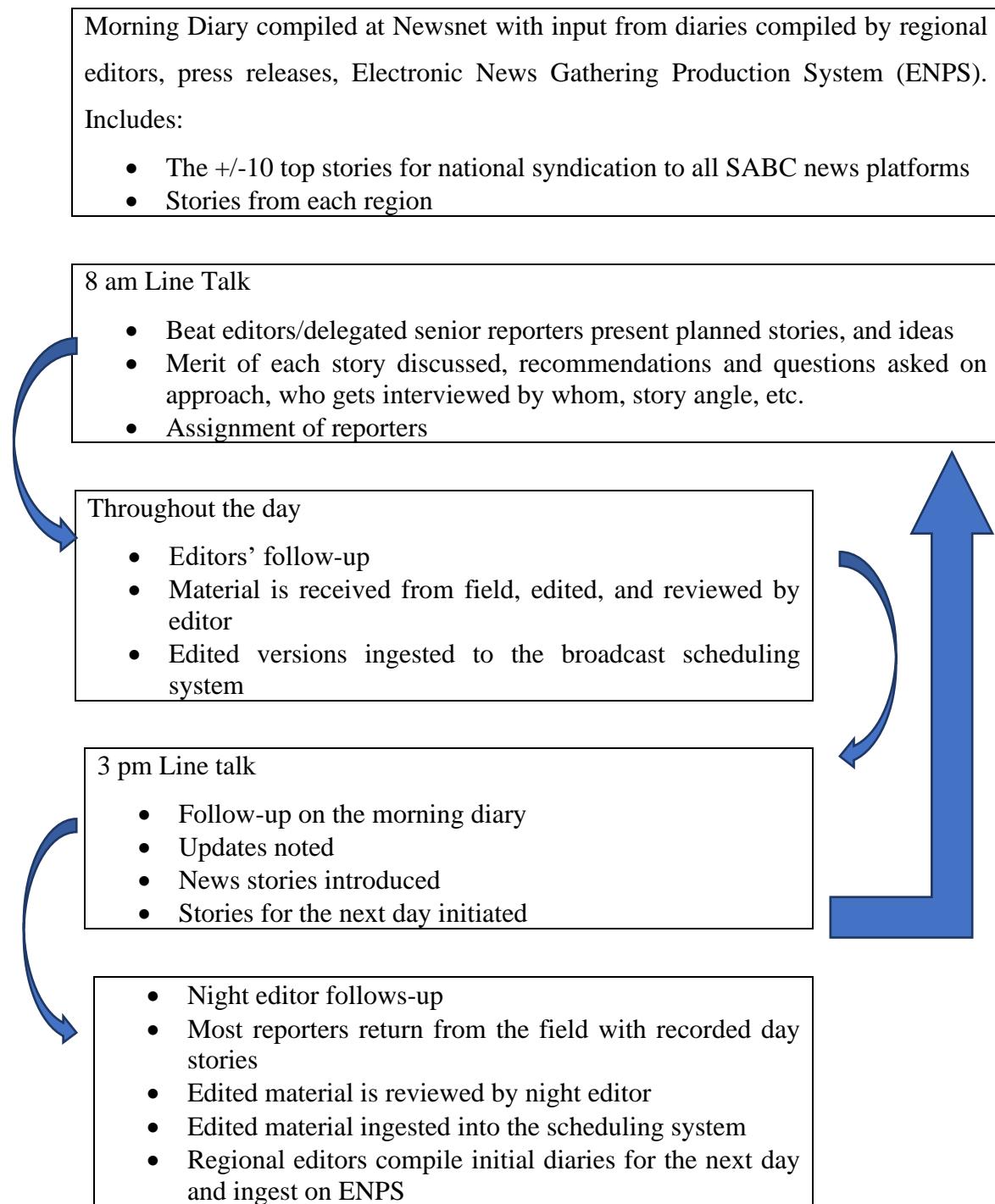


Figure 7- 1: The structured news making process

The processes outlined above are not the only news-making stages or, in Bourdieu's parlance, 'structures' or 'structuring structures' that are worth accounting for in scholarship but are selected in this work because they represent some of the key identifiable routine stages that are regularly employed or relied upon on a daily basis at the SABC newsrooms and in other media institutions globally. By observing these

stages, this work located some of the shared values, ingrained beliefs, norms, collective behaviour of the News and Current Affairs journalists, editors, producers, and many who were engaged in the daily construction of the news stories at the broadcaster. Ostensibly, routines, shared professional values, and norms are invoked to make the work of story making more efficient. They contribute to ensuring the functional ends of news making, while others help to maintain stable journalism as a consequence (Tuchman, 1976). The idea that journalism and media institutions follow discernible routines in constructing news stories is widely accepted (Vlad and Becker, 2009) and has consequently contributed to a major theoretical view that news stories are just but reconstructions of reality subject to production constraints and not a mirror reflection of social reality as it unfolds (Vlad and Becker, *ibid*; Tuchman, *ibid*).

Several studies have documented various routines at different stages of news construction (Cottle, 2000 - 2007; Preston, 2008; Vlad and Becker, 2009). In the access stage, studies have focused on journalists' sourcing patterns and the beat system as the key determinants of the range of information and events they get to know about. Again, this is but one argument on the role of routines, values, and norms in news organisations. However, aside from making work more manageable, news routines, values and norms also increase the risk of compromising the autonomy of news workers. While they structure how journalists do their work, news routines, values and norms are also structured by other factors – which in some instances also lay down how news processes ought to be followed, how journalism ought to be practised, and influence the various approaches to storytelling while also functioning as control mechanisms (Tuchman 1976; Berkowitz 1997; Deuze 2008; Shoemaker and Vos 2009).

'I value my autonomy in the newsroom, but one has to master how things are done on a daily basis. One must acquire detailed knowledge of routines, decision-making processes, and management's expectations to avoid constant interference. This is the easiest way of avoiding unnecessary stress in the newsroom' SABC Interview 17.

The routines, decision-making processes, and expectations from management emanate from the practical imperatives of the organisation and its strategic intentions in the field, and they are repeated constantly and routinely; they are therefore, in Bourdieu's parlance, 'perceived as natural, taken for granted and even common-sensical' (*ibid*,

2004, p, 107). It makes sense for journalists to adapt even to a ‘doxic situation’ for the sole purpose of confronting the ever-changing set of practical requirements of keeping up with the news cycle. Characteristic of a ‘doxic situation’, according to Bourdieu, the situation is often an embodiment of ‘harmony between the objective, external structures, and the subjective, internal structures of the habitus’ (Bourdieu 2004, p, 107; see also discussion on Bourdieu’s field concept in Section 2 (Theoretical and conceptual framework of this study). Bourdieu developed the theory of the field to highlight the tendency by social agents to evolve ways of doing (strategies) that are adaptable to the ‘structures’ of their settings or the ‘social worlds’ within which they operate (Bourdieu, 1984, *ibid*). In this view, Bourdieu shows how, for example, what appears to be a relatively autonomous field such as journalism ultimately generates a myriad of complex ‘social relations’ based on how individual actors interact in daily practices. Such practices, produce specific inherent qualities for ‘social action’ that are determined by the actors’ ‘position on the field’ (Bourdieu, 1979 - 1992), resulting in Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus, i.e., ‘the lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p 170). Most notably, the major aspect of this habitus is that it only manifests at the level of the explicit relations between the agents or actors who are responsible for the various aspects of the news making. Rather, many actions, interactions, processes, and structures operate in deeper, functional, and often spontaneous, uncritical, or sometimes irrational ways.

7.2.1 From News Bulletin to Current Affairs Programme

Thus far, the focus has been directed the journalists and editors involved in the making of daily news, from start to finish. But there is another distinct group that is equally immersed in story making, i.e., the current affairs programme teams. It would be remiss not to mention that within the 3 months covering the period of June – November 2019, the SABC ran a series of current affairs shows on the topic of land, all of which sought to bring to the fore a wider range of voices and angles to the issue. For example, in November 2019, the current affairs documentary ‘SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT’ packaged a special feature on LAND, focusing on land scams. The programme positioned itself as an exposé of how South Africans dreaming of owning land, particularly prospective property buyers, had been scammed out of their deposits by opportunists who had found a gap in this market. In the episode, unlike in the SABC daily news bulletins, the Special Assignment team spoke to ordinary South Africans who said they were tricked

out of their deposits by a certain company (name withheld) under the pretext that it was selling land. The story highlighted that the company did not own the land, and the prospective buyers were demanding their money back. Then, there were the current affairs shows such as the ‘Big Debate’. The show covered, arguably comprehensively, the land issue. It was broadcast on SABC2 and SABC News Channel with financial sponsorship from several nongovernmental organisations. The show debated the issue of land expropriation without compensation and whether it is good for South Africa. The two-hour duration of the show was scarcely sufficient to cover the ‘complex, multilayered and divisive nature of the land debate’ (Social surveys, 2019). Earlier on 20 March 2018, the SABC’s current affairs show ‘Question Time’ focused on the issue of land expropriation, following the passing by members of South African Parliament of a motion on land expropriation without compensation. The motion was widely adopted with a vote of 241 in support, against 83 against (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2018). This story was extensively covered in all mainstream SA media in the SABC. This and the subsequent current affairs productions mentioned here represented a kind of ‘the afterlife’ of the hard news bulletins. They epitomised the final transformation, i.e., ‘news becoming a source for yet other stories – the stories behind the story’.

The lifecycle of a story at the SABC is therefore presented as a process of sourcing, negotiation, and an account of how routines, values and norms influence news output. The transformation of the hard news story in the daily bulletin to a current affairs programme epitomises the last stage in the process, a kind of ‘the afterlife’. In this final transformation, news becomes a source for yet another story – the story behind the story. Here, the bulletin acts almost as a teaser of what is likely to come. A significant number of stories that feature in the SABC current affairs programmes have their beginnings as either ‘hard’ breaking news stories about an incident or event, a reporter or editor reviewing evidence from a range of sources, constantly scanning the news agencies, monitoring reports from other media, not to forget the input from individual journalists who rely on regular sources for cues for breaking stories. At the SABC, a notable source of ideas for the current affairs teams was the SABC’s own news bulletins. Organisationally, this worked in favour of the SABC in that the original journalist or team of reporters who worked on the original story or the preceding stories covering an issue could act as a source for the current affairs version. In fact, it was

common for a theme that frequently made it to the daily bulletins to resurface in one or more of the SABC's current affairs shows.

7.2.2 Current Affairs Planning Sessions

The current affairs production meetings were often longer, unlike the daily line talk news editorial meetings that ordinarily lasted no more than an hour. The current affairs planning meetings entailed long brainstorming sessions between the team and the executive producer, whereas the daily line talk news diary meetings were more like feedback sessions, positioning of diarised stories by editors from the nine SABC regional news hubs, with some discussion on story angles and recommendations on whom to interview. Whenever I could, being at these meetings was fruitful for this work. At the current affairs meetings, I often observed the negotiation and collective ideation of programme ideas, production planning, allocation of roles, and ultimately curation of the content into a complete programme, which was ready for broadcast. Like the line talk, the current affairs meetings also reviewed previous broadcast material and discussed feedback that would have been received from the viewers and actors in coverage. It was easy to discern the urgency in the daily news editorial meetings, the functional end being to generate the bulletin daily and timely. The atmosphere at the current affairs meeting was a notch slower, at least until deadlines were approached. At all times, and I speak for myself here, observing both these meetings got my adrenaline going, often with awe and wonder, and at times with disbelief. Each day was different, as were the stories. Fair to say, shared professional values and ideals were evident, sometimes exhibited in 'bright' sparks during discussions, passionate expressions, and of course, the usual 'crises of expectation' when things seemed not to go according to plan. This was the community of journalists that kept this decades-old public service broadcasting establishment going, despite the odds.

In all, the news diary and the current affairs planning meetings were always serious, with questions sometimes directed at one person, sometimes at no one in particular. Jokes and asides flew about as well but not often. In general, the atmosphere was mostly pleasant. I felt welcome at all times during my fieldwork.

7.2.3 Making the Current Affairs Programme

I had several cursory discussions with various team members of all the TV current affairs shows at the SABC and reviewed samples of their programme plans for an extended period. At the time of my fieldwork, there were 9 TV current affairs programmes running on the SABC platforms as follows:

1. SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT
2. HEALTH TALK
3. NETWORK
4. LEIHLA LA SECHABA
5. FOKUS
6. TRENDZ TRAVEL
7. YILUNGELO LAKHO
8. CUTTING EDGE
9. NGULA YA VUTIVI

Concerning the deep dive for my fieldwork, I spend significant time with the current affairs production team of the programme, YILUNGELO LAKHO; the weekly current affairs programme that focuses on educating audiences about their consumer, economic and political rights. This role is critical from the perspective of democratic theory in that it is located within the cusp of tensions between the social and political objectives of PSB, particularly the development of an informed citizen (Meier, 2003).

7.3 Pre-Production Process of ‘Ilungelo Lakho’ (‘It Is Your Right’)

Concerning current affairs editorial decision-making processes at the SABC, I selected to observe the ILUNGELO LAKHO current affairs programme for my fieldwork because of its role in promoting citizen participation and public interest information sharing as well as its common reliance on archival material, prepackaged video inserts, research, case studies, all of which are used to create set the tone for each episode. This dynamic is often overlooked in News and Current Affairs story-making analysis; however, increasingly, there is overwhelming empirical evidence to support perspective that news is a social construction and that individuals are only part of a collective process involving a range of structuring factors, even as the ownership of the process is ordinarily attributed to senior editors and executive producers. The problems discussed

in previous subchapters relating to SABC8 result in staff avoiding expressing their views during the production process. For example, one respondent stated the following:

‘It helps to have an editor who is inclusive... one that genuinely wants to involve all team members in the making of the programme... and maximises everyone’s expertise, views and potential’ SABC Interview 12

As observed, for the journalists assigned to a feature current affairs story, submitting the script (a text) to the executive producer was one of the several stages in the production process. The process included the programme planning meeting (editorial meeting) at which what would eventually become the broadcast programme was negotiated. Because of the SABC8 saga earlier, I expected anxious moments at these meetings, primarily between the journalists, producer, and executive producer. This is where the actual negotiation of the ‘angle’ for the programme is discussed, including the choice regarding who is to be featured as accredited sources. Power is arguably the central organising principle that influences the content output at the SABC. This work engaged with issues of power and how it is expressed by the individual tasked with the ultimate editorial decision-making of the ILUNGELO LAKHO current affairs production.

My field observation focused on the following six types of editorial negotiation:

1. Was the negotiation positional?
2. Was the negotiation integrative?
3. Does the executive producer play a mediation role during meetings?
4. Was there any reference to news values? E.g., balance, fairness, accuracy, right of reply, development agenda, etc.
5. Upwards referral: Did the discussion lead to upwards referral?
6. What was the tone of the discussion?

The fieldnotes from each observed editorial planning meeting of the ILUNGELO LAKHO current affairs show were coded in a prepared coding form. The observation of the meetings took place within a longitudinal period of 5 months. Samples of a coded

form from the observed planning sessions are included in the appendix section of this work.

The field observation of ILUNGELO LAKHO was deliberately abandoned after the 6th programme planning session, when it became evident that the thematic patterns in the data were recurring and that I therefore ran the risk of data saturation. In other words, I assumed that the arising data were likely to appear repeatedly in the subsequent meetings. I am aware of the debate by some researchers who have questioned whether reaching data saturation is possible in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For reasons of focus, I will not dwell on this debate but highlight the fact that after the 6th ILUNGELO LAKHO programme planning meeting, I was happy to describe the collected data as ‘sufficient’, noting scholars such as Creswell (2000) and Morse et al. (2002), who have argued that sufficiency depends on both the rigour ‘of the analytical process’ and the richness ‘of the data’ it generates’ (*ibid*). In short, because there were no new patterns emerging on the types of negotiation during the planning meetings, I concluded that (a) the production of ILUNGELO LAKHO was a collective process and (b) although the executive producer, by virtue of organisational hierarchy, was structurally empowered by the SABC news-making process to assume the role of a ‘processor’ of information (the power to veto), and that the rest of the team could be characterised as information ‘gatherers and distributors’, the integrative approach to negotiating the story was a recurrent feature. The executive producer was always adaptable, encouraging compromise, oriented towards problem solving, and when bargaining was necessary, his attitude was ‘soft’. In short, the production resembled a ‘collective’ activity, characterised by general agreement among the team members, be it the choice of actors in coverage or the story angle, regardless of the distributive powers of the individual team members. This observation is important because it contradicts widespread notions in a number of research works that have considered the issue of gatekeeping at the SABC. It is widely hypothesised that senior editors at the SABC pursue mainly decisions that align with the broadcaster’s strategic intents at the level of institutional gatekeeping (e.g., at editorial meetings) and that the rank and file, i.e., nonexecutive news workers, have a limited amount of leeway to influence the news output. Rather, with ILUNGELO LAKHO, it was observed that the output was a ‘collective’ product and that on the face of it, power relations were not static. Evidently, the executive producer, although vested in the story outcome, deliberately expressed

relational power in a manner that was seldom positional. Throughout the observation period, I do not recall the executive producer explicitly taking a side in any discourse during the planning meetings. The production team, regardless of rank, was always encouraged by the executive producer to provide an opinion, particularly with respect to how the story would be framed and the final package presented. Seemingly, this is how the task of negotiating the product was being accomplished – with power relations between the executive producer and team seemingly fluid, nonpositional and integrative. In practical terms, whenever there was a contestation around an issue relating to a story, the default position was to reference news values. This approach is well documented in scholarship. Journalists manage their organisational limitations by routinising their tasks and use established conventions to set boundaries.

‘All our stories must meet the basic threshold of fairness, impartiality, informative, accuracy, right of reply, and of course there must be public interest. We tick these boxes religiously. At least, I ensure this is done’ (SABC Interview 4) Themba Jacobs, Executive Producer)

The comment is not surprising. After all, if story making at the SABC is understood as a ‘social’ activity, it stands to reason that it is not what the journalists and their principals (editors and executive producers) think but the processes, routines, and conventions, mostly embedded inside the organisation over time, that carry the day. Suffice to say, the journalists at the SABC generally recognise that they have much at stake with each programme or news story they package; it is their credibility and believability that suffer from the consequences of poor editorial judgement and from conduct that audiences may deem unprofessional and unethical.

In light of the above, the critical role news making research at the SABC ought not be understated. The searchable online database of contacts and background research produced by the Newsnet research team played an invaluable role within the current affairs and news making process, especially when required to provide background information that would be necessary for the beat reporter and editor to work on the appropriate ‘angle’ for a story. While reporters and editors determine how a story should be framed based on their understanding of the habitus at the SABC, encompassing the internal norms and rules, etc., the framing of the story often was influenced by the

verified contextual background of an issue. Hence, I dedicated some time documenting aspects of the support role of enabling the ‘thinking’ processes of both the reporter and editor. Below, I provide an outline of some of the observations I generated while observing activities at the SABC Newsnet Research Unit. This unit is integral to current affairs and news production processes at the SABC.

7.4 Newsnet

In 2019, I drew a Newsnet activity report based on my observations of the activities performed by the news researchers at the SABC. The unit has received written and oral commendations for its role in planning and research in support of the coverage of key broadcast events, notably:

1. Compilation of new research material and Newsnet pages
2. Updating existing Newsnet pages
3. Daily tracking, relating, and uploading onto Newsnet of top/breaking online stories
4. Support during live broadcasts – identifying/recommending and liaising with programme guests
5. Contributing to diary events, identifying key upcoming stories/issues, and exploring news angles
6. Responding to Ad hoc requests/backup information for News and Current Affairs programming
7. Participating in news diary meetings and other with internal stakeholders – Editors, Radio, TV, and the 24-hr news channel
8. Desktop Data Collection

In addition to the above, Newsnet beat researchers also engaged in field research – mainly attending beat-related public events, seminars, workshops, direct calling of specialists, policy makers, etc. Below is an activity log that I compiled during the course of my field work, highlighting the role played by individual News and Current Affairs researchers at Newsnet.

Table 7- 1: Newsnet activities during June 2019

Researcher	Research items produced	New research Pages	Pages update	Research requests & support	Internal meetings	External meetings/other	Beat
1	14	2	19	16	16	19	International/Africa
2	12	0	3	3	2	1	Social Development
3	14	1	4	8	7	8	Arts & Culture
4	12	1	11	7	2	1	Health, Social Development
5	5	4	4	4	11	4	Profiles; Analysts and Special Projects. May focused mainly on Admin work
6	8	3	6	10	1	14	Africa/Media/Science/Ad/hoc
7	17	4	24	8	11	6	Economics
8	0	0	15	9	8	11	International
9	0	4	32	8	6	1	Politics
10	12	0	11	1	0	0	Health
11	6	4	5	34	6	7	Environment
TOTAL	100	23	134	108	70	82	

The above data based on the month of June indicate a research unit that is extremely active and contributing meaningfully to the news cycle at the SABC. The number of new pages created more than doubled the previous month. There were unpredicted instances that required news research, and these included annual events such as the ANC January 8 statement event; the National Youth Day on June 16; Nelson Mandela Day with events running throughout July; National Women's Day in August; and much more. The team coordinated the analysts for broadcasts and ensured that contextual content was provided.

Despite all these demands, some not mentioned in this report, the Newsnet team was always at hand to respond to all requests from the various SABC platforms, particularly with regard to 'breaking stories' in and outside South Africa. As the table above shows, a total figure of 108 requests by SABC journalists for research support from Newsnet in June 2019 alone is arguably significant. As already highlighted, journalists and editors use research and archived stories not only to bring out useful information but also to help with making decisions with respect to 'story' framing and to ensure accuracy in reporting.

7.5 Challenges During My Field Work

I have already indicated above that my research experience at the SABC was unfettered. For context, I have also highlighted the unexpected events occurred at the start of 2020 (see Chapter 1.6) where I describe how my fieldwork came to a sudden halt when the COVID-19 pandemic began. The National Coronavirus Command Council (NCCC) was instituted to guide how South Africa could contain infections and lessen the negative effects of the virus in communities, and on March 27, 2020, the NCCC announced a national lockdown. This unprecedented move imposed strict regulations and restrictions on movement and public gatherings. For the next two years, workplace protocols and strict measures were instituted, which limited all forms of gathering. This affected my fieldwork significantly since I could no longer attend any of the editorial and production meetings on site. It also impacted my access to the university resources, as the campus and staff were equally affected. Fortunately, at that point, I had already collected considerable amounts of data, sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions. Additionally, the healthy rapport with my research subjects ensured that I could follow-

up on any information required virtually, via email, online audio and video platforms, and by telephone.

In acknowledging how my access to the SABC newsrooms was enabled (see Chapter 5 and 6, in sections 1 and 2) and mindful of my positionality, together with the requirement to conduct oneself in ways that are ethical (Chapter 6.3), in all these instances, recalling Bourdieu's emphasis on reflexivity was important. For example, I had to be open concerning the issues that I already knew from previous experience as a staff member and with respect to my research focus. I ensured transparency both during informal conversations and more formal interviews. I made it clear to my selected interview respondents that my fieldnotes would be accessible any time on request. I have stated at the beginning of this chapter that attending to these ethical issues through reflexivity introduced a useful filter regarding whether or not to use the interview data that I collected.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined in brief the initial moments of my fieldwork at the SABC and documented some of the 'access' issues that are often flagged in scholarship by researchers who attempt to study the internal workings of the SABC newsroom. As highlighted, I was extremely welcome by the SABC staff and management and meant the level of access I enjoyed was unique but also explained in terms of my positionality at the broadcaster. Prior to my fieldwork, I worked at SABC for several years, and therefore, I was known by a significant number of actors that eventually became part of my research journey. The events surrounding the SABC8 coincide with the genesis of my fieldwork. I have always felt it proper to highlight constantly that I was personally conflicted. The reasons for the disclaimer are many, but among them is the fact that I attended the same university and class with one of the members of SABC8. Together, and during the same period, we were among the cohort of journalists that benefitted from the inaugural media and journalism studies postgraduate programme in 2001. The other reason: I was in good speaking terms with the majority of the SABC8. In addition, now, all of a sudden, they were all fired, accused of insubordination or what others described as 'speaking against censorship'. Although the Labour Court later overturned their dismissal, a sense of despair had already settled.

This chapter has also shown that the field of news making and current affairs production or the journalistic field, not least at the SABC, is a highly complex and structured system characterised by constant change and collaborative activity between actors and structures – all of which is impossible to narrate in full within the context of one study. Highlighting some of the identifiable stages of content production is just one useful approach to organising an account of a process that involves so many variables and departments that work together to transform information into news bulletins and current affairs programmes. This chapter has presented the structures and some of the elements that constitute the lifecycle of story construction at the SABC. I have introduced the daily editorial meetings and the current affairs planning meetings at the SABC. These regular meetings provided my study with a site of structured interaction, power, contest, and negotiation and constitute a very important structure of news making at the SABC. I also show how the everyday work of journalists at the SABC is impacted by routine practices, professional norms and values that are entrenched within the institution and yet taken for granted. Third, I illustrate the tension between the shared professional ideals of good practice and the reality of practice as experienced by journalists inside the SABC. This study reveals that despite the continued reputational decline of the SABC image, there still exists a community of practice inside the institution that is committed to the broadcaster's mandate PSB – ideally characterised normatively by its relationship to the public sphere and by its professional News and Current Affairs products. In summary, this work explores the complex journalistic field of the SABC, and as already discussed in the theory and conceptual section two, chapters 3 and 4, the study employs Habermas' public sphere theories, in conjunction with Bourdieu's three linked concepts of habitus, doxa and capital. It also ushers the debate on structure and agency, another of Bourdieu's considerations. In this work, habitus is understood also as the subjective attitudes, dispositions, and beliefs, and doxa relates to the 'rules of the game' that explain the 'thinking and being' through which all activities in the natural and social world appear as self-evident (Bourdieu, 2010). Capital relates to the resources that journalists deploy in the field in their interactions with one another, the institution, and the broader social world (Bourdieu, *ibid*). For example, depending on one's position in the news management hierarchy, one can be said to possess 'editorial capital'. This applies to a journalist who possesses a greater awareness of the rules (doxa), encompassing professional values, skill, professional networks, etc. The concept of habitus is deployed in Chapter Eight (8), which follows.

Chapter Eight

Habitus in the Context of the SABC Newsroom

8.0 Introduction

In Chapter Eight (8), I consider the ways of doing (habitus), comprising processes, dispositions, shared professional journalism norms and values that influence the mediation of news at the SABC and the relationality that actors armed with the symbolic capital, each brings to the newsrooms through their accredited status as part of management hierarchy (institutional structure) or social networks, professional ‘know-how’, etc. I discuss here the ‘fluidity’ of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’, one of Bourdieu’s explanations. This approach offers a significant promise in terms of theory and research into how power is generated, regenerated, and ultimately expressed inside media organisations and questions the portrayal of journalists as blindly willing to focus on a story only if political power holders tell them to do so. Furthermore, it offers insights into how best to empirically investigate journalistic practice in general and PSB practice at the SABC in particular. As already mentioned, the benefit of operationalising Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology and his notions of habitus, doxa and capital is that it enables a deeper understanding of the significance of other structuring schemes of power – schemes that include but are not limited to embedded norms, routines and policies that are structural in the organisation of media institutions; and the interpretive power sometimes held by journalists themselves, particularly relating to the application or use of codification of journalism practice and how media representations are framed. On the latter, we learn from Bourdieu’s conception of field that it is erroneous to presuppose journalists are always victims of societal and institutional arrangements beyond their control. This section brings to the fore classical newsroom studies that have documented and analysed the complex nature of news making. It highlights some of the empirical factors that impact the ultimate selection of the news story or current affairs programme. The section begins with the sourcing of the story.

8.1 Sourcing the Story: How News is Socially Constructed at the SABC

The making of the News and Current Affairs product is essentially a ‘social’ process involving many aspects and hands. For example, when a single news report breaks, it is included in the diary, typically by planning editors. The story then passes through many

individuals, who include an assignment editor whose role it is to brief the input or field reporters who then are tasked with going out and covering it. All these individuals share a professional value system and rely on routine practices that ensure the efficiency and predictability of their work. At the SABC, although individual on-duty editors, executive producers, and heads are generally regarded as custodians of story-making processes, and most of them do not hesitate to claim ownership of the agenda for the beats they are tasked to manage, the ‘collective’ and ‘social nature’ of story construction and production processes was evident. This observation at the SABC newsrooms revealed that contrary to popular belief, individual editors, and executive producers at the SABC are not the only actors that select nor source the stories that each supervises. This work concluded that this process was in part an outcome of organisational culture and in part an arbitrary response by all the individual actors to the challenge of constantly having to generate or identify stories as quickly as possible from millions of available news sources. In essence, the organisational culture was predominantly determined by a range of institutional processes, norms, and shared journalistic values; others fixed and others arbitrary. For instance, some journalists appeared free to suggest or negotiate the story angles or the framing of the story to beat editors and at the line talk meetings, all based on individual dispositions; and often, but not always, these ideas were taken up by the beat editors and executive producers and adopted in the final bulletins. Of course, this is by no means a suggestion that editors, producers, and all those at the SABC who are tasked with generating story ideas do not source stories individually. Rather, this work succeeds in highlighting the different types of negotiations for sourcing, selecting, and framing of the story – all of which were possible owing to a shared institutional culture. For example, take the case of one beat editor who tended to source the story ideas themselves, often directly from the ENPS, press releases or other media. In this work, I argue that such an attitude or way of doing is not a departure from the dominant organisational norm. The ENPS, press releases, or competing media are institutionally accepted sources of news, unlike an original story or angle that may emanate from elsewhere. In this way, the embedded organisational practice, way of doing, or culture at the SABC significantly structures not only the sourcing of stories but also their reconstruction.

‘Sometimes we can’t but help assume the stories are coming from the 27th floor, but suspect the 27th floor gets its story prompts from Luthuli house, and all too often it is

sanitised news that either is already trending in online platforms or peddled by our broadcast competitors' (Fieldnote13)

The 27th floor was an apparent reference to the office of the COO Motsoeneng. There were journalists who resented the said editor's approach and sometimes felt denied the initiative to come up with story ideas.

'Our audiences say this and the other through media and directly to us. We hardly curate stories that address these concerns. For example, we seem to attend to service delivery issues only when there is protest and violence or when politicians have something to say or defend themselves' (SABC Interview 9)

While the above concern was observed, there was another constraint that was institutional and functional in nature. The practice by editors of sourcing stories internally through internal mechanisms such as Newsnet, the ENPS and press releases and other wires was understandable because unlike the field journalists, editors did not have as many opportunities to go out and about in search of current affairs and breaking news. However, the practice also pointed to the complex social nature of news construction at the SABC, which confirms the theoretical notion that news is a social product that involves a series of components, processes, and players. This is not to suggest that contrary experiences indicating journalistic agency were not observed or noted in some of the interviews with research subjects:

'My editor is happy when I propose stories, as long as they are feasible, verifiable, and importantly about the public interest, not interest groups or individuals' (Fieldnote 14)

From the above extract, it is discernible that some editors were happy to embrace story ideas from their teams, confirming the unpredictability of the habitus and, importantly, the primacy of generating the story, regardless of circumstance and meeting the deadline as a functional end. Of course, the approach came with an expectation from the editor; although it was the editor's primary role to ensure there were enough story ideas to contribute to the bulletin each day, the responsibility of meeting the deadline was a shared one. The deadline had to be met, and if the agreed news item failed to materialise due to unforeseen circumstances, the team had to at least propose some

professionally credible ideas, including revisiting the usual sourcing mechanisms such as press statements, Newsnet, and stories from other media. The replacement story had to align with the ‘rules of the game’ (doxa). This was the unspoken rule of thumb – an important feature of the habitus.

8.2 Beginning of the ‘Lifecycle’ of a Story: The Process

Having located the system within which most sourcing of stories at the SABC occurred—where the story begins — the identity of the process and kinds of information that typically arise at the beginning of the ‘lifecycle’ of a story become visible. At the SABC, the context of a potential story was generally offered by the editor via an editorial briefing or preliminary diary documents. The editor who assigns work to a specific reporter is expected to offer a basic treatment of the story and to highlight overall expectations, which could include facts and figures, previously published work on the topic to be covered, what is already known in the public domain, and often, this included consultations with internal colleagues who would have covered similar or the same stories before. Notably, such discussions were not scheduled and often took place informally, involving only those individuals who were likely to have a bearing on the proposed story. Herein lies the integral role of the odd tea break, the lunch hour, and the studio canteen as a sort of internal space in which, seemingly, anyone is free to enter and to engage as an equal, regardless of institutional hierarchy or rank in the newsroom.

Assuming there was traction in the story, further background information seeking would continue. Potential actors in coverage are identified, and in some cases, direct contact would be made. During my fieldwork which began in 2016, several journalists exalted the arrival of mobile telephony, particularly how it had made it possible to access sources directly with much ease. The mobile phone facilitated access to first-hand sources from anywhere. Every senior journalist in the newsroom had a mobile phone whose bill was paid for by the SABC.

‘Without some initial legwork, preselling a story to your editor or vice versa, the editor priming the reporter, and an advance pledge to participate in a story received from a potential source (interviewee), there is no formal proposal to run with. In most cases, an

interviewee, preferably accredited or directly related to the story or event, offers the official point of entry and a focus to the story' (SABC Interview 9).

No broad editorial buy-in, no story - so it seemed to be the rule of thumb. Almost all stories required the endorsement of the official editorial meeting, which in turn allowed for the rest of the editorial team to weigh in on the particular story. At this stage, stories 'lived or were assassinated' – suggesting that the first formal presentation of a story proposal served as a critical news filter; and without the official comment to proceed from the editor-in-chief or delegated individual, the story could consider 'dead in the water', i.e., not worthy of pursuing.

Specific to the SABC, little research has been conducted on these informal practices that take place before the story idea is formally adopted by the newsroom. This work is therefore important because the observation and interviews of news workers at the SABC indicate that such practices constitute an important precursor to a would-be story for the bulletin. The battle for selection is often won at that stage of the story life cycle. Primary sources, including those close to an account, i.e., eyewitnesses, instigators, etc., are often identified at that stage of the story negotiation, whereas secondary sources, i.e., those individuals or institutions accredited to provide insights even in cases there was no direct connection to the specific matter in coverage, are considered when the formal process of story making begins. These individuals, groups or entities constitute the 'strategic ritual', that operates to guarantee the weight of the story as an impartial narrative or the media organisation as an unbiassed mediator whose role is merely to report events as they unfold (Tuchman, 1972; Schudson, 1989 - 2019; Harcup and O'Neill, 2009). Ensuring the right to reply on a controversial story or obtaining a contrary view contributes to the perception that the story is presented 'fairly' and that the 'multiple sides' of the issue in coverage are presented. Often, additional information was required to authenticate the information received or cover the gaps on an account. The SABC had an intranet production system, ENPS for TV and Dalete for radio news, although which a copy would be passed through to different groups of users, who in turn would include their own edits. Details of each edit were captured in the system ensuring the identity of who else had edited the story and when. The final story would be first assessed by the beat editor, or a senior sub-editor - largely for 'high-level' matters to do with the quality of the story, house-style, and to determine whether it was

suitable for the bulletin. This final quality test usually includes a check on how the story complimented the entire bulletin. At this point, much unwanted material was identified and filtered. The decision to update or correct a story had implications for the journalist tasked with the story, and the expectation was that they would not leave until the required revisions were made.

‘It’s better to stay behind and fix your story than to have it removed from the bulletin. Your sources, the people who are interviewed all expect to be featured in the story. It is a lot of pressure but much easier if the story makes it to the bulletin that have it killed completely’ (SABC Interview 4)

It was not common for stories to be thrown away (killed) simply because it was difficult for a story to make it that far in the process. In most instances, there would be no material to replace a story that is thrown away all of a sudden, and likely the editor would rather request more work to be done on a story to make it palatable, than throw it away.

8.2.1 Writing the Headline

The sub-editors provided the headline for the story, and every so often substantially recasted the story to fit the tone of the bulletin. Only then would the story be handed over to the bulletin editors. Individual beats had their own bulletin editors, but the sub-editors serviced all the beats. The bulletin editing team checked all the stories for the bulletin. As with the sub-editors, the priority was on the communication style, grammar, and language use. The production editors were responsible for monitoring captions such as titles and names in each news item. The bulletin editors were, in theory, the final editors of a story, but it was common in practice for the subediting team to identify last minute issues. The editing process was just as collective, amounting to several hours in a day (usually between approximately 0400 and 2300 but critically throughout the day as when the story was ready for the editing process), and often this meant that the original story submitted by a journalist could undergo as many changes as possible by the time it was broadcast. The various bulletin editors and sub-editors routinely check particular details during the editing process – often with the reporter present. The ENPS and Dalete systems allowed edited material to be visible to approved directories to ensure each story’s relationship to the rest of the bulletin. Video footage used in each

story was the domain of the video editing team, led by the video editor. Footage was regularly recompiled within the newsroom ecosystem, but particularly from the SABC Audio and Video Archive unit. Camera persons could be dispatched where necessary to bring back desired video material, or sometimes the footage could be found from the SABC's own electronic and physical archive.

The argument thus far is that news making at the SABC represented the activities of a whole range of internal actors, all of whom impact the manufacture of the story in some form or the other. Therefore, it is important not to think of news making at the SABC in terms of a product produced by an individual but rather as a social process involving a sequence of activities, albeit temporally ordered. The sourcing and negotiation of the story involved many layers – each with the potential to ‘filter’ the story for better or worse. Amidst suggestions that management hierarchy at the SABC was all too powerful and deterministic of the bulletin or current affairs output, it is the assumption of this study, based on obtained data, that whether or not the story ‘shapes up’ or 'stands up' remained a collective outcome of all the individuals who would be tasked with a story, substantially constrained, or enabled by the SABC's organisational routines, norms, and values. For example, editors were concerned to ensure that the activities of the opposition political parties were covered; news values such as accuracy, balance, etc., adhered to; language and tone in news; and a host of written SABC rules relating to news, current affairs, and information programming. However, all these professional ways of doing were shared widely by all journalists at the SABC. It is the shared understanding that non-compliance to professional norms and rules could be detrimental to the credibility of each individual journalist but equally and importantly to the broadcaster's image and in breach of its mandate.

8.2.2 The Collective Responsibility of Meeting the Deadline

Once the consensus regarding news diary and sources was established at the morning diary conference, each story was assigned to specific journalists by the beat editor. Journalists could be assigned to more than one story at a time, while stories would be assigned as features and others likely cued for subsequent bulletins. However, often, the expectation was for news reporters to generate the assigned work within deadline on the same day. Thus, it was observed that reporters intensely relied on strategies and procedures to meet deadlines, utilising the available time and resources. In practical

terms, it is common practice for reporters to routinise their practices so as to achieve more efficiency (Ericson, 1999 as cited in Berkowitz, 2009).

According to Berkowitz (*ibid*), after the ‘routine’ selection of sources and interviewing has been achieved, the next phase is to begin the interpretation of the acquired information, and it is within this process that some sources are provided more access than others, and the news story is reconstructed in manner that aligns to the generally accepted norms. At the SABC, journalists took their guidance from the beat editor – often in the form of a basic run-down of what was already known about the story. Sometimes, the brief included supplying existing information from sources like press releases, newspapers clippings, and whatever was already available.

8.2.3 Selecting the Lead Story

The planning editor at Newsnet, by virtue of position within the organisational structure of news making and current affairs production (professional capital), is assigned the role of preparing the initial diary, which comprises the proposed top 10 stories. The top stories are selected from input from the editors across the nine regions in South Africa. The list becomes a basis for a simulated negotiation at the ‘line talk’ – the daily editorial meeting where the final list is agreed to and subsequently syndicated to all SABC news platforms for broadcast. The morning dairy conference, which begins promptly at 8 am daily and lasts for at least one hour, sets the tone in terms of the story line-up for the day and how each story should be framed, which sources to use and who will be working on a story.

‘At the morning diary meeting, it is everyone’s guess which story will be a lead story. It is possible that the lead story is not even discussed at the diary meeting’ (SABC Interview 1)

Bourdieu posited that among the defining features of the habitus were schemes or actions that transcended mere habits, processes, and rules and yet allowed individual actors initiate new ways arbitrarily, grounded on their gut feelings and intuitions, and these Bourdieu contended were collective and socially shaped (Willig, *ibid*; Schultz, *ibid*; Thomsen, *ibid*). In the preceding interview (SABC Interview 1) above, I highlighted the unpredictability of the organisational imperative generating acceptable

news stories, on deadline, without fail. As already shown, a number of diverse factors affect the line-up of the bulletin. This phenomenon, in line with Bourdieu's parlance, represents how the habitus reproduces the social structure (*ibid*). For instance, the habitus is implied when certain identifiable conduct or assumption gets embedded in the social structure in such a way that it is taken for granted as the norm and thus socialised into the actions of actors in that culture (Bourdieu, 1977; Ferdinand, 1963). The concept of habitus connects actors to the social domain or field through their embedded assumptions and the ways of doing that each actor obtains through socialisation and accumulated symbolic resources (Benson, 1999; Maares, and Hanusch, 2020).

8.2.3.1 Interaction Between ‘Structure and Agency’ at the SABC Newsroom

The validity of Bourdieu's characterisation of the fluidity of 'agency and structure' as an analytical tool is epitomised by the event at the SABC newsroom on the 20th of June 2016 – illustrating some of the theoretical arguments in this thesis. The snippet below is taken from a more detailed account by Krige in his book, the SABC8. It chronicles the day in question (20th of June 2016) when the Head of News Simon Tebele directed the line talk editorial meeting to drop three R2K stories from the diary. Foeta Krige was one of the journalists who was present at the meeting.

Tebele: ‘Those stories are out, as discussed earlier’ ...

Gqubule: ‘Why?’

Tebele: ‘Because it is about us’ ...

Gqubule: ‘Please recording my voice as dissenting’ ...

Foeta: ‘I totally agree with you, Thandeka’ (reference to Gqubule)

Suna: ‘As junior as I am, please record my voice as dissenting against this.’

Jonathan Lungu, who was conducting the line talk from Mbombela: ‘Johannesburg, did you note what Foeta and them are saying?’

Tebele: ‘Yes, I head. Please continue.’

Krige (2019, p. 48 -49)

The verdict: Tebele, argued ‘...those stories are out... because it is about us.’ All the stories in question in the foregoing example were scraped from the bulletin on account Tebele, who perceived himself as institutionally accredited to make that call by virtue of his position the SABC news management hierarchy. The directive was not preceded by an exhaustive debate among editors attending the line talk on the day, nor did the parties anchor their arguments within the framework of the SABC Editorial Code of conduct policies, which ideally constitute the rule book that is meant to guide editorial decision-making. The decision by Tebele, nor the arguments against it, was not based on the consideration of whether the ‘stories’ in question were newsworthy but rather on the ‘habitus’, i.e., the news sense of the individuals. The debate therefore relates to whether there were embedded constraints within the SABC. In Bourdieu, scholars such as Richardson (2005), as cited in O’neill & Harcup (2009), have argued that the selection process of news is a result of how news values are understood and applied. Such news values are normative but also ambiguous – passed down over time through socialisation in the newsroom and training (*ibid*, p.173). Normatively, such news values operate very much like a ‘system of criteria’ that news editors use ‘to make decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of material’ (Palmer, 2000).

Bourdieu extends the analysis on newsroom processes and values with his concept of capital. Applied in this instance, the decision to remove the stories, while identifiable with overt pressure originating from a senior management representative; and on the part of the dissenting journalists, the ‘fear’ of losing professional credibility, in Bourdieu, it was the exercise of ‘editorial capital’ in action – with Tebele representing hierarchical management structure (a position of power) and the resistance that accompanied it emanating from journalists in the newsroom epitomising their own agency by protesting. The episode marked the beginnings of sustained dissonance in the SABC newsrooms.

8.2.3.2 The Dissonance in the SABC Newsrooms Got Worse

Between 2016 and 2019, the South African media extensively covered the battles that took place in the SABC newsroom, and most of these stories went viral on social media

in the country and abroad. On the 25th of May 2016, I attended the afternoon line talk diary at the S2 news conference room. Earlier, a protest had taken place outside the SABC Auckland studios. As I entered the room, there was the usual chatter between the journalists in attendance, but this time it was rather subdued. I sat next to one of my research participants. She stares right at me, and judging by her look, I could tell something is amiss. Without a greeting, she said:

‘Nothing burns like the cold... I think it was George Martin who said this’ (Fieldnote 2)

‘*Who is George Martin?*’ I ask. There is a short repose, and then the whisper.

‘Forget George Martin... this is real. It was extremely cold here this morning. We received a last-minute instruction from Simon to scrap R2K protest outside from the dairy. Fellow editors objected. He was visibly unhappy... and not open to discussion. It was as though the decision was made in heaven’ (Fieldnote2)

The informant described the unfriendly exchange earlier in the morning during the daily line talk news diary meeting. She told me about the incident in which Simon Tebele, then-acting head of news, had a ‘beef’ with fellow editors, citing Thandeka Gqubule (then economics editor), Foeta Krige (then RSG executive producer) and Suna Venter (then Afrikaans news producer).

‘It was uncharacteristic of him. He was visibly upset. He literally decreed the footage with violent action in the story should be removed...Frankly... the whole atmosphere was so cold’. (Fieldnote 1)

At that point, the SABC regional hubs had already dialled in. Then, entered Tebele. The room was momentarily quiet, followed by the usual formalities – a feedback session in which all the designated bulletin editors, senior reports and executive producers provided feedback on the previous and ongoing stories. There was no mention of the morning drama.

On the 24th of June 2016, the Right2Know Campaign (R2K)³², a coalition of organisations led protests directed at the authorities of the SABC in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. The group argued that the protest was against an earlier the decision by the SABC to not broadcast footage of violence during protests. The read R2K statement read in part:

‘By not showing burning vehicles and shops being looted, the SABC downplays the seriousness of the situation, which has already resulted in deaths’³³

I argue that the entire saga was indicative of a conceptual clash regarding the interpretation of the SABC mandate. While on the one hand, resistance by the journalists ostensibly hinged on ‘defending’ the ethos of professional journalism, the Head of News, Tebele on the other hand, considered himself to be ‘protecting’ the SABC.

8.3.1.2 ‘Our Independence is not Guaranteed’.

The fieldwork had several advantages – one being among research subjects who were more than willing to discuss their roles, views about their work and every now and then a commentary on the overall SABC news performance. Between 2016 and June 2017, Motsoeneng’s era as COO, I was able to observe numerous ‘aftermaths’ of editorial meetings at which journalists expressed disdain for some stories. I often wondered why they would not speak out during the formal editorial meetings. A reporter told me:

‘Our independence is not guaranteed. The SABC does not comply with its own Charter’
(Field note 3)

On the 28th of June 2016, journalists at the SABC started an online petition in which they called for *‘independence from censorship, and political interference’*. The petition further called for the SABC to *‘stop intimidating and purging staff’* who held opposing views³⁴.

³² <https://www.r2k.org.za>

³³ <https://www.r2k.org.za/2016/06/24/statement-r2k-continues-its-protest-against-SABC-censorship/>

³⁴ https://www.petitions.net/free_the_SABC_from_censorship_and_political_interference

The petition highlighted the point that, all along, news was not necessarily what the journalists themselves think but rather a product with organisational expectations. Thus, even as journalists at the SABC would individually disapprove of a source, they would keep the gripe amongst themselves and instead prioritise the delivery of the story in time, instead of risking their careers in exchange for audience approvals. In this way, news at the SABC became a product of journalistic routines, values, and norms, while journalists assumed the role of organising information into news. Put differently, with a scholastic lens, news is a reconstruction of events and the interface between routines, values, and norms, not least the relational ‘interaction between sources and journalists’, works to structure news output (Tuchman, 1973). However, unlike factory workers, there is an expectation for SABC journalists prioritize public interests, owing to the broadcaster’s public service mandate and by exercising their professional news judgement. Thus, every now and then, as the July 2016 petition suggests, journalists exercised their democratic mandate by collectively masking a challenge to the status quo. For the journalists at the SABC, resistance to perceived violation of the SABC’s mandate by management was arguably an important part of their professional ethos, but not without consequences.

Shortly after the institution of the online petition, three senior editorial staff namely, Thandeka Gqubule (Economic editor), Foeta Krige (RSG executive producer) and Suna Venter (senior journalist) – were all directed to stop their duties pending a disciplinary hearing, ostensibly, insubordination during a diary meeting at which a directive had been issued to exclude from coverage a planned protest by the Right2Know (R2K) activists allegedly against the SABC censorship of news. The SABC’s Chief Operations Officer Hlaudi Motsoeneng was targeted for his interference in editorial processes., specifically his directive that certain news sources should not be covered in the SABC newscasts. Between 18-19 July 2016, seven SABC journalists and one contracted freelance journalist had been fired for allegedly protesting a SABC management decision not to report on violent protests.

There are other elements to these stories, which I discuss throughout this work, for instance, the conceptual clashes that arose from the distinct and polarised interpretations of news values. For the purpose of academic rigour, it is important to state that my

account is far from exhaustive but suffices to say that this work does shed some light on how the incident involving the much-publicised SABC8 reached the tipping point.

8.2.3.3 How Structure and Agency Impact Story Selection

Adopting Bourdieu's framework relating to his idea of the fluidity between structure and agency, I have highlighted the case of the SABC8 as one of the examples of the interaction between 'agency' and 'structure' whereby the institutional hierarchy of management was challenged by subordinates, indicating that individual journalists at the SABC, regardless of position held in the management hierarchy, were not entirely without power. I have suggested that part of the power is derived from the shared norms and values related to the profession of journalism. At the SABC, the professional ethos was even supported by the statutory PSB mandate and a constitutional framework. The Broadcasting Charter and the Editorial Code of Ethics, requires SABC journalists to exercise their professional news judgement in the public interest at all times. This mandate transcends the management hierarchy in that staff can object to certain decisions if they perceive management to be acting outside the SABC's legal and professional mandate.

'A free, balanced, and fair SABC was a precondition for the first democratic elections. ... that is what we are fighting for and that is what will not yield... we will not flinch' Gqubule, 2016 (Press conference after the Labour Court postponed the case of her dismissed colleagues)

According to Soloski (1989), professionalism is the goal of journalism that is institutionally embraced as part of the culture of news work. Such conditions permit a degree of fluidity between 'structure', i.e., institutionally embedded routines, norms, and procedures, and agency, which is limited to journalists deciding story angles, how to frame the story, and what sources to use (Ryfe 2002). In practice, however, the structure favours the most senior in the management hierarchy, although not without occasional open resistance. Hence, the agency of journalists is sometimes constrained and not always enabled. Their news discretion, access to sources and ability to decide which stories are selected or excluded is often determined by their position in the management hierarchy (Soloski, 1989). The decision concerning what is 'newsworthy'

and ‘who’ deserves to be interviewed is theorised in several studies as a very powerful political weapon.

8.3 The Relationship Between Habitus, Professional Values, and Interpretations of Doxa

Above, I have shown how what had begun as an internal newsroom disagreement on a normative issue morphed into a public uproar in which the disgruntled journalists at the SABC raised the issue of autonomy as a condition for the professional execution of their work. These arguments came from the ‘naturalised’ belief that the newsroom ought to be free from undue influence, including freedom from management actors who may want to control professional journalism. This attitude, as Schultz noted in her study titled ‘The Journalistic Gut Feeling’ (2007), ‘is an important part of the professional self-understanding of journalists and editors expressing how news judgements seem self-evident’ (*ibid*, p.190). Here, ‘journalistic doxa’ as an analytic concept is put to work.

Thus, while on the one hand, amid allegations of censorship and purging of those journalists who took a stand against the SABC management structure, COO Motsoeneng told a range of media platforms that his was a ‘transformation agenda’, which were ‘what the people want’ (Pretorius, 2016). He argued in support of a call for ‘independent’ PSB journalism while alleging that some individual journalists at the broadcaster were bent on abusing discretionary decision-making in their work by ‘censoring good news stories about the country... ‘They don’t show good stories. For me, it is censorship... but you just show this bad element’ (News 24, 01 June 2016)

‘For me what is critical is that we as the SABC, or media generally, you can’t incite the public to burn property, because the property that people are burning it is not the ruling party property, it is community property’, Motsoeneng insisted (News 24, 01 June 2016)

The above diametrically opposed positions all purport to support the professional value of autonomy in media and journalism practice. In this way, ‘independence’ or ‘autonomy’ becomes a rhetorical construct in the same way that it is a normative ideal (Örnebring, & Karlsson, 2019). The article by Rodny-Gumede (2015) addresses this

issue by raising the question of what professionalism entails in practice within the setting of the journalistic field South Africa. Through in-depth qualitative interviews with journalists, Rodny-Gumede (*ibid*) explored whether there were any deviations in practice from the liberal conceptions of news media in respect of the way journalists in South Africa understood their own professional values and their own role in society. The findings revealed that journalists did not frame their role in terms of liberal notions of ‘neither lapdogs nor exclusively watchdogs’ but rather in terms of ‘competing imperatives, in which concerns for the audience and a broader articulation of the public interest took precedence over more liberal conceptualisations of the role of journalism in society’ (p., 67).

Like the BBC, the SABC enjoined by the broadcasting charter, is expected to facilitate a plurality of voices, views, opinions, different types of information, news; and also, to foster positive social transformation as an institution in transition from apartheid to democracy. It is therefore imperative for the broadcaster to pursue a PSB variant that properly responds to the demands evolving new political dispensation in South Africa. Such transformation, marking a transitional process from apartheid to democracy is thought to be necessary reflected in its broadcast output – not least in its news bulletins and current affairs broadcasts. As already highlighted, the SABC was among the institutions charged with ensuring the departure from apartheid policies and to construct a new vision for a society based on democratic citizenship. This social and political change post-apartheid provided media scholars with the necessary context for exploring media and democracy theories. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli (1994) are among the early scholars to identify some of the broad areas of the transition that challenged the SABC. Their study, titled 'Reconstructing Public Service Broadcasting: Media and Democracy During Transition in South Africa' outlines at least three broad challenges that faced the SABC during its transition as follows,

1. To change the face and structure of the SABC to reflect the 'new South Africa'
2. To cater to the developmental needs of the country in a period of rapid change
3. To acknowledge the programming and scheduling the fact that the SABC was part of the African continent (Tomaselli & Tomaselli *ibid*)

Similar articulations of the broadcaster's experience at the time include the works of Prof. Jane Duncan (2001) titled, Broadcasting and the national question: South African broadcast media in an age of neo-liberalism; the 2007 paper by Prof. Jackson Banda titled, An Appraisal of the Applicability of Development Journalism in the Context of Public Service Broadcasting (PSB); and other works by scholars such as Wasserman & De Beer (2005), who have discussed satisfactorily some of the critical issues associated with the conceptualisation, regulation and practice of PSB in selected sub-Saharan African countries, including SA. Scholars argue that care must be taken to ensure the application of PSB in African settings does not merely replicate Western liberal democratic assumptions of the media. The scholarship posits that the process of democratising society, must account for the 'histories, cultures, and sociologies of African societies' because the baseline Western attitudes of what is good, just, and democratic can no longer be presumed (Thusso et al., 2021), and Banda, (ibid).

This study builds on this impressive body of work with a specific focus on the SABC journalists in the context of PSB practice and conceptualisation. My research proceeds from the premise that the ideological frame of journalists, the way they perceive their own roles – considered together with the 'embedded norms' inside the media organisation (the operational field or institutions), both offer a tangible basis on which institutional arrangements are constructed, which in themselves deserve scrutiny and updating (Born, 2006), while the perspectives journalists enable the understanding of their professional attitudes and values, how they conceive of their own roles, and the impact of pressures such as censorship and self-censorship, etc. Effectively, all these elements have an impact on the normative expectations of PSB and, by extension, on the democratic experience in South Africa. Thus, in the context of the journalistic field or specifically the SABC newsroom, the desire to be independent from external forces such as the economy and politics is not in question; neither is the normative ideal whereby journalists have the interpretive power embedded within their community of practice or discretionary decision-making over their work.

8.3.1 Sense Of Professional Community – 'You Threaten One, You Threaten All'

Throughout all the accounts involving clashes in the SABC newsrooms, journalists chose to bond together. There are many reasons for taking this position. Some studies (e.g., Thomsen, 2018) have shown that in certain circumstances, 'journalists share a

bond' that is 'stronger than any bonds' emanating from rules of management and organisational norms (Thomsen, 2018, p. 48). A perception of an attack on one or more journalists can easily be interpreted as an attack on the core professional values of all journalists. A key value among practicing journalists is to become a good journalist. When journalists see this core value threatened, they unite to protect the profession' (Thomsen, *ibid*).

According to Foeta's account, Gqubule argued that the decision by Tebele was unlawful and that the SABC could end up in court. For that reason, she insisted that those against the decision be recorded as dissenting voices, and some did. Suna Venter, a junior producer, and Foeta, her senior, both joined Gqubule in rejecting the decision by Tebele, even as the latter had the final say. This is how the reporters who dared to exercise their agency (capital) were thrust into the media spotlight and became the news. The event became the precursor of what was later known as the SABC8, when subsequently, eight SABC journalists (the SABC8) were fired for protesting what they perceived as a 'unilateral decision' by the then-acting Chief Executive Hlaudi Motsoeneng to exclude visuals of violent service delivery-related protests. Throughout this thesis, I refer to this saga and discuss some of the outstanding aspects; however, in summary, the incident contributed to the clear illustration of Bourdieu's notion of 'fluidity' between 'structure and agency' and how journalists at the SABC often used their agency to appraise the task at hand or what they understood to be the demands of their news tasks.

'The group of people known as the SABC8 was not formed. It was not planned. It was forced upon eight individuals, who up to that point in their lives had been living their own dramas, barely aware of the other's existence' (Krike, 2019, p., 47).

The SABC8 did what they did within the context of an existing institutional way of doing (habitus), rules and professional norms (doxa) that were already embedded inside the SABC over time.

8.3.1.1 Fluidity of Structure and Agency Inside the Newsroom

A good example is found in the field study by David Ryfe, as cited in Hendrickx & Picone (2022), which describes how a particular editor of an American newspaper

described his position as that of a ‘change agent’ whose role was to bring whatever changes to restore ratings. (2009, p. 198). This attitude was identifiable at the SABC newsrooms in general, epitomised by the COO Motsoeneng and Head of News, Tebele. It was justified in terms of fostering clear lines of authority and reporting within the newsroom and accountability for actions. However, given that selecting a story from a myriad of available news and deciding how such stories are to be presented is a hurried process that happens with minimal deliberation, the real debate remains on whether news editorial meetings, which are the domain of established professionals in the journalism field, do require such a ‘change agent’, who obviously enters the editorial meeting with a mandate from elsewhere.

In Bourdieu’s outline of the Theory of Practice, habitus allows us to connect both sides of the structure/agency debate, and by so doing enabling the rejection of the idea that practice is determined by preexisting conditions and entirely subject to ‘preestablished assemblies,’ while also objecting to the assumption that there exists in actors or agents some free will ‘to constitute, on the instant, the meaning of the situation’ (Bourdieu 2004, p.176). From this perspective, habitus enables us to think of news making at the SABC as an outcome of structural arrangements but also as something that plays out in practice, in the everyday world of doing things. Habitus transcends practice and encourages us to examine both the visible and invisible in human practice, including examining how people perceive themselves and their own behaviour in relation to institutional and other power structures.

There is a general agreement in literature that the journalistic field will always seek to balance its own policies, political and economic imperatives with the influences of outside factors such as the economy, politics, and groups (McChesney, 2016; Bourdieu on Television as cited on Szeman, 2000), sometimes to the detriment of quality journalism. What this suggests is that acknowledging the ‘logic of the objective competition’ in the field, particularly between competing positions - different producers are likely to generate products that each, according to own disposition, believes or perceives to be what is expected of the different positions within the field of power. However, this happens arbitrarily without calculated deliberation, and as such individuals’ dispositions are acquired from the habitus or socially ingrained subliminally over time (Bourdieu, as cited in Park 2009). This feature of the SABC

newsroom is discussed in this work, noting that while it is often taken for granted, the embedded practices and norms, including the shared values of journalists, all have a pervasive impact on how decision-making on news selection and framing comes about and that ultimately, often than not, all serve the functional end of everyday news work. In short, it is argued in this work that hierarchy in the newsroom can impose a structuring role in news management and editorial decision-making processes, albeit not durable over time, i.e., subject to a range of factors that may militate against the structure, not excluding agency.

8.4 The Habitus and Capital in Editorial Decision-Making

I have highlighted some of the ways editorial decision-making is impacted by management hierarchy, some of which resulted in dissonance inside the newsrooms. At the core of the hierarchy of influences identified during my fieldwork at the SABC, in various reports and interview remarks, was the claim that the mandate came from the SABC's 27th Floor in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. The floor was occupied by the most senior executives of the SABC, including COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng. They, according to the SABC Board Commission Report (2019), instructed senior news editors to do their unofficial bidding for news stories, and sometimes the directives violated the standing provisions contained in the Broadcasting Charter and in SABC Editorial Code of conduct.

However, this does not suggest that journalists always agree on everything, even if they share similar journalistic values. Here, Bourdieu alerts to the fact that each actor in the field embodies an individual habitus, i.e., an individual way of perceiving and responding to the social world or, in this case, an individual logic relating to the shared journalistic values. I asked a reporter who had attended the 'line talk' meeting referenced above why she had chosen not to join the dissenters and below is the remark:

‘Stories die every day in the newsroom’ (SABC Interview 5).

If it is, according to the above respondent (SABC Interview 5), that ‘stories’ are ‘killed’ every day in the newsroom, why then were the three stories in question contested? What was so different about these specific stories? I do not address these specific questions, but perhaps the focus ought to be directed towards the often-invisible

arbitrariness of the ‘rules of the game’; those doxic beliefs and values that journalists employ to facilitate their selection of stories; news values like timeliness, currency, or newness (the taxonomy is long). Schultz (2007) alerts us to the fact that while there exists a strong consensus around certain professional values and norms in the journalistic field, while some are disputed, debated and subject to change. According to Schultz (*ibid*), the ‘arbitrariness’ of these ‘rules’ or ‘intuitive beliefs’ becomes evident when mainstream views (orthodoxy) are considered in relation to alternative views (heterodoxy). Moreover, each actor in the field embodies an individual ‘habitus’, i.e., an individual way of perceiving and responding to the world around oneself, through their dispositions or, in this case, through an individual logic relating to how one chooses to respond to the existing norms and structures that are institutionally embedded. Bourdieu’s field theory challenges us to conceive of the journalist field, like all fields, as a social space in which individual agents/actors compete for positions within the hierarchy of power and recognition by peers (Bourdieu, 2005, Willig, 2013). Furthermore, prior research has shown that ‘news stories are not a product of a ‘narrow’, unified ideology of news making, but rather a product of embedded and ‘often taken for granted’, institutional processes and values of news production (Willig, *ibid*; Schultz, 2007). An important task, therefore, is to bring out these ‘silent’ processes and values. The dissenting journalists at the SABC clearly relied on news values to reject the imposition of hierarchy in editorial decision-making. The ‘journalistic doxa’, according to (Willig, *ibid*; Schultz, *ibid*; Thomsen, *ibid*, and others referencing Bourdieu) is the mechanism used by journalists to decide whether or not an event is ‘newsworthy’. Such was deployed by the SABC journalists in question in their attempt to have their stories selected for coverage. But why did they fail? I argue that in line with Cook (2006), ‘news’ is a product of an institutional arrangement (*bid*). At the SABC, as in other hierarchical news organisations, editorial decision-making power often resides with the most senior in the newsroom. In this way, Simon Tebele, then the SABC head of news, represented the authority of the institution: the one individual at the broadcaster who was officially in charge of the department, i.e., in charge of the entire news staff, including the news output. Journalists, on the other hand, believe that the exercise of their professional judgement is what institutions expect of them (Gitlin, 2002). However, one could also argue that ‘news’ is a product of institutional or organisational factors such as the choice of management, embedded routines, norms, and values. These institutional arrangements ensure decisions at every stage of the

news-making process, usually at great speed and under the pressure of deadlines. However, equally, the interpretive power of the journalist cannot be understated, and therein lies their agency.

8.4.1 Habitus: Through The ‘Eyes’ of Journalists Themselves

SABC journalists perceive their social reality and respond to it through the manner in which they interpret professional rules, abide, or deviate from established norms, and generally react to the demands of the news-making task is categorised in terms of Bourdieu’s habitus. These habits, skills, and dispositions are socially embedded and embodied by each news worker at the SABC. These dispositions are often homogenised among individuals with similar historical experiences, backgrounds, education, profession, etc., (Bourdieu, 1977). ‘...through imitation (mimesis)’, the habitus is acquired, and this represents what actors conceive as reality, and this ‘includes their individual experience and opportunities. Thus, the habitus represents the way group culture and personal history shape the body and the mind; as a result, it shapes present social actions of an individual’ (Bourdieu, ibid., as cited in Sieweke 2014). The concept of ‘professional habitus’, when applied to the question of journalism practice within context, offers a flexible conceptual utility that extends our understanding of how the embedded structures of the SABC matter to the microlevel experiences and agency of news workers. It allows us to appreciate the ambiguous way through which professionalism is sometimes deployed and editorial positions defended.

8.4.2 Habitus as ‘Misrecognition’

The tendency to ‘misrecognise’ or to be ‘disinterested’ in the invisible but sometimes visible institutional constraints is another of Bourdieu’s concepts. This concept is applicable in the manner in which the SABC saga has been presented in the public domain, particularly in the ‘grey literature’ and the media. As shown already, former COO Motsoeneng has mainly been discussed in terms of his positionality in relation to South Africa’s political class, specifically his proximity to the ANC presidency of Jacob Zuma. This relationship is in no doubt. According to former SABC CEO Lulama Mokhobo, COO Motsoeneng boasted about his association to former ruling ANC and state president Jacob Zuma to intimidate executives and the Board of the SABC. Testifying under oath, Mokhobo told the Zondo Commission on the SABC that

‘Motsoeneng flexed his muscles to the point of telling people that he frequently visited Zuma and would sometimes only leave at 2am’³⁵. Commentators caught on to this alleged association with the then-state President Zuma to portray Motsoeneng as a proxy of the ANC and President. At the time, Zuma was highly publicised in the media for no noble achievements but simmering public frustrations and allegations of impunity and grand corruption for his role in a controversial 1999 arms deal. While the identification of Motsoeneng with respect to his positionality is not disputed, so is the devaluation of his credibility as an independent actor and, by extension, his ‘symbolic capital’.

8.4.3 The Functional End: The Only Bulletin That Matters is the One On Air

Meeting the deadline is an important yardstick. Thus, while it is conceivable that lots may occur from when a story is initiated and the time when it is submitted for its broadcast, ultimately there must be a story on air. The original idea of a story might easily fade in the progression of its lifecycle or deemed ‘unnewsworthy’ in the first place due to a range of factors, including inaccuracies, but come the deadline, there must be a story ready to go on air. This is another example revealing that ‘news’ is a perishable ‘product’, but not the news organisation.

‘Often, the story fails to stand up. Nothing sinister there. But to not have a story, that is unacceptable.’ (SABC Interview 2)

Some editors remarked that by monitoring what was happening around a particular story and using their knowledge and ‘gut feel’, they were able to predict if a particular story would stand up. Bourdieu problematises such moments in his concept of the habitus, not only to point at the limits of perspective but also by highlighting the unequal position (editorial capital) the editor possesses over others on account of his or her positionality. For example, editorial capital may be imposed either to resuscitate some rejected material in the story or reversion it, depending on what is dictated by the functional need of the organisation. A functional end to reversion a story as opposed to throwing it away completely may include instances when a bulletin ‘deadline’ is too

³⁵ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2020-02-26-very-dangerous-hlaudi-motsoeneng-dropped-zumas-name-to-bully-SABC-execs/>

close to find a replacement story. This arbitrary sense of reality existed and remains naturalised in the SABC newsrooms. Decisions about what gets thrown away or used were sometimes controversial, as evidenced in the case of the Tebele vs Gqubule debacle on Monday, June 2016. To the originator of a story idea, rejection of a story might imply ‘censorship’; but understanding the functional end of the organisation provides an insight into the strategic intent of the institution and enables us to accept the possibility of several variable considerations; meeting the deadline or self-censorship being among those. I argue that the concept of habitus, when applied to how news is selected, allows for deeper insights on the complex factors and social ways, involving embedded systems of news making, including the often taken-for-granted organisational ‘routines’, values, and norms – suggesting an important nuance when we consider issues of autonomy, independence, and censorship. Regarding the SABC newsrooms, in line with Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, application of doxa, and the deployment symbolic capital, the irrationality of all actions is noted. From this conception, this work draws the conclusion that when the functional end of news production is threatened, journalistic routines interact with the norms of the profession, interests of editors, and external pressures from outside the institution such as those emanating from the market or politics; essentially turning the development of the story more of a burden, not for the individual journalist alone, but an intensely social activity and as such a product of multiple perspectives, ‘beliefs’ and organisational structures, often ingrained and embedded over time’; all of which conspire to produce what ultimately becomes a ‘news product’.

8.4.4 The Tacit Diary

According to Bourdieu (1984), ‘habitus is neither an outcome of free will nor determined by structures but is created by a kind of interplay between the two over time. In this sense habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence or concentration’ (p. 170). Thus, it is assumed that the informal practice resulting in the tacit news diary in SABC newsrooms is evidence of Bourdieu’s conception. For example, a rumour would swell among pockets of the journalist community inside the SABC. This kind of ‘social culture’ often resulted in a pro-active cue in the newsroom. Then, often the news editor would approach a constellation of reporters at the canteen, and say something like, *‘have you heard?’*, ... *‘that’s a great story... Who wants to run with it?’* It would be all informal at that point

but this I interpreted as the editor priming his teams, cueing them to start the search for the background and other additional information. It was more like ‘tacit scheduling’ of the diary, but such is the nature of news work sometimes.

‘Don’t quote me on this one. It is bizarre sometimes, like when you discover who is getting arrested next week, and the source tells you to not share the ‘heads up’ with anyone – only to discover your colleagues already have the same information’ (Fieldnote5)

As is obvious from the above fieldnote extract, the origin and custody of the story is not immediately known. In such instances, the newsroom hierarchies became obvious, and depending on the gravitas of the story, ‘potential big’ ones were often informally assigned the most senior reporters to verify and report on. Paradoxically, this is how some stories met their fate. The editor informally would make it known the desire to lose a particular story, long before it was considered for discussion at the daily diary conference or at the very least, would tacitly advance a similar but differently framed story, and in that way ensure that the original version of the story is not entirely lost. Thus, the interpretation here is that while the news story may have already existed out there, in the newsroom, it was ‘assassinated’, re-natured or reconstructed in ways that met the SABC’s organisational needs, values and norms. In this way, if such a story was selected for inclusion in the news diary or bulletin, it was not necessarily because the story was new but because it contained other news values that were broadly shared professionally and embodied in the SABC’s news ethos, in short, conforming to the habitus.

8.4.5 Motsoeneng’s Habitus

In public and in press statements, Motsoeneng initially contested the directives from Labour Court, which included reinstating the beleaguered journalists that he had dismissed earlier. The merits of his arguments remain untested in most analyses regarding his tenure at the SABC but suffice to say they were consistently embellished in a kind of defence for what he considered self-evident and correct to do professionally. For example, Motsoeneng would later testify before the Zondo

Commission Inquiry into state capture³⁶ that all he sought was to condemn the ‘glamorisation’ of violent protests and that his was simply a call on journalists to cover protests ‘responsibly’. The SABC statement on the issue had read in part:

‘The SABC as a public service broadcaster would like to condemn the burning of public institutions and has made a decision that it will not show footage of people burning public institutions like schools in any of its bulletins with immediate effect’ (Kganyago, SABC statement, 2016)

Motsoeneng said he had told journalists that management would be ‘cleaning up’ the SABC... that ‘no person within the SABC is independent... only the SABC is independent’.

However, even as Motsoeneng denied that there was crisis or censorship at the broadcaster, he had in his own words argued boldly before the commission:

‘It was my job to interfere’ (Motsoeneng, 2016)

However, was it his job to interfere? What was the SABC institutional norm at the time? In her affidavit, Thandeka Gqubule, one of the affected senior SABC editors, outlined details of a meeting in the weeks leading to the suspensions. The meetings were attended by Motsoeneng, acting CEO Jimi Matthews and other senior journalists. Motsoeneng recorded as having said:

‘We cannot have people who question management... this is the last time we have a meeting of this kind’ (Inc., Amended-notice-of-motion.pdf, 2016).

³⁶ The Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State concluded that former President Jacob Zuma, and the Gupta family business contravened the Constitution and the Executive Members' Ethics Act, according to their dealings with the SABC; and recommended that the former communications minister Faith Muthambi should be investigated along with former SABC COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng, and SABC CEO Lulama Mokhobo, for their role in the saga.

As the editorial furore unfolded, Jimmy Mathews, SABC acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO), resigned on 27 June 2016, saying ‘the situation at the SABC’ newsroom had ‘become corrosive and had imparted negatively’ on his moral judgement and that as a result he had become ‘complicit in many decisions’ of which he was part (Mathews, 2016).

Coincidentally, it was the same year in 2016 that the SABC’s resident spokesperson, Kaizer Kganyago had issued a controversial media statement appealing to all broadcasters and print media in South Africa to support the SABC’s management directive not to broadcast violent protests. The statement said, among other issues, that ‘violent protests’ were ‘on the rise and destroying public institutions’ (SABC statement as cited in SANEF, 2016³⁷).

‘THE SABC WILL NO LONGER BROADCAST FOOTAGE OF DESTRUCTION OF PUBLIC PROPERTY DURING PROTESTS’.

Concerning the SABC statement, Krige (2019) captured the incident as follows:

‘The heading alone, in bold capital letters, would have been disturbing to anyone with an understanding of journalism and ethics... the broadcaster expressed its concern about the violent protests in the country’ (Krige, 2019, p.,32).

The decision was condemned by several civil society organisations, including the South African Editors Forum (SANEF³⁸), and immediately rejected by the Independent Communications Authority (ICASA), the statutory body that oversees electronic communications, broadcasting, and postal industries. ICASA, citing the Broadcasting Act, indicated that it would consider officially cancelling the SABC’s broadcasting licence if the specific editorial decision was not reversed (ICASA 2016).

³⁷

https://sanef.org.za/SABC_to_stop_showing_destruction_of_property_on_tv_news_bulletins_may_27_20/

https://sanef.org.za/SABC_to_stop_showing_destruction_of_property_on_tv_news_bulletins_may_27_20/

In this work, I discuss in numerous segments elements of these moments of newsroom dissonance, an exercise made easier by the numerous media articles that covered the various episodes and, critically, with reference to the publication by Foeta Krige on the SABC8. His book offers a blow-by-blow first-hand account of how he and colleagues experienced this saga. The SABC8 account presented in this work is a shorthand account with inherent limitations. However, as already indicated, my account, and indeed all the referenced material relating to this story, is just but one among the many alternate and complimentary versions that could or are yet to be told about the SABC by different authors. Again, I reiterate that this is by no means a chronological account of the widely publicised story of the SABC8, reference to the eight journalists who were temporarily ‘fired’, on grounds that they had opposed the decision by the broadcaster’s management to censor protest footage, although significant references to the sensational; nor is it a comprehensive account of what transpired during this tragic saga. Importantly, presenting a full account of the same was not the objective of this work either. However, in an attempt to paint a holistic picture of the ‘culture’ obtained at the SABC during the course of my fieldwork and to contextualise some of the journalists’ perceptions that were shared with me and others in the public domain, I could not ignore or exclude some of the pivotal developments that ensued during that period, which included the departure of Simon Tebele, who was found liable for the legal costs of what the courts described as the ‘wrongful dismissal’ of the group of journalists known as the SABC8. Something else happened. The controversial COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng, often characterised as having dictatorial tendencies, was dismissed by the SABC in June 2017 after being found guilty in an internal disciplinary hearing³⁹, while effective from March 2018, Tebele was replaced by Ms Phathiswa Magopeni as the Group Executive of News and Current Affairs (SABC, 2018⁴⁰).

8.5 Capital: Uneven Distribution In Favour of the SABC8

This study notes that the social positionality of all the other actors in the SABC8 vs Motsoeneng dispute was hardly, if ever, brought to fore in conversations. In this way,

³⁹ <https://businessstech.co.za/news/media/178719/hlaudi-motsoeneng-fired-by-the-SABC/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.SABC.co.za/SABC/the-SABC-appoints-ms-phathiswa-magopeni-as-the-group-executive-for-news-current-affairs-division/>

the ‘misrecognition’ of the positionality of other parties to the feud served to confer those parties with symbolic capital – which also translated into greater acceptance in the public domain of their version of events and, equally, diminished ‘capital’ for Motsoeneng, whose professional positionality was tainted by association with the ‘controversial’ head of state, Jacob Zuma. For context, the social positionality of all the SABC8 is also worth noting, specifically given that in much of the narration of the woes inside the SABC, the media and a huge body of ‘grey literature’ have ‘misrecognised’ or have shown significant ‘disinterest’ in that aspect. For example, Gqubule, one of the SABC8 members and key respondents in the legal submissions against Motsoeneng, held the senior position of Economics Editor at the SABC and was responsible for the coverage of Economics, Business and Financial Markets. In the public domain, specifically in the SA media, Gqubule’s proximity to the highly decorated former president Thabo Mbeki’s brother, prominent author, and political analyst Moeletsi Mbeki is not in dispute⁴¹. Thandeka’s LinkedIn profile uses the double-barrel surname Gqubule-Mbeki⁴². The Mbeki family, largely owing to their late father Goven Mbeki⁴³, is symbolic in SA, Africa, and the global political public sphere. In short, Gqubule, by association with the Mbeki family, wields substantial symbolic ‘capital’ – which by itself translates into believability in the ‘public sphere’.

It is argued therefore that the feud that took place at the SABC newsroom provides an opportunity to operationalise Bourdieu’s field theory. For example, it is evident in the context of the SABC8 vs Motsoeneng that social relationships either accorded symbolic capital arising from positive recognition by peers in the profession or one was denied the same. This tendency is evident in the manner in which the SABC8 vs Motsoeneng saga has been discussed in the public domain, particularly in the ‘grey literature’ and the media. I have already alluded to the positionality of former COO Motsoeneng in relation to South Africa’s political class, which is in no doubt, specifically his proximity to the ANC presidency of Jacob Zuma is deployed to disfavour him (See Section 3.1.3.4 on Misrecognition as Distribution Of Capital And Legitimation and section

⁴¹<https://briefly.co.za/41229-moeletsi-mbeki-age-children-wife-parents-siblings-education-books-articles-contact-details.html>

⁴² <https://www.linkedin.com/in/thandeka-gqubule-mbeki-515598216/?originalSubdomain=za>

⁴³ <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/govan-mbeki>

8.4.2 on Habitus as Misrecognition). Motsoeneng's alleged association with the then-state President Zuma casts him as a proxy of the ANC and President. At the time, Zuma was highly publicised in the media for no noble achievements but simmering public frustrations and allegations of impunity and grand corruption for his role in a controversial 1999 arms deal. By so recognising Motsoeneng's social positionality, so is the devaluation of his credibility as an independent actor and, by extension, his 'symbolic capital'. According to Bourdieu (1987), of the distributions, one of the most unequal and the cruellest relates to how symbol capital gets distributed, as this often confers status in the social hierarchy of power and legitimacy. Bourdieu argues that symbolic capital confers strength and power to the holder and, by the same token, denies the same to the one who does not possess it. Thus, any discourse that is organised on the basis of an unequal distribution of symbolic capital is likely to be highly censored and euphemised in pursuit of specific ends. By implication, depending on the distribution of symbolic capital, the agents involved are unequally armed in the fight to impose their version of the truth (*ibid*). Applied to the selection of the lead story, habitus and the deployment of capital are both conceived in terms of the positions taken by each actor in the newsroom. Put differently, habitus, characterised by the dominant values, norms, attitudes, and practices inside SABC newsrooms, and within the same context, power, both relate to the distribution of 'capital' within the newsroom. This conceptual underpin is central to appreciating the key factors that influence institutional culture at the SABC. Often stories were abandoned part way through the story lifecycle, and journalists were assigned stories other stories.

8.5.1 How Journalistic Capital Favoured the SABC8

With the help of Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital, more so his emphasis on the relational social interactions that support the ability of an actor to advance personal interests (Bourdieu, 2010), this study is able to decipher the internal wranglings inside the SABC and to identify some of the ways through which symbolic resources are deployed. Importantly, it shows how, for instance, the actions of persons of higher status inside the organisation, regardless of their positions in relation to management hierarchy within the SABC newsroom structure, are by their mere attendance at an editorial meeting bestowed with more capital than the rest. Bourdieu identifies these hidden forms of domination, sources of bias and other forms of arbitrary behaviours exercised by journalism actors in the field, some of which may be deemed a threat to

the autonomy of ‘fields’ due and a danger to democracy. In the case of the SABC8 saga, both the protagonists and antagonist mobilised symbolic capital (Bourdieu’s concept) to buttress their arguments in the social domain. For example, on the one hand, symbolic capital was deployed by the disgruntled journalists when the protesting journalists posted pictures of themselves on Facebook, with their mouths shut with tape; with these images, a storm of international attention was attracted.

From the SABC8 incident alone, it is observed that sometimes, while journalists may be subject to ‘social pressures’ towards which it appears they have no control, there are times when they also exercise collective agency or capital in the form of ‘interpretive power’ regarding the ‘rules’, and at times the ‘rules’ may potentially go against the status quo and, in so doing, appeal to a larger social domain. The SABC management decision to fire the SABC8 is a case in point. The Labour Court overturned their firing in July 2016 (Judgement, 2016), and they were reinstated. It was the SABC8’s argument that management had misinterpreted the codified editorial rules and mandate of the broadcaster. It was Thandeka Gqubule’s view in her court submission that the Motsoeneng led SABC was ‘intent on depicting a distorted version of reality...and preventing the citizens it is mandated to serve from receiving true and accurate information about the state of the country’ (*ibid*).

Following the Labour Court decision that nullified the terminations, the SABC8 were conferred with the annual Guardian of Governance Award from the Institute of Internal Auditors SA (IIA SA). Recipients of the award are specified as those individuals who embody the good governance and have shown outstanding ethical behaviour. The Gauteng Local Division of the High Court also upheld the earlier action file in the case of SOS and Others v South African Broadcasting Corporation and Others. The court determined that everyone has a right to freedom of expression and the right to vote. Read with the Broadcasting Act and the SABC Charter, ‘this means the SABC is required ‘to ensure that members of the public have access to accurate, neutral, and pluralistic information’ (Judgement, 2017).

8.6 The New Head of News

Following Phathiswa Magopeni’s appointment as Group Executive: News and Current Affairs on the 12th of February 2018, there was visible excitement among the SABC

staff that participated in my study interviews. Several of them alluded to her ‘different leadership style’ as head of news, much to do with her heterodox approach, which I describe below in terms of a ‘discreet conductor of an orchestra’. The mood was aptly characterised by a sigh of relief from a senior journalist who described the period before Magopeni’s appointment thus:

‘It was the most distressful episode in decades spent in the newsroom. She does not impose herself on us or treat us like brainless children’ (SABC Interview 4).

‘Oh, we needed this... we have been waiting for this and I support this fully. This has to work’ as cited in an article by Godfrey Mutizwa on 3rd of September 2018
<https://www.acumenmagazine.co.za>

A media statement issued by the SABC said the task of the new executive for News and Current Affairs, was to stabilise the newsroom. On her appointment, she pledged to restore editorial independence in the newsroom and had expressed the following:

‘South Africa’s public broadcaster has always played an indispensable role in the democratic order of the country, but it has also always had a special place in my own life’ (TV with Thinus, 2018)

8.6.1 The Discreet Conductor

I would later attend a number of the daily line talk meetings at the S2 conference room at which Magobeni was in attendance. Using a prepared code sheet that I had developed for the purpose of documenting areas of interest to my research objectives, I coded Mogopeni’s personal conduct during these sessions – a practice that I pursued with several other senior personnel at editorial meetings and during current affairs production meetings. With respect to Magopeni, I specifically observed three indicators specifically relating to her type of story negotiation, namely, (1) whether or not she was positional during the meetings, (2) whether or not she was integrative in her conduct, and (3) whether or not she played the mediating role.

Here, I must point out that the data collected were not sufficient to draw any conclusive inferences; suffice to say, based on what I was able to note, Magopeni was broadly well

received by the actors in the SABC newsroom. First, she did not chair the editorial meetings herself but sat around the long ‘oval’ conference table and participated in the meetings as did the rest of the team – every time seated on a different chair – but never at the ‘head’ of the table. Overall, Mogobeni’s demeanour revealed not even the slightest hint of either excess positionality, or when there was glimpse of it, her positionality was distributive. In my code sheet, the positionality indicator included whether or not the target was contentious in their demeanour, competitive, and lacking in compromises, while the other two indicators sought to establish the existence of an orientation towards problem solving, encouraging compromise, adaptable, focused on win/win solutions, and empowering her teams. However, the SABC teams attending the line talk and the current affairs resembled the conductor-less orchestra, in which much of the conductor’s input would have been negotiated exclusively behind the scenes, during rehearsals when only the key information is conveyed to the players of instruments. I attributed this representation to Magopeni, particularly her attitude during the line talk meetings. In my qualified opinion, she was the discreet conductor. I could not but help ponder if the overwhelming confidence Magopeni was getting from nearly all my interview respondents, including in my fieldnotes and extracts from media reports were symptomatic, not of ‘editorial independence’; but rather, according to the SABC Commission Report in 2019, it was out of ‘pain, anger, and fear; frustration, anxiety, and apathy, and …inattentiveness, detachment, and helplessness’.

However, still, I could not ignore the sense of ‘freedom’ that was being displayed at editorial and planning meetings that were curiously hardly accompanied by any hard negotiations. For a while I thought the conduct in the news editorial meetings was perhaps but ‘an act’ owing to my observer status as an ‘outsider’. In short, it was my observation that the editorial meetings, although conversational and civil, were also at the same time rather prescriptive, although not in explicit ways. Editors would assign stories, willynilly; but I do not recall a moment when the journalist would object to an assignment. Rather, it was common to expect limited negotiation on the diarised stories, and more often, the editor’s choice was rarely contested. As was perceived by journalists at the SABC and noted during my fieldwork, the creation of the story lifecycle involves a type of collaboration, discussing the story with peers and editors, collecting relevant information, and packaging the newsclip for the bulletin. This is particularly a collective process but one typified by the expression of different forms of

power and ‘power relations’ inside the newsroom and yet also subject to a range of other ‘structuring’ factors to do with embedded organisational routines, norms, and values. In a typical news environment, the editor must think like a journalist but also like a manager who has to ensure that there is sufficient material for the daily bulletin.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented different incidents that capture how Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus were expressed in the SABC newsrooms and grappled with the interaction between structure and agency as expressions of power and what it truly entails in the broadcaster through the eyes of journalists and their news management. Importantly, it reflected on the interrelationships of power and hierarchy inside the newsroom. Highlighting the habitus of journalists at the SABC through their lived experiences in the newsroom was important for this work, not only because it is born out of the real context of the journalists’ work setting but also because it offered empirical examples of what was happening inside the broadcaster at the particular point in time and in light of the claims regarding editorial interference and broadcasters’ ‘lack of independence’. Even then, this work acknowledges that the issue of PSB, power and ‘independence’ is a complex social phenomenon and that exploring the institution’s journalism culture is among the variety of ways of making sense of it. The framework of the ‘field’, as argued in Bourdieu (1984), is particularly relevant and refreshing as a tool to draw conclusions on the culture inside the SABC newsrooms. Bourdieu maintains that symbolic capital, encompassing ‘knowledge’, ‘experience’, cultural resources, and other symbolic categories, are more important for the understanding of ‘dominance’, the construction of ‘hierarchies’ and other interrelationships of power. In the context of the SABC, there is no doubt that the institution was informed by the uneven distribution of such symbolic power in all its manifestations, and as such, this has implications for the ‘independence’ of PSB and for how certain journalists and management positions are derived by actors inside the institution. The advantage of Bourdieu’s ideas of symbolic capital, applied together with the ‘field’ notions of habitus and doxa, is that they can be applied to help understand any setting and are powerful enough to analyse social practice in general.

Chapter Nine

Codes of Practice at the SABC Newsrooms

9.0 Introduction

In the preceding sections, I have attempted to operationalise Bourdieu's field theory, which comprises of several concepts. For the purpose of this work, I have limited my focus to the most commonly used ones, i.e., the field, habitus, doxa and forms of capital. I have discussed the development of the fieldwork itself and outlined a few aspects of the production of this account, drawing on my unique access to the SABC newsrooms over a longitudinal period of four years from 2016 to 2021. I have outlined the various processes of news making and current affairs production and the relative power dynamics between field journalists, editors, and news managers. I highlight some of the norms, values and professional ideals of news workers as observed during my field work and continue to build on the established ways of doing (habitus) and the related concept pertaining to the possession of certain forms of capital that structure practice, particularly the relative interactions between all the two concepts. In short, the three chapters discuss main objectives of this study, which is to explore newsroom culture and journalism practice at the SABC. Throughout the study, I attempt to paint a rough picture of the implicit and explicit news-making processes, structures, routines, and practices that are embedded inside the SABC newsrooms. In continuing to outline the dynamics of the field, I highlight how the field and its habitus continue to change over time due to changes in other factors on which the field depends. Below, I engage with some of the institutional management and policy issues that influence news making at the SABC. Specifically, I consider some of the normative journalistic codes and editorial guidelines that are designed to enhance institutional culture. Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of 'doxa', this study discusses some of the journalism codes of practice that are well considered in the literature on media studies. The codes are part of the internal structuring structures in media organisations and indeed within the SABC newsrooms, and they are often the source of a range of contests and changes in practices; for example, as in this study, contests over the interpretation of the editorial code and professional values or changes in routine institutional practices that are embedded over time. The collected evidence from the newsroom ethnography of the

SABC suggests that improving the credibility of the news function at the broadcaster may not lay with the codification of practice or changing norms but instead in how embedded norms and values of the broadcaster are performed. For reasons of focus, this thesis does not set out to cover the entire outline of the anatomy of newsroom culture as often articulated in normative liberal traditions of journalistic professionalisation and professionalism. Rather, the discussion is limited to aspects that relate to the chosen theoretical frameworks of this study, namely, the public sphere and its relationship with PSB and journalism and those aspects that facilitate the operationalisation of Bourdieu's analytic framework of the 'field'.

9.1 Embracing the 'Doxa' in Order to Play the Game Efficiently

With respect to the much-publicised dissonance that was ensured at the SABC newsrooms, it is worth zooming in on what may have appeared as amicable arrangements in the line talk diary meetings and at the current affairs planning meetings. Bourdieu is generally dismissive of interactions and warns researchers to avoid 'treating' interactions as 'a central orchestrator of structure' (Bourdieu, as cited in Fox, 2014, pg. 211). According to Fox, *ibid* (p. 204 - 211), Bourdieu points to the limitations of spontaneous behaviour that does not acknowledge the relational irrationality of interactions. For instance, Bourdieu argues that when emphasis is placed only on interactions, the tendency is to overlook the critical role that is played by the 'implicit or noninteractive forces in everyday society' (Fox, *ibid*, p. 205). The interesting part of this argument relates to understanding the field or public sphere in terms of a configuration of a 'specific network... of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.97). Here, Bourdieu notes the primacy of objective relations in the social world – and not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals (*ibid*). For example, at the SABC, editorial independence ideally empowers journalists and editors with the shared professional standard necessary for decision making – and this is enshrined in principle. However, it can be argued, based on Bourdieu's logic, that the observable interactions in the newsroom rarely tell us much about the relationship between senior management and beat editors or between beat editors and field reporters. The little that is observable is, for instance, the enforcers of the editorial policy monitoring how the stories that reporters are working on are progressing and often politely inquiring about the progress. What is not recognised is in fact, often the reporter, who has learnt to 'play game', who

has internalised through the college of ‘osmosis’ what constitutes a ‘dead end’, what works and does not work, he or she would likely check with the editor who briefed him or her for assurance. This constant update is considered normal practice, and the feedback usually becomes the brief that gets shared widely in all SABC newsrooms every day. For editors, regular diary meetings provide the opportunity to collect ‘secondary’ updates on how stories are shaping up and to ensure compliance. For journalists and less senior reporters, who are not expected to attend the editorial conference, it is a norm for each to have frequent private chats with the editor. Bourdieu provides inspiration for understanding this kind of phenomenon. In his concept of habitus and doxa, Bourdieu ascribes this kind of practice to establishing a feel for what ought to happen in the given setting, within the rules that accompany the game. I attempt to operationalise these concepts in relation to the everyday news-making processes and in the existing ‘power relations’ inside the SABC.

‘I speak to my editor daily, sometimes more than once a day. She has an open-door policy. You don’t need an appointment to see her. You just join the queue. Everybody wants to chat to her.’ (SABC Interview 4)

Such was the degree of passive control of the news-making process – all clothed in cordial relations between the editor and the reporter. Of course, it made sense – the editors’ ears had to be ‘plugged’ in the entire newsroom because they had to be in a position to decode ‘what is going on’ in real time. Editors needed the feedback to help decide what to do. However, there were other things unrelated to the work at hand that they tried to ‘listen out’ for, such as the daily rumour mill, the leaked embargoed material, and other stories behind the story in coverage... and there were plenty on those. The whole process, although camouflaged in rules, was ambiguous.

9.1.1 Doxa as in the ‘Rules of the Game’

Journalists follow the rules, often defined by themselves, against a set of shared professional rules. In Bourdieu (1998), journalism is a ‘microcosm with its own laws, defined both by its position in the world at large and by the attractions and repulsions to which it is subject from other microcosms’ (*ibid*, p.39). Because of such, their depiction of everything in their line of vision cannot be preread, but according to Bourdieu’s field theory, can be decoded retrospectively by acknowledging the habitus that guides their

actions in the field (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). Microcosms in this sense are relatively independent or autonomous fields, which presupposes that they function according to their own ‘laws’ or ‘institutional logics’ (Benson, et al, 2005). Journalists, like all agents in the field, embody such a habitus, but importantly, such habitus is negotiated within an institutional context, which has its own boundaries. At the level of practice, the journalist has the scope for freedom of action in relation to his or her occupational duties (Reich and Hanitzsch, 2013), but that is limited to other institutions and restricted in the context of one’s own institution. Thus, in the context of the SABC, we can argue that the agency of journalists as a claim to professionalism is encouraged, but only to the extent that it is not perceived to interfere with the strategic intents of the organisation or the habitus of the institution.

A number of journalists that I interviewed were quick to reference the eight typical news values that were examined at the SABC and that are broadly applied across media. Below, I outline what the classic rule book looks like. Although the list is not exhaustive, it includes the following: impact, timeliness, prominence, close to home, conflict, unexpected, current, and human interest (see Figure 9- 1)

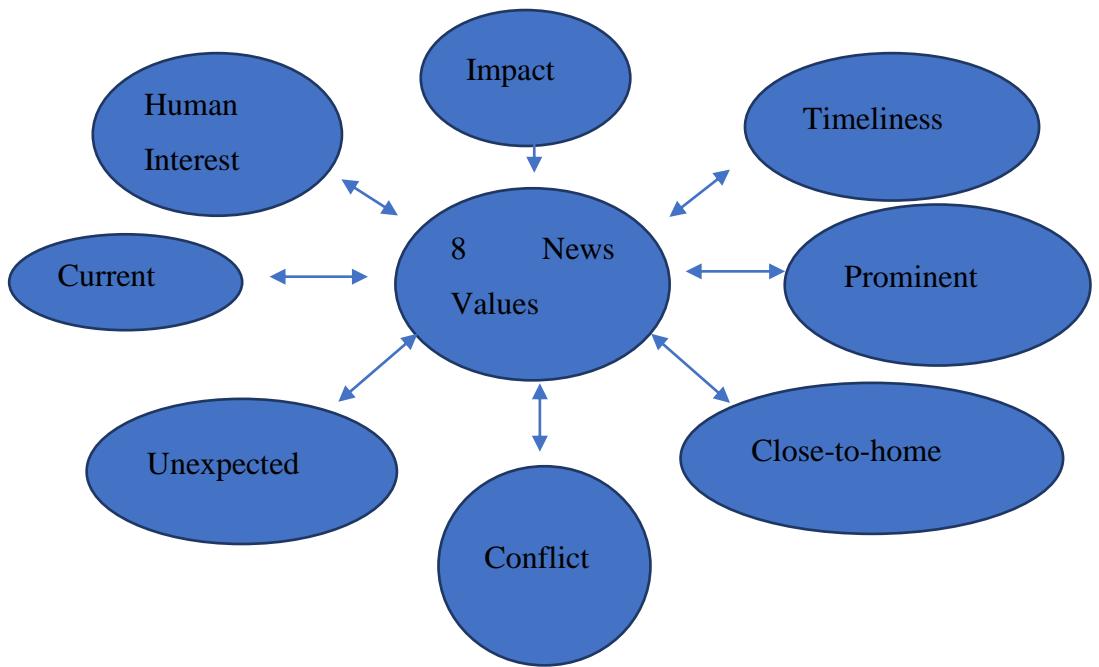


Figure 9- 1: The eight typical news values

Reconstructed from Owen Spencer-Thomas⁴⁴

Notably, I observed that all these news values represented how the game was being performed at the SABC newsrooms through ‘habitus’, ‘doxa’ and symbolic capital, and in Bourdieu’s parlance, the ‘doxa’ was designed primarily to achieve a ‘functional outcome’, the news product. Those with sufficient capital (symbolic power, i.e., hierarchical position, know-how, networks, etc.) inside the newsroom were better able to apply the rules. Actors in the game (journalists) cited professional rules for a number of reasons but often to address the pressure of deadlines or to motivate, justify and ensure the inclusion of certain stories. Attaching a news value to a story or referencing some documented guideline such as the editorial code of ethics, this meant the work was ‘good enough’ for the bulletin. In professional journalism, this mastering of the ‘rules of the game’ constitutes an ideological framework that ensures both the individual and profession remain coherent (Deuze 2005; Evetts and Aldridge, 2003); but also, professionalism establishes other widely held patterns of behaviour and

⁴⁴ <https://owenspencer-thomas.com/journalism/newsvalues/>

dispositions in the field or social domain. Critiques claim that it is the very existence of such an ideologically thrust which allows the individual journalist to “to play the game” (Bourdieu, 1977) or think on behalf of the profession and vice-versa (Rosen 2012).

9.2 How the Editorial and Ethics Code Sets the Rules at the SABC

In principle, this work assumes all journalists agree to defend media freedom in relation to the collection and distribution of information. Freedom to express comment and criticism is nonnegotiable, as is the goal of ensuring freedom from censorship. Along the same lines, the SABC has its own editorial code of ethics that is endorsed by the Board and Management of the SABC. It is generally accepted that the authority for editorial decisions is vested with the editorial staff. According to the code, the SABC is called upon to ‘report, contextualise, and present news honestly by striving to disclose all essential facts and by not suppressing relevant, available facts, or distorting by wrong or improper emphasis’ (SABC Editorial Code 2020). In this study, the editorial code is conceived in terms of Bourdieu’s notion of doxa, both in its orthodox form (visible, documented and codified in law) and heterodox form – the implicit, taken for granted, and often in practice operating at a subconscious level, sometimes invisible, although not always (Bourdieu, 1984). Doxa is ‘deeply ingrained in the habitus’ or ‘the set of dispositions, attitudes’, ‘dispositions’ and ‘behaviours’ that journalists obtain ‘experientially’ through socialisation and is accepted to be self-evident (*ibid*, 471). This chapter attends to the thesis objective of highlighting how the habitus at the broadcaster interacts with the evolving ‘doxa’ (rules) and ultimately how both have structured practice in the SABC newsrooms. It proceeds from the premise that, despite the codification of practice through various instruments such as the professional codes of conduct, there exists no overall consensus regarding that which precisely qualifies as good journalistic practice or news stories, nor is there a fixed view on why journalists and their organisations do what they do or how they select what they publish. The underlying theme in Bourdieu’s field conception is that the ‘socially ingrained habits, skills and dispositions’ of journalists contribute to the social world, field of practice or in Habermas, the public sphere and that a degenerate public sphere or field potentially produces shallow and dumbed-down outcomes with narrow perspectives. Such a scenario stands in contrast to the one articulated in the codes of conduct, nor is it aligned to the one envisaged in Habermas’ conceptualisation of PSB, one that is inclusive, carrying multiperspectives from a range of voices irrespective of social class

or position. This study, nonetheless, explores how journalists at the SABC behave, or ‘dispose’ themselves, in light of the established parameters of behaviour, including how they perceive themselves in relation to existing rules, in short, their ‘way of being’ or habitus, as they relate to embedded norms and rules (doxa) that are located inside the SABC newsroom. Let us begin with a cursory outline of the SABC editorial policy and begin to show how it constitutes the structures, norms, and professional values of practice at the SABC.

9.3 Position Taking and the Editorial Policy

At the SABC newsrooms, it is the norm to consistently defer to news values or what can be referred to as the ‘general guidelines which determine how much prominence is given to a news story’ (SABC Editorial Code of Conduct 2020). News values are considered central to the process, as they are deemed to help discover which information is newsworthy and which information is of little interest. The Editorial Code of Conduct describes matters as diverse as how to address issues such as disability, race, which language use to avoid, how to refer certain items, and so on.

‘...policies are intended to help the editorial staff negotiate difficult editorial issues and decisions so that distinctive and compelling – and sometimes controversial – programmes can be made, while maintaining the highest ethical and editorial standards’, reads the SABC Editorial Policy Document.

In practice, this is the idealised version of how the news-making decisions at SABC ought to take place has been difficult to attain. For example, during my fieldwork, it was quite routine for a reporter to be reassigned to cover some breaking news and pulled off from another; and often the SABC Editorial Code of Conduct would be invoked. In addition, every now and then tension would arise from the interpretation of same.

9.3.1 The Editorial Code and Its Impact on Independence, Power, Hierarchy and Resistance

The critical importance of a viable editorial code of conduct is widely agreed upon and has been the subject of periodic review processes. In 2020, the then new Board of the SABC launched its new Editorial Policy 2020 document, following a review process and consultations that lasted nearly three years. The SABC Editorial Code of Conduct

2020, which is applicable to everyone, outlines what constitutes the ideal typical values and code of practice when making editorial decisions. One of the key features underpinning the document is the reference to ‘Editorial independence’. In summary, the SABC Code of Conduct 2020 guarantees the following:

‘Journalistic, creative, programming and publishing independence of the staff of the corporation’ (SABC Editorial Policy 2020, Section 2.2.3.3, p.3)⁴⁵.

All these foregoing principles and values are further enshrined in the Charter of the Corporation, which governs the SABC and constitutionally guarantees the rights to the SABC staff. The policy says:

‘SABC journalists, its editorial and programming staff, enjoy the prerogative to make editorial decisions on programming and publishing content’ (*ibid*).

Numerous previous studies focusing on editorial independence at the SABC have concluded that the broadcaster is hardly exposed to ‘unusual levels of political pressure from outside’ (Arndt, *ibid*, p. 3). Instead, threats to editorial management are shown to emanate from the levels of SABC Board and senior news management. According to a Arndt (*ibid*), threats to editorial independence:

‘...take the form of pressure and rewards, which in combination effectively stifle independent thinking and hence work against editorial independence and a professional ethos integral to the SABC’s public broadcasting mandate’ (Arndt, 2007, p.4).

The 2019 SABC Board Commission report (referenced) reconfirmed the above. The report showed evidence ‘that from 2012’ until ‘2017, SABC executives took instructions from people with no authority in the newsroom’ and that this had led to failure ‘to execute their duties in terms of the editorial policies’. Numerous scholars have highlighted the challenges associated with the SABC editorial policies, while several civil society groups who made submissions to the code prior to its publication

⁴⁵ <https://www.SABC.co.za/SABC/editorial-policy-book-2020/>

called for the strengthening of the ‘core editorial value’ of ‘editorial independence’ to expressly refer directly ‘to the fact that the SABC should be independent of all vested commercial, government and party-political interests’ (SOS, 2014; Arndt 2007; Duncan 2000 – 2008; SANEF, 2019, MMP, 2020).

The SABC Editorial Code of 2020 has accommodated this line of thinking. In the code, SABC reiterates its public service broadcasting status while specifying that:

‘...for public accountability purposes, the SABC consists of two separate divisions controlled by the SABC Board, namely, ‘a public service division and a commercial service division, in each of which the SABC runs a number of radio stations, television channels and digital platforms; and each has a set of licence conditions that imposes obligations which are laid down by ICASA in the Compliance Procedure Manual’

The code then also says the SABC will:

‘...not allow commercial, political or personal considerations and prejudices to influence editorial decisions’.

It all sounds fair, but the question therefore is how are these noble principles contained in code going to be implemented in practice?

9.3.2 Editorial Independence

In this study, the focus on SABC’s editorial independence is considered from an institutionalist perspective. Through newsroom ethnography, the practices of SABC journalists are mapped within the context of news or content production processes, which include editorial meetings – particularly the everyday news making decisions by SABC reporters and editors. In South Africa, the constitution guarantees editorial independence together with that of broadcasting regulators. For instance, one of the stated goals of the South African Broadcasting Act (see Broadcasting Act NO.4 of 1999) is to establish and develop a broadcasting policy in the public interest by ensuring ‘plurality of news, views and information’.

The SABC Board is appointed by the President of the Republic of South Africa on the advice of the National Assembly. The Board controls all the affairs of the SABC as set out in the Charter. A central tenet of the SABC's Charter is that it enjoys freedom of expression and journalistic, creative, and programming independence as a PSB (SABC Editorial Policies, 2020).

9.3.2.1 SABC's Core Editorial Values

In addition to features relating to independence, accountability and diversity that are shared by PSB globally, the SABC has other unique facets that relate to the South African context of a transforming society. The SABC's commitment to the constitution is epitomised in these summarised values, which are complimented by an editorial code (originally developed in 1993).

- Accountability
- **Editorial Independence:** This is enshrined in the SABC Charter and the constitution of the Republic.
- **Nation-Building:** South African citizens are provided with the information they need to build a democratic South Africa and to participate in events that promote and celebrate national identity and culture (SABC, *ibid*; Baker, *ibid*).
- **Equality:** The SABC is required to cater for all official languages equitably.
- **Human Dignity:** This includes avoidance of stereotypical or prejudiced notions of South Africa's races, cultures, and sexes.
- **Diversity and Inclusivity:** All programmes are required to reflect South Africa's diverse thoughts, languages, cultures, provinces, and people.
- **Transparency:** The SABC ensures that the principles of honesty, openness and transparency govern every aspect of its relationships with shareholders, stakeholders, suppliers, and the public (SABC Editorial Policies, 2022).

9.4 When No Standard Operating Procedures Exist

In all the tension that ensued inside the SABC newsrooms during my fieldwork, the saga of the SABC8 as a case in point, and other subsequent incidents that were extensively covered by the media in South Africa, the urgent need to operationalise the editorial code through a standing document/s outlining Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for dealing with incidents became clear. Often, whenever there was a problem inside the SABC newsroom, reference was made to nondocumented SOPs for which there was no evidence produced when required to do so. Such was the case in a number of disciplinary hearings that occurred during the course of this research – some of which are referenced in this work and certainly not all. The default position at the

SABC was always to refer controversial decisions to senior managers through a system known as the ‘upwards referral’.

9.4.1 Upward Referral: Pros and Cons

On the 3rd of July 2020, the SABC announced at the launch of its latest Editorial Policy 2020 that it had reversed the decades-old policy known as the ‘upwards referral policy’. The then Group Executive of News and Current Affairs Phathiswa Magopeni summarised the development thus:

‘The journalists in the newsroom have full accountability for what has to be decided in terms of who we cover, how we cover them and how we reflect the voices... So, what is being done is to restore the full editorial control of the newsroom’⁴⁶

Under a new system, ostensibly, the newsroom will be insulated from top management, and news decisions will be left entirely to news editors. Translated into practice:

‘...the final editorial responsibility rests with the Group Executive of News and Current Affairs, with no upward referral of editorial decisions to Group Chief Operating Officer’ (Clause 3.1.3 of the SABC Editorial Policy)

This matter of principle was debated widely by various media stakeholders. Others argued that the upward referral system that has been in place since the dawn of South Africa’s post-apartheid dispensation in 1994 ‘embraces transparency and not censorship’. Furthermore, the policy was initially designed to manage disputes in the newsroom. Then, there are those who believed that the idea of keeping separate the editorial tasks from financial and organisational responsibility was good for the newsroom and for the independent editorial decision-making. (Save Our SABC (SOS) Coalition, 2020; Right2Know Campaign, 2020; Media Monitoring Project, 2020; SANEF, 2020).

However, and notably, the same Clause 3.1.3 is ambiguous in several respects. For example, it goes on to say:

⁴⁶ <https://ewn.co.za/2020/07/03/SABC-formally-restores-editorial-independence-in-its-newsroom>

‘...the Group Executive of News is still accountable to the GCEO for the overall performance of the News Division’ (*ibid*).

‘Via the backdoor, the clause restores the control of the newsroom back to the GCEO, and by default, the Minister of Communications (Interview 15).

The SABC’s Memorandum of Incorporation specifies that the GCEO shall be appointed by the Minister. Thus, although the 2020 editorial policy document was expected to usher a turning point for the broadcaster and the Board and management had publicly endorsed the principle of editorial independence and supported the editorial code, the debate surrounding its efficacy has continued. What is notable, nonetheless, is that the SABC Board has publicly said it ‘understood that the authority of editorial decisions vests in the editorial staff’.

At the height of my fieldwork, editorial independence was among the issues that brought to the fore the subject of perceived interference in news making. Prior, several critiques suggested that the SABC journalists ought to be critical in their engagement with news stories, or at the very least, owing to their PSB mandate, be encouraged to pursue ‘watchdog’ journalism, let alone generate their own story ideas (Fourie, 2004; Arndt, 2007).

Political interference in public broadcasting is not new; it is inevitable due to the nature of power and politics...By the time TV was introduced in the country in 1976, the value of control and manipulation of ideas and news had long been recognised by authorities (Foeta Krige, 2019., p.12).

Claims of editorial interference by the top brass at the SABC were rampant and deserved to be taken seriously. In fact, there were numerous documented probes and confirmations by various committees and bodies, including by the SA Parliament and the SABC, dating many years back.

A commission of enquiry covering the period from 2012 to 2018 was instituted by the Board of the SABC. The enquiry considered allegation of interference in the decision-making in the Newsroom of the SABC⁴⁷. The report by the commission was released on the 25th of February 2019, and the results were damning. In the list of findings, and they were several, the commission chaired by veteran South African journalist, former chairperson of the South African National Editors Forum, and then Press Ombudsman, Joe Thloloe, highlighted the following:

- that the SABC suffered from the capricious use of authority and power to terrorise staff and to deflect the Corporation from its mandate and its editorial policies
- that the organisation was crippled by pain, anger, and fear, by frustration, anxiety, and apathy, and by inattentiveness, detachment, and helplessness.

To my reading, the report conjured images of authoritative figures at the SABC, brandishing ‘knives’ and ‘enforcing control’ at the broadcaster’s staff members. Paradoxically, I was unable to pin down any such incidents, barring my initial encounter with the ‘horrid’ SABC8 saga at the start of my fieldwork in 2016. Prior, during my term as a staffer at the SABC newsroom, editorial independence was always conceptually contested in the newsroom. However, I did not experience any significant political pressure at the daily editorial meetings. Rather, it was my observation that nearly all stories presented at the editorial meetings by individual journalists faced little to no resistance. There appeared to be a tacit agreement and no visible resistance to any story initiative or, at the very least, explicit ‘gatekeeping’ targeting any story that satisfied the basic threshold of shared professional journalism values, i.e., containing the commonly shared news selection criteria, such as accuracy, timeliness, impartiality, etc.

By 2018, based on my raw observation and on the reviewed data I had collected at the time, all that appeared before me resembled a ‘conductor-less’ orchestra, or perhaps

⁴⁷ Thloloe, J., & Tawana, S. (2019). Report of Commission of Inquiry into Interference in the Decision-making in the Newsroom of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. *South African Broadcasting Corporation. [Online]*. <https://www.SABC.co.za/SABC/report-of-commission-of-inquiry>.

more accurately, a self-conducted orchestra comprising an ensemble of skilled practitioners (journalists and the support technical staff) but without a conductor directing the show. This is in addition to the fact that my fieldwork coincided with one of the SABC's challenging years. The broadcaster had dominated media headlines with public criticism. In the print media (Rossouw, 2007), several civil society groupings (Media Monitoring Project, 2016⁴⁸; Save Our SABC, 2016⁴⁹) alleged mismanagement, corruption, nepotism, political interference, a lack of editorial independence, 'incompetence', and low-quality journalism, and several scholars highlighted the extent to which the SABC betrayed the Broadcasting Charter of South Africa, which established the country's statutory remit for public service broadcasting (Fourie, 2003 - 2004; Duncan, 2003 - 2008; Arndt, 2007; Cowling, 2007; Dramat, 2007 -2007, p.13). Case study 2 of this thesis focuses on how the SABC mediated pluralist politics during the 2016 local government elections from the public sphere point of view, revealed the extent to which the broadcaster's 6.30 pm main English bulletin severely betrayed public trust, including how the news text facilitated the overaccess of campaign coverage to national leaders of the dominant political parties at the expense of the local and community political leadership, on whom the election was directed (see Chapter 7 of this thesis).

9.4.2 How the Editorial Code Structures the News Product

The editorial code is a set of rules that journalists and their institutions agree to accept as the standard to be held accountable to by the structures mandated to do so. Generally, it calls for the upholding and defence of journalistic independence, and the right of the public to be informed, but in ways that are fair, accurate and honest. I discuss, although not exhaustively, the SABC Editorial Code of Ethics, which is enshrined in terms of Section 6 of the Broadcasting Act (as amended). In Bourdieu's parlance, the SABC Editorial Code of Ethics represents the codification of practice, i.e., the taken-for-granted assumption or 'common sense' behind news-making decisions. It is a means by which power can be expressed, either through orthodox (conforming with the existing

⁴⁸Media-Monitoring-Project-v-SABC-JULY-2016-JUDGMENT.pdf/<https://www.icasa.org.za/complaints-and-compliance-committee/media-monitoring-project-vs-SABC-195-2016>

⁴⁹<https://www.southafricanlabourbulletin.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/SABC.-Revamping-our-public-broadcaster.pdf>

and generally accepted norms or beliefs) or heterodox norms, and beliefs represent the opposite. I argue that through Bourdieu's ideas of 'doxa', there are insights to be gained, specifically regarding the manner through which power is negotiated at the SABC, and Orgeret (2005) notes that in Africa, this area is under researched, particularly the tension 'between political power on the one hand and PSB values such as editorial independence and professional autonomy on the other hand' (Orgeret 2005: 20). There are numerous examples indicating the complexity of simply referencing the editorial code of conduct. Take, for instance, the requirement according to the code to provide a fair opportunity to reply or the right of correction to all actors in news coverage, generally suggesting that an actor in a news story has a right to defend himself or herself against any public criticism. Below, I discuss some of the empirical cases involving SABC newsrooms.

9.4.2.1 The Right of Reply

Failure to afford the complainant the right of reply contravenes 13(2) of the code of conduct as instituted in the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA).

'I threw away a story that was due for this evening because the reporter could not get hold of a critical source. It is a controversial piece, and I cannot run it without accommodating the right to reply' (Fieldnote8)

In the above extract, the editor mobilises a common news value, 'the right to reply', to justify canning a story. He tells me that he has had to put on another story in its place because the initial one has fallen through. Again, this is common practice. During the course of my fieldwork, several cases arose in which the registrar of the BCCSA received two complainants from several actors against the SABC. For the purpose of illustrating this point, I present below two cases that highlight how the issue of professionalism has become canonised in the context of the SABC and is such deeply routinised, ingrained and embedded in a manner that structures the making of news at the broadcaster.

9.4.2.2 Prophet Bushiri vs The SABC

The first case relates to a case brought before the BCCSA Tribunal by the self-proclaimed prophet, Shepherd Bushiri, against the SABC. Prophet Bushiri, a popular leader of the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church, alleged, first, that during an interview with the broadcaster, the news presenter, Mr Simphiwe Ncongwane, was biased, prejudicial, persecuting and very interrogative, while the second complaint was in relation to failure by the SABC to afford the complainant the right to reply. This was regarding allegations made by a certain Mr Solomon Izang Ashoms during an interview also conducted by Mr Ncongwane, an hour after the initial interview with the complainant Prophet Bushiri.

According to the submission at the BCCSA, the SABC decided on the 4th of April 2018 to broadcast a story that by its very nature was extremely controversial, without affording the complainant the right to reply in the same broadcast. In the story, it was reported that Prophet Bushiri was being investigated by the SA's crime busting unit, the South African Police Services' Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI), for allegedly transporting R15 million monthly out of South Africa to his country of birth, Malawi, using his private jet. The complainant stated that a letter had been sent to the SABC demanding (a) an apology, (b) an opportunity to reply and set the record straight, (c) removal of the broadcast from all its platforms, and (d) an undertaking in which no further stories on the matter would be broadcast without informing the complainant in writing.

The BCCSA submission indicated that everything happened as requested by the complainant, and an interview was conducted, except that the complainant objected to the way the interview was conducted – accusing the interviewer of bias and of being judgemental; and by so doing, not ‘allowing the viewers to make their own conclusion without being negatively led and negatively influenced by the presenter’s attitude’

To cut a long story short, in regard to the first complaint, it was decided that no contravention of the code was committed. In other words, the BCCSA judgement concluded that what the complainant had deemed to be the presenter’s biased, prejudicial, persecuting and very interrogative was in fact the work of journalism or news making in action. However, on the second complaint relating to failure by the

SABC to afford Prophet Bushiri (the complainant) the right to reply, the BCCSA Tribunal found that the complainant was criticised without being allowed to reply to such criticism.

There were several similar submissions to the BCCSA in which complaints had argued that the SABC failed to afford them the right to reply; the other such case involved the opposition the Democratic Alliance (DA).

9.4.2.3 Democratic Alliance vs The SABC

In submissions to the BCCSA, the DA argued that the SABC denied the party the ‘opportunity to fairly present its opposing point of view to that of the president of the ANC in a programme in which controversial issues of public importance were discussed’ (Case number: 20/2018). Although the DA participated in a subsequent programme via a telephone interview (www.sabc.co.za). The party argued ‘that this broadcast was qualitatively and quantitatively inferior to that of the ANC president’s address, that it was not in the same series as the original broadcast’, and further, that it ‘was not done within a reasonable time and not in substantially the same time slot as required by Clause 13(1) of the Free-to-Air Code and Clause 28.3.1 of the Subscription Broadcasting Code, respectively’. However, the Tribunal ruled in favour of the SABC, finding that the DA had been afforded the opportunity to express its views within a reasonable timeframe (10-night hours) after the original broadcast, and this was in the same news series.

‘These days, if you do not ensure the right of reply in your very story, you know your story is dead in the water’ (SABC Interview 1)

The above statement is problematic. For instance, in the DA vs SABC saga as alluded to above, the BCCSA ruled in favour of the SABC and determined that the broadcaster was entitled to editorial freedom. In short, the Tribunal determined that no contravention of the codes was found, and the complaints were not upheld.

9.5 Doxa vs Practice

It is evident that the professional value of offering a right of reply to subjects of significant allegations or criticism is a fair obligation to uphold. It can serve to enhance the credibility of the coverage. However, the ideal practice is often associated with the complexity of the issue at hand, the social position of the subject and their resources (capital), and sometimes whether or not there is justification to revisit an issue in the public interest. If we accept that journalists and media institutions, broadly, are all constrained by the functional ends of news making, such as having a clear deadline to package a story, we must therefore concede that the news output is a product of not just the rules of going (doxa) but equally that news making is impacted by a range of variables. Drawing on Bourdieu's conceptualisation of practice, 'doxa' allows us to acknowledge and account for the taking of positions by individuals, journalists, and editors alike. According to Bourdieu, embracing the 'doxa' is not a rigid undertaking but a reflexive action.

9.5.1 Playing it Safe

A senior reporter describes the application of the BCCSA code of conduct to news work this way:

'It is not easy to hold anyone to account, especially those in authority. Instead, we are more likely profile authority figures and the celebratory events than hold them to account. Stories that are critical of authorities are rare because we must prove beyond doubt that our sources are truthful, fair, and not malicious' (SABC interview 5)

The comment above speaks to the question of how the professionalisation of the newsroom is experienced at the SABC. The considered dimensions of analysis include concerns regarding the importance of accountability processes in news organisations, together with the evidence of 'self-censorship' as an ingrained practice among journalists. These kinds of ethos do not spring from a vacuum, but rather they are a product of real experiences of journalistic work and settings. For example, in the sampled news text focusing on the ten (10) stories covering the issue of land restitution (see Chapter 8 Section 2), reconfirmed is the overreliance on the events that are preplanned by external actors and, within the official diary, a dependence on official sources, together with a taken for granted unsaid practice that assumes a story on policy

and governance is not complete unless the 'official' that is implicated in it has commented on it. Journalists at the SABC ordinarily embody a solid grasp of professional values, which enable them to navigate what is otherwise a precarious work terrain – one that is constantly transforming and demanding of the requisite aptitude to 'play the game', i.e., to say, reflecting in practice the core professional values and standards, incorporating the PSB notions of public interest, truthfulness, impartiality, accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and all it takes to function as a professional with a nose for good stories.

'US officials have publicly said they are opposed to the expropriation of land without compensation. They are linking the policy to recent farm murders. The opposition EFF will likely protest the visit, while the red carpet should be expected from Afri-forum' (Fieldnote22)

The portrait that emerges from the statement above is evidence that the cited reporter understands the importance of currency in a story, particularly its alignment with the existing norms and share professional values of news making. This entails having the necessary competencies (professional capital) to decode complex realities emanating from the intersection of the social, political, economic, and other. In the pitch, the reporter reflects the highly contested normative positions on the land issue in SA. Reference to the US officials regarding their views on the proposed expropriation of land without compensation confers relevance and authority to the story, while the expected activism and likely tension between the EFF party and Afri-forum elicits emotion and drama. The EFF and Afri-forum occupy different positions on the land issue, and both have been extremely vocal on the issue. 'Prominent actors', likelihood of 'conflict', and 'public interest' epitomised the contentious 'land issue' itself – all these being journalistic hooks that are routinely employed for selecting what is news. This is typically how the SABC routinely selects certain stories and events and not others. This pattern of selection and criteria is the subject of a wide range of scholarly work in journalism and media studies and is not exceptional to the SABC. Rather, it is common practice in professional journalism broadly and, as such, effectively embedded in mainstream news organisations, including at the SABC. However, it is also observed that because there exist no formal requirements to comply or adhere to that which is embedded and ingrained inside organisations, sometimes journalists effectively

‘misrecognise’ certain aspects, for as long as the news-making process is not disrupted, and the function of producing the ‘perishable’ news product is achieved within schedule.

I have alluded to how shared professional journalism values in the newsroom were unleashed as observed during Magobeni’s tenure as executive of News and Current Affairs, resulting in ‘smooth’, explicitly and arguably open participation in the newsroom; this may have been the enabler of the range of complex decisions observed each day regarding the efficacy of each news story in the diary, i.e., decisions relating to which story is selected or rejected, story angles, who gets interviewed, who gets allocated to cover the story, and so on. Thus, we can also further argue that had Magobeni imposed her hierachal position in the organisation – in a kind of super interdependency relationship with the rest of the team, the ‘positive sentiment’ as noted and expressed by interview subjects would have been ‘slim’; and so, would have been the chances of running efficient line talk sessions that appeared to generate a wider range of critical information, agreement on story decisions, and zero ‘dissent’.

9.6 High Editorial Staff Turnover

Indeed, the context leading to Magobeni assuming the role of executive of news at the SABC should not be lost. The broadcaster had experienced notable moments in which there was no substantive leadership in the newsroom. First, following the departure of Jimmy Mathews, who left following the infamous newsroom feuds involving the group of journalists known as the SABC8, the SABC did not have a substantive editor-in-chief.

Even after the departure of Simon Tebele, Head of News, and the SABC COO Hlaudi Motsoeneng; for a while it seemed as though there were no immediate plans to address this situation. Second, key news editorial staff voluntarily left in early 2019, while others went on retirement. These included Izak Minaari, the head of the SABC online digital platform, a key news and research input contributor, content optimiser and big events planner who had served in the corporation for nearly three decades; TV news editor Nyana Molete, who was with the broadcaster for over 27 years; and several others. However, operationally, it seemed that the newsroom and everyday work functioned as though it was business as usual. There are many possible reasons to explain this, but the most credible assumption is that the SABC, like all fields, is a

product of durable, embedded, and ingrained structures. News making is particularly a collective and mechanical exercise, with journalists, editorial staff and executive producers acting as a ‘cog in a machine’ that has a functional end, i.e., the ‘News and Current Affairs product’. Continuity in the newsrooms was evident during the periods of dissonance at SABC. The bulletins and current affairs were broadcast on the deadline and without fail. This was made possible by what Thomsen (2017) has described as the ‘underdogs in the news ecosystem’, whose everyday work ordinarily is cued by their editors. However, in the absence of the editor, such perceptions are challenged. Melin (2008, as cited in Thomsen, *ibid*) has argued that because of such moments, there exists ‘a firm belief amongst journalists that they are (and should be) free and autonomous agents’, and this belief has often resulted in ‘tensions within the organisation’ (p. 24). With respect to the latter, perhaps the perception of ‘free and autonomous agents’ was validated at the SABC, specifically among some of the journalists, particularly the less senior who suddenly were able to express their own agency in practice – delivering the News and Current Affairs product without the constraint of an overbearing management hierarchy.

Indeed, there was a widespread belief that all editors and senior news managers were either controlled by senior management, politicians, or interest groups with money.

“The saying goes that he who pays the piper calls the tune. This is true of the SABC in many ways. Self-censorship is common here. Those with power and money do not have to call every day. It’s as if journalists and their managers know how to behave” (SABC Interview 9).

The SABC Board Commission did consider such allegations, and although it found no evidence of direct control by politicians, specifically from the ANC, there was evidence of manipulation of editors and other senior news managers by top executives (See SABC Board Commission Report 2019⁵⁰). This therefore suggests that the newsroom was fragmented based on the different loyalties within the SABC community of practice. In my interactions with SABC journalists, I was unable to pin this down. It

⁵⁰ <https://www.sabc.co.za/sabc/report-of-commission-of-inquiry/>
[Report of Commission of Inquiry – SABC – Official Website](#)

seemed everyone was busy minding their own workload, and evidently, the imperative of everyday deadlines for the daily news staff and for the weekly current affairs left very little room for anything that could explicitly disrupt any broadcast. Thus, even with the uncertainty and internal upheavals, some of which are discussed in this work, in the SABC newsroom, it was much easier to recognise the shared professional values than to discern the divisions within the SABC community of practice. It would not be far-fetched for any would-be observer to argue that the absence of substantive editorial leadership at the SABC ushered the irony of a more democratic newsroom.

9.7 Towards Newsroom Democracy

The notion of newsroom democracy is brought to the fore. The expressed desire is for news editorial decisions to be made not by any top management, the Group Executive of News and Current Affairs included. A number of journalists that were interviewed in this work supported the notion of ‘democratising editorial decision-making and SABC internal newsroom’.

‘We have the editorial forum, but it seems we are toothless. We can bark and bark loud, annoy the neighbours, and hope the neighbours do something about, but so far that is all’ (SABC Interview 15).

The observed experience and views of professional journalists at the SABC suggest that democratic newsroom practices may be best suited to limit incidents of newsroom dissonance and, by extension, may serve to limit or eliminate instances of journalists seeking external recourse, often in the courts of law or statutory compliance bodies outside the SABC.

9.7.1 Operationalising the Editorial Forum

The issue remains that of formalising the editorial forum within the SABC, which, up to the point when this thesis was compiled, existed informally. In this way, ‘all editorial decisions could be reviewed and interrogated by a democratic structure’ (Fieldnote, SABC20). In such a setting, upwards referral would become mute as a practice, effectively shielding the newsroom from the influence of senior management, the Board, minister, and other outsiders. In reality, this could translate into de jure independence for the journalists at the broadcaster, the basic condition for the SABC to

be considered ‘public.’ The forum would be manned by regular journalistic staff with unquestionable pedigree, preferably certified by a relevant statutory academy. The precepts in the editorial code of conduct, translated and documented into SOPs, would in this way be applied by the forum as the practical rule book, in the same way that the courts interpret the law.

Ideally, SABC could benefit from appointing an editor-in chief, solely to ensure compliance the editorial policies of the SABC (Fieldnote 3).

This view is shared widely in grey literature (see www.nelsonmandela.org), particularly the emphasis on the role of an editor-in-chief, that if created, must be clearly defined and limited to ensuring complete adherence to the SABC Editorial Code of Conduct, regularly updated, documented, and published SOPs, and the interpretation thereof. In short, news decision-making should be confined to the newsroom, and appropriate mechanisms should be adopted within the setting to guide practice. This is not to suggest in any way that editorial independence and professionalism will be assured. As already shown, for example, there is often a disconnect between the actual practices inside the SABC and the codified ideals in the SABC Editorial Code of Ethics.

9.8 Conclusion

This section has discussed the codification of practice at the SABC newsrooms. It has shown how codes of practice such as the SABC Editorial Code of Ethics and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at times enable schemas that either mask or contribute to the institutional culture, specifically on matters relating to editorial independence. The main discussion point is focused on changes in the ‘ways of doing’ or practices inside the SABC newsrooms and the variable impacts of codes of practice such as the editorial codes. Borrowing from Bourdieu’s logic of practice, this work argues that journalism operates within a set of ‘relational structures’ or, in Emirbayer (*ibid*), ‘a system of relations’, and codes of practice are here conceptualised in terms of those ‘relational structures’. How journalists perceive their location within society or the organisations they work for, their views on the rules or codes of the craft, etc. All these relational factors influence journalism practice and ultimately journalism output. As already highlighted, relationality is deeply embedded in Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology (Bourdieu, 1988). In Bourdieu, field theory is a system characterised by relational

interactions between the habitus, doxa, capital and more. An embrace of Bourdieu's approach, therefore, presupposes that even the existence of codes is relational, only possible in and through its relation to other properties (Bottero, 2009). Thus, even in situations where practice is codified with say, the editorial code, or through Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as proposed in the case of the SABC newsrooms, how journalists interpret these is sometimes relational to other factors, as well as contestable. This is so because every journalist has 'mud on their feet from somewhere', and like every being, they are socially located and know what they know from networks somewhere. Such informs their attitudes and actions. This applies to the media organisations – they too are socially located and embedded with norms and other structures over time. This work concludes by maintaining that although the codes of practice are designed to strengthen the SABC, particularly its independence, this does not in itself guarantee the editorial independence of the newsroom or that all concerned parties will adhere as prescribed or intended in the codes. In other words, guidelines offer the framework for journalism practice to be pursued, even as there is no absolute guarantee of fulfilling the professional ideal. However, Bourdieu 'encourages us to think' of 'the ways in which' different elements and structures, including statutory codes and guidelines, help 'contribute to the development of the habitus' and foster 'fields' (Navarro, 2006, p.16). The habitus, although subject to changes overtime, it nonetheless 'constitutes the intersubjective social relations within which sociality, and practice more generally, occur' (Bottero, 2009, p.1).

Chapter Ten

Mediating Pluralistic Politics During the 2016 Local Government Elections

10.0 Introduction

In Chapters 7, 8, and 9, this work highlights the everyday work of SABC journalists and their setting. More specifically, the chapters identify some of the embedded institutional routines, norms, ingrained beliefs, and values that guide the choices of SABC journalists and judgement. To supplement the above, the results of Case study 2, which engages with the sampled SABC newscasts and Current Affairs programming. Case study 2 is broken into two chapters ten (10) and eleven (11).

This Chapter ten (10) specifically responds to the question: To what extent did the 6.30 pm SABC prime-time news bulletins mediate pluralist politics during the 2016 local government election campaign from a public service perspective? To convey the arising findings, pie charts and histograms are simultaneously used to present the same data. Pie charts are deployed to highlight different proportions of different categories in total, while histograms containing the same data are used to convey the sizes of the categories in relation to each other. When used together, the assumption is that the two offer a more comprehensive picture of the data.

The next Chapter eleven (11) answers the question: What are the shared professional journalism norms and values that are identifiable in the mediation of SABC current affairs broadcasts⁵¹?

Note: Parts of the analytic finding of this section was published jointly with my PhD supervisor

⁵¹ Journal of Public Administration • Volume 51 • Number 3.1 • September 2016

10.1 Equitable News and Current Affairs Coverage of Political Parties

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) is responsible for regulating the SABC coverage of elections in the public interest. The Independent Broadcasting Act of 1993 (Act 53 of 1993, as amended) directs ICASA to be independent, impartial, and subject only to the law and constitution. Regarding public election broadcast and political advertisement, ICASA is responsible for specifying the ground rules to ensure that contesting parties are treated equitably. Section 56 - 59 of the Electronic Communications Act (ECA) outlines the scope of ICASA's responsibility.

In short, the SABC and broadcasters in general are enjoined by ICASA to ensure non-discriminatory, fair, and equitable access to broadcasting services in the run-up to elections, and the day of the election (Parliamentary Monitoring Group of South Africa -PMG, 2023). ICASA outlines the following four ways to achieve equitable access;

1. Equitable treatment does not mean equal treatment, i.e., broadcasters are not obliged to deviate from their editorial values and processes for the sake of giving the similar weight to minority parties (Sec 57(4) of the ECA). Rather, equitable treatment means fair treatment, and where possible, this is applicable in a single programme but could be achieved in a series of broadcasts or newscasts (*ibid*).
2. Broadcasters are required to actively seek out information and not expected to rely on diary events of political parties and information brought to them. According to the ECA, failure to do so gives ‘parties with greater resources inequitable amounts of news coverage’.
3. The ECA requires all broadcasters to ensure that all contesting parties or candidates, including all actors in news and current affairs coverage, have the right to reply to criticism. This, however, does not amount to ‘forcing broadcasters to turn editorial programmes into a series of replies and replies-to-replies’; Rather, broadcasters should determine what is ‘fair or unfair comment’. For example, ‘fair comment’ in the form of mild or rhetorical criticism is considered central in a robust political contest, while a demand for the right to

reply to criticism ‘which results in clear and immediate damage to a political party’ is considered applicable.

4. The ECA calls on all broadcasters to ‘distinguish between the activities of government officials executing government functions and those of the same persons conducting election campaign activities’⁵²

Source:

In this work, SABC’s election coverage is evaluated against the four above mentioned ICASA yardsticks of equitable access mentioned above. Further, this work examines the role of strategic considerations in the SABC TV’s coverage of the 2016 local government election campaign news. To achieve this objective, three frames were identified, namely: focus on personalisation, institutional sourcing, and conflict frames.

The 2016 local government election was a watershed moment. The ANC lost considerable ground to rival parties, most notably the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The ANC did achieve some negligible in-roads in certain constituencies but was unable to retain the control of three metropolitan municipalities for the first time since 1994 – namely, Nelson Mandela Bay, City of Tshwane, and City of Johannesburg. With ANC earning a marginal 54 percent of the national vote, the 2016 elections ushered a new epoch for local governance and democracy informed by competitive politics. This work sampled a full month of SABC’s coverage which culminated with the election on 3 August 2016. Specific focus was the consideration of the extent to which the broadcaster fulfilled its PSB mandate. In all, the sampled news bulletins were analysed using thematic analysis. Data was coded and classified into analytic categories, which were subsequently interpreted in terms of the emerging thematic structures using conceptual and analytical concepts

⁵²

ICASA (2023)

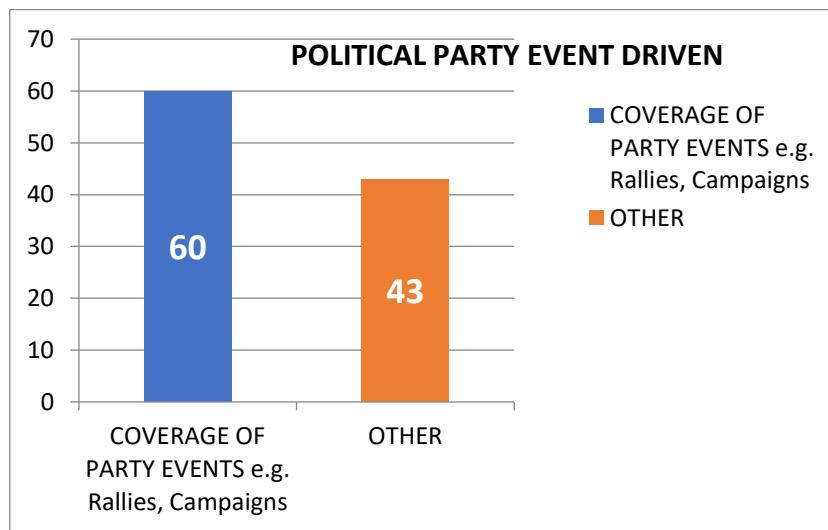
<https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=3123f5498bd02c2eJmltdHM9MTcwODEyODAwMCZpZ3VpZD0yNWJjMDUyZS0xYTFiLTY2Y2UtMDgyMS0xNmFkMWIxYjY3MTEmaW5zaWQ9NTE5NQ&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=3&fclid=25bc052e-1a1b-66ce-0821-16ad1b1b6711&psq=are+enjoined+by+ICASA+to+ensure&u=a1aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ292LnphL3NpdGVzL2RlZmF1bHQvZmlsZXMuZ2Npc19kb2N1bWVudC8yMDE5MDQvNDIzNzRnb241MzQuGRm&ntb=1>

drawn from the theoretical framework of the public sphere and PSB. What follows are the findings and interpretation thereof.

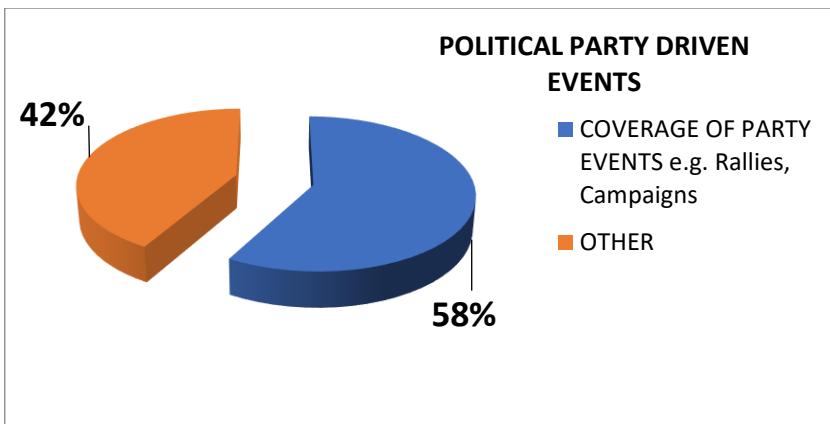
10.1 Political Party Driven Stories

According to the ECA Act, the SABC is expected to supply the public with impartial, objective, and accurate record of events and developments in respect of elections. Equally, as highlighted in the above discussion on equitable coverage, the ECA Act discourages all broadcasters from ‘relying on political parties to bring information to them’ during election campaigns. Instead, broadcasters are implored to ‘actively seek out information’ to avoid giving ‘inequitable amounts of news coverage’ to political parties who have the advantage of having more resources than others.

A total 103 bulletins were sampled, out of which 60 news items (58 percent) were characterised by party sponsored activities such as marches, door-to-door campaigns, and press releases and briefing sessions. Such was contrary to the normative expectations of PSB and ICASA regulations, which specify that the SABC must avoid relying on political party driven events during an election.



A



B

Figure 10- 1: A: Distribution of coverage of party-political driven stories, A: histogram B: pie chart

The theoretical formulation of the journalistic field, and the concept of habitus, both inspired by Bourdieu, offer the analytic framework to examine the SABC's 2016 election coverage. The habitus or way of doing is epitomised in Bourdieu's notions of position taking, strategy, and media capital. This study considered these notions using specific frames and information sources in the sampled bulletins. It is argued in this study that the SABC treated the party diarised events and press releases as although they 'were endowed with epistemological qualities that infuse' the event or press release 'with newsworthiness' (Harcup & O'Neill 2001:265). This case study, following on Conley and Lamble (2006), suggests that the event, or press release should not be accorded the same treatment as news in itself. Rather, events, or press releases of events should be treated as mere sources of news. The newsworthiness of the diary event or press release should exist within the 'chemistry of an event, comment or circumstance that combines to produce news' (Conley & Lamble, 2006, p. 42). It is this totality of news, of influences and values that 'determine whether stories are to be pursued ...and 'if pursued', whether they warrant publication, and 'if published', where in the news line-up the story is positioned (Conley & Lamble, *ibid*, p. 42). There is no effort to explain in this work what factors may have contributed to the SABC's overreliance on events in the construction of news. Suffice, to say that the SABC's overreliance on events, press releases and other sources of news in this instance constituted a habitus within the SABC newsrooms operate. It can be assumed, borrowing from Bourdieu's template, that the evident position taking, and strategic operational intents of the SABC were justified in terms of how well the story worked

within the overall organisational goals, and composition of stories that were included in the election bulletins.

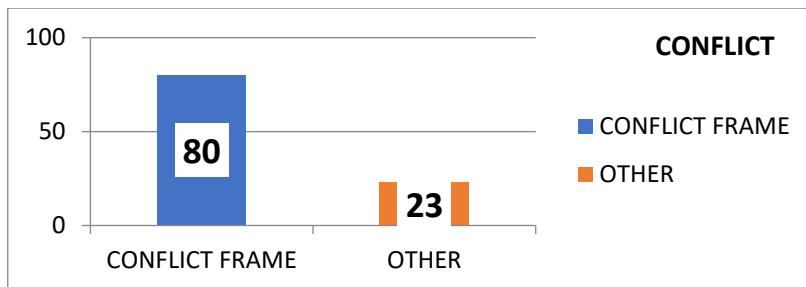
10.2 Personalisation and Conflict Frames as Strategic News

To establish whether the SABC TV's 2016 local government election campaign news coverage was characterised by strategic issues or not, two frames were identified: namely, personalisation and conflict frames. Van Santen and Van Zoonen (2009) propose several ways by which personalisation can be used to demonstrate newsworthiness, ranging from a focus on politicians, and other institutionally accredited actors, instead of parties; to focusing more attention on the private persona of the politician or actor in coverage; while the conflict frame may include the negativity of an event, use of adversarial or contentious language, and competition with a focus on winning and losing (Jamieson, 1992). This case study does not suggest that the SABC ought to adhere to the idea of reporting only the facts but focuses on the most basic and commonly used conceptualisation of personalisation, as it relates to the coverage of political actors, candidates, and institutionally accredited or society elites, compared with storytelling that is committed to issue-specific frames (Floss & Marcinkowski, 2008; Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2009; Dueze, 2005).

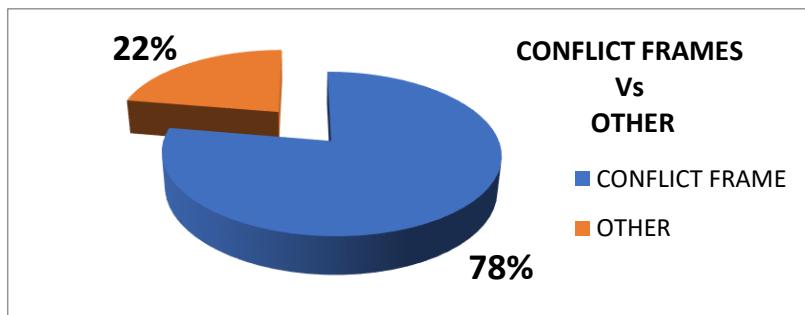
The findings in this case study revealed a preoccupation with the conflict narrative, epitomised by a focus on disagreement, contention, winning and hard bargaining as a strategic institutional goal of the SABC, and occupational logic of SABC journalists. The propensity to favour conflict framing was high whenever SABC news editors had to select 'news-bites' from sources, perhaps because conflict was thought to spur audience interest, and as such deemed newsworthy.

Of the 103 sampled SABC news bulletins, 78 percent contained the conflict frame, i.e., a total of 80 stories. It is noted in this case study that the conflict frame may spur audience interest, but this is not the goal of PSB journalism during election campaigns. Normatively, PSB is required to go beyond the occupational rationality of the journalism profession which positions the values of conflict and competition in news as acceptable measures (McChesney, 1999). While presenting a thoroughly researched argument(s) from diverse angles often resonates with viewers; it is the responsibility of PSB to present information that enables choice-making during an election, and to hold

political leaders to account for their statements. Overall, the SABC, owing to its PSB statutory mandate, has the responsibility to report on substantive issues such as ‘the prospective and retrospective consequences of actions and proposals of contesting candidates’, unlike its commercial counterparts (Kerbel, et al., 2000:8-32). News information in that sense qualifies as a resource for the audience to participate in the public sphere as informed citizens (Habermas, 1962).



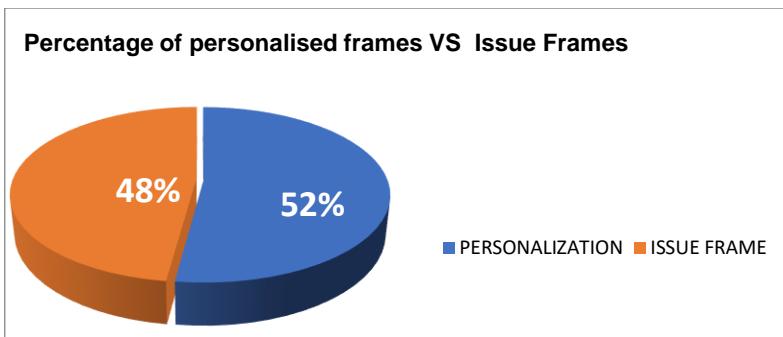
A



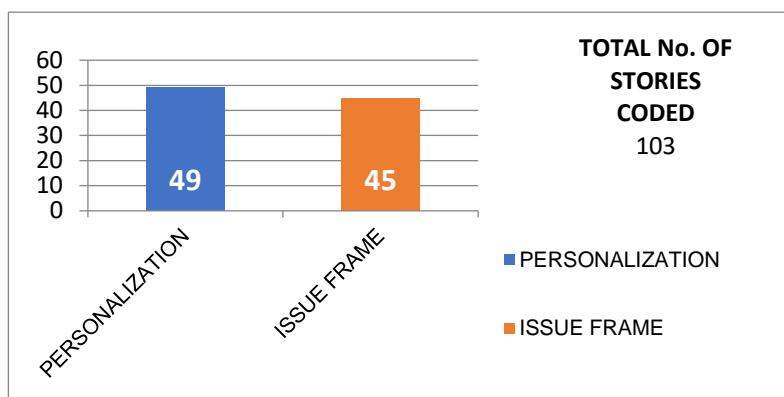
B

Figure 10- 2: Distribution of coverage of conflict frames vs other A: histogram B: pie chart

Thus, although it is understood in this study that PSB news reporting is expected to appeal to this audiences, it is nonetheless required to transcend this practice in line with the public sphere ethos, by keeping citizens and voters up to date. Although conflicts are inevitable in politics (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2008), legitimating this form of reporting requires newscasts to connect the audience to the totality of event(s), issues, political activity, and interventions (Jensen, K. B., 1990).



A



B

Figure 10- 3: Distribution of coverage/frames of personalisation vs other issues, A: pie chart B: histogram

During the 2016 election campaign, SABC news bulletins were required to present a comprehensive coverage of the process and issues by including in its election coverage the broadest range of citizens who were directly involved with a phenomenon or issue; relevant or affected members of the public and experts with the view to obtain a deeper understanding. However, given the culture in most newsrooms globally, particularly the pressures of generating the TV news item in time for the evening bulletin, it can be assumed that journalists who are often working under time constraints risk producing reports that are incomplete and inconsistent with the normative public sphere. In the sampled bulletins, and as highlighted in the findings, a conclusion is drawn that the SABC newscasts largely focused on events organised by the contesting parties or press releases at which the soundbite of the political leader, and often, the conflict frame was guaranteed. The reliance on press releases is not unusual, as Hall, et al., (1978) suggest, that ‘media do not themselves autonomously create news items but rather they are ‘cued’ into ‘specific topics’ by regular and reliable institutional sources.’ This means

constantly turning to accredited representatives of major institutions – members of parliament for political topics, employers, and trade union leaders and so on. These representatives are ‘accredited’ because of their institutional power (Hall, *ibid.*, 1978, p.58).

This preference is structured in way that produces the narrow range of expert sources who, according to Hall (*ibid*) assume the role of ‘primary definers’ in every conversation setting the boundaries of ‘legitimate debate’, and ‘the terms of reference within which all further coverage takes place’, and ultimately ‘commands the field in all subsequent treatments’ (Hall et al., 1978, p.58). Because politicians, especially during elections are perceived in terms of conflict and strategy, journalists commit more news coverage on them, as if to suggest that strategic coverage is what the public wants (De Vreese, H. et al., 2001). This means that political leaders, particularly national leaders who are endowed with more symbolic resources (capital), unlike their local municipal counterparts, receive more coverage. This stands at variance with the notions of PSB and the public sphere. Such was the case in the SABC coverage of the 2016 local government elections as only one local leader in the election received a once-off coverage, and the rest of the coverage went to national political leaders. The effect of this bias in coverage was lack of plurality and limits to explanations that facilitate citizen debates and public conversations (Lowden, N.B., et al., 1994). The result, as shown in several studies elsewhere, is that citizens may be left relatively uninformed (Blumler & Coleman, 2010). It is logical to infer that the dominant focus on the elite in the SABC election newscasts yielded similar results (see Figure 10: 6 & 7 A & B below).

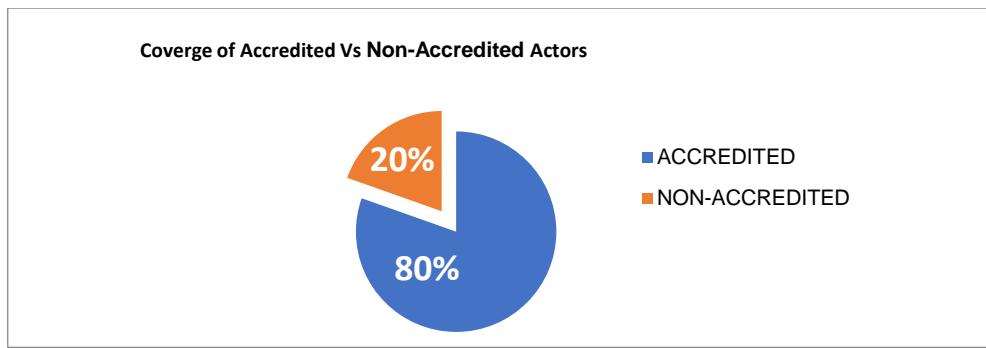
10.1.3 Elite Dominance and Exclusion of Majority Views

Based on the foregoing results, it was the political leaders with more symbolic capital who influenced the degree of importance of the various events, and issues in general, thereby indirectly turning them into news bulletins. In this way, information flow was constrained and so were the thematic frames highlighting what voters were most concerned about. In the majority of the bulletins, reports were not focussed on facilitating the electorate to understand the specifics of what the contesting political parties were offering. In short, there was little dissemination of information to enable meaningful participation in the election. This element is important for the conduct of

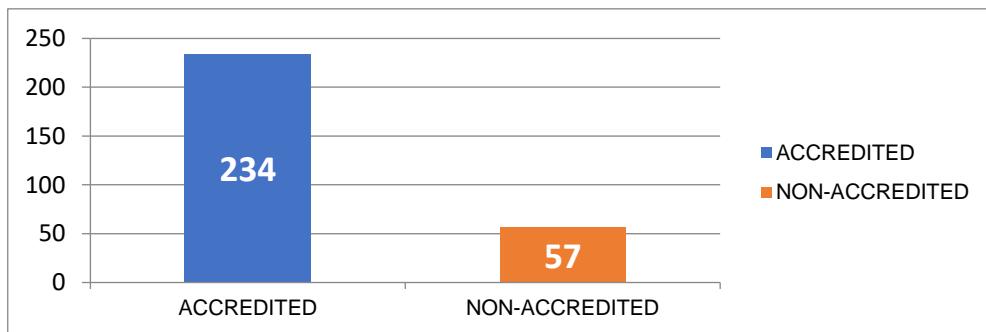
media during an election, more especially for statutory PSB. Thus, failure to move beyond mere reproduction of events was a violation of the ICASA rules relating to election broadcast coverage, since the case study results reveal that news were evidently not reported in a manner that facilitate informed citizenship.

Thus, even when events are covered in the news, or the strategic intent of news making at the SABC is considered, news ought to be ‘noteworthy’ to justify bringing it to the attention of the public. Events, including those of political parties must embody hallmarks of significance and relevance, during elections. Newsworthy events ought to be identified on the grounds of observable, irrefutable and relevant realities on which to construct news stories. This requires incorporating context into a bulletin and often explaining issues through inclusion of a broad range of representations by various actors present and not present at the event. Even more credible, and in keeping with the current public sphere notion, a news report of a publicly attended event must be mediated in manner that resembles a space where citizens can debate public issues, deliberate, and ultimately generate ideas that approximate public opinion (Curran, 1991; Habermas, 2001).

It is assumed in this case study that a normative PSB that is accountable to the public sphere can potentially enable the structures and processes through which political parties and their candidates present the election choices on offer, but also facilitate the electorate and interest groups in society to keep in-check politicians and other authority holders. In this regard, news framing processes link directly to what an ideal PSB and public sphere should look like given the editorial authority to frame ‘the presentation of messages and by the strategic use of political and social power to influence the agendas as well as the triggering framing of public issues’ (Habermas, 2006, p.415).



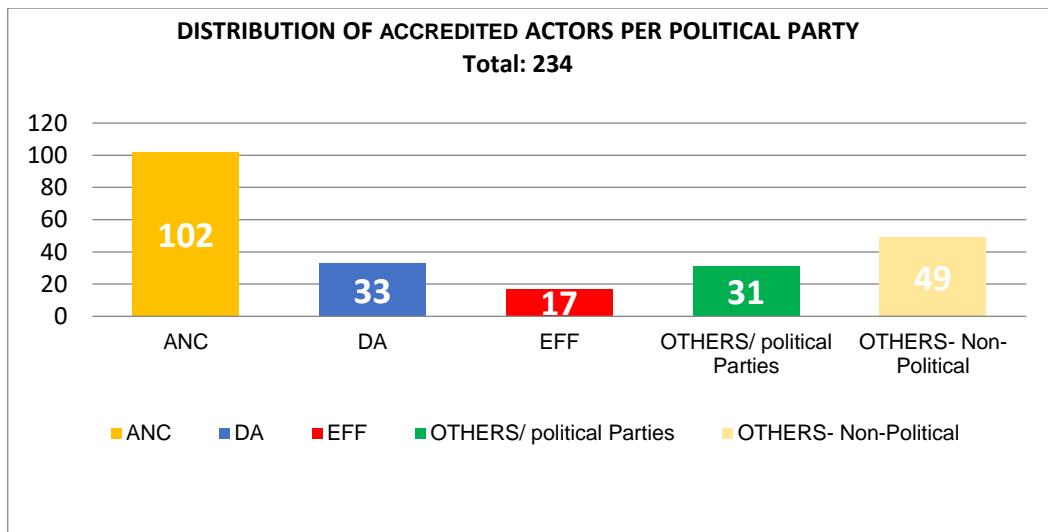
A



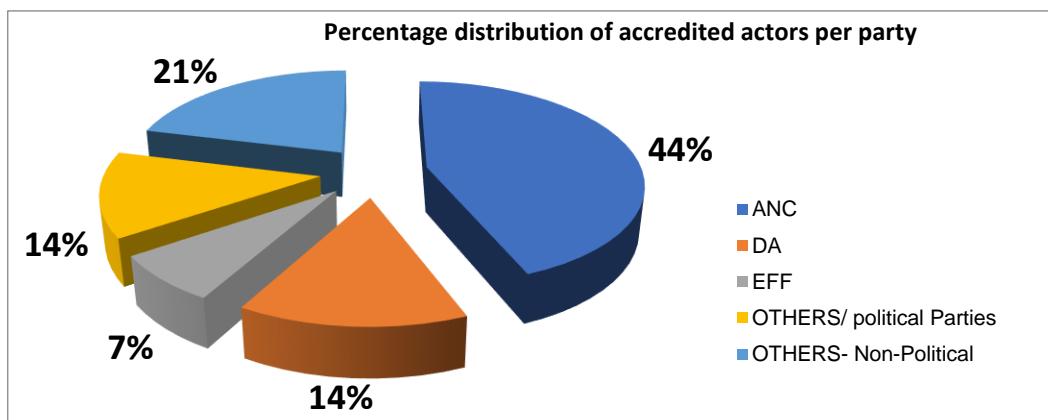
B

Figure 10- 4: Distribution of coverage of accredited (elites) vs nonaccredited, A: pie chart, B: histogram

In line with the above expectation, SABC election news coverage had the power to target the big election issues such as the extreme weather events that have left thousands homeless, lack of public transport and housing, employment opportunities for the youth, questions relating to education, financial management of municipalities, service delivery, corruption and more. Instead, to a greater degree the sampled bulletins were focussed on national party leaders, specifically, ANC President Jacob Zuma, Mmusi Maimane of the Democratic Alliance (DA), and Julius Malema of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).



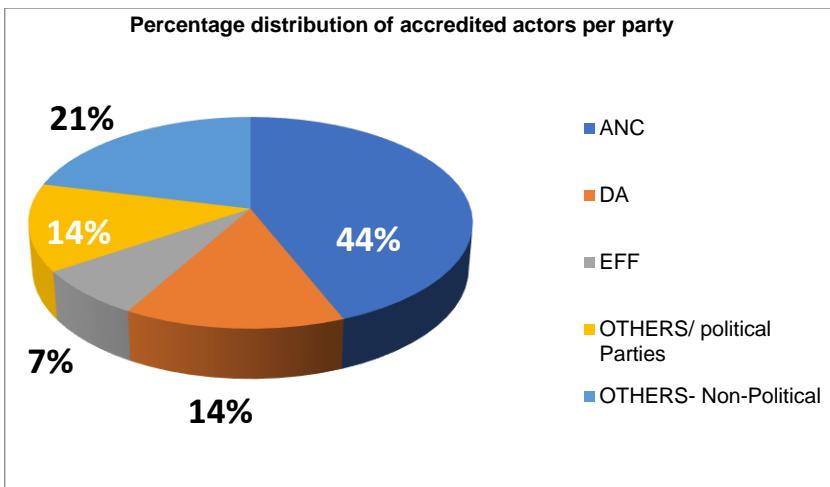
A



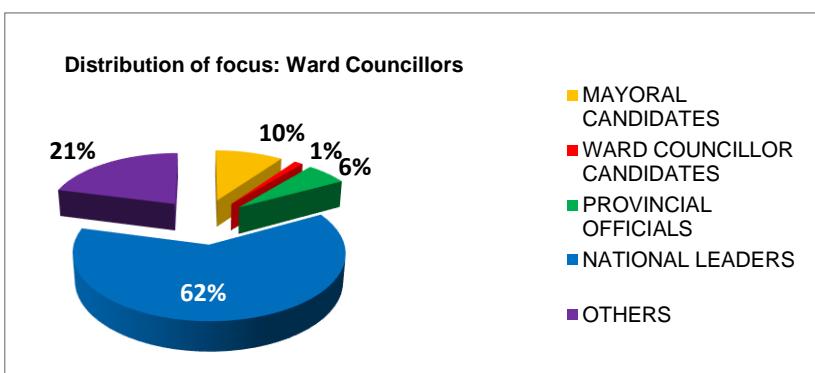
B

Figure 10- 5: Distribution of coverage of per accredited political party, A: histogram B: pie chart

The case study findings reveal limited coverage of local leaders and the electorate, and a significant preoccupation with national leaders. Specifically, the contestants in this election were ward councillors, and the local election was about them and their campaign issues in the first place. However, even the ANC ballot papers for local government elections did not show faces of the local party leaders, an anomaly that passed unnoticed particularly by the SABC. Instead, in some cases, ward ballots carried the candidates' names and party logos, while the district and local council ballot papers featured only the names and logos of the parties (Munusamy, 2016).



A

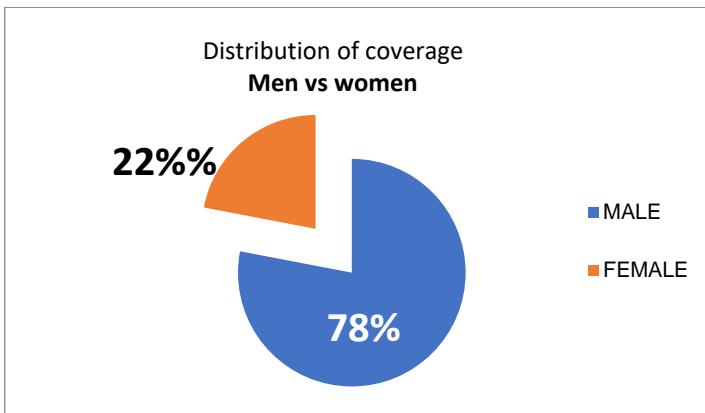


B

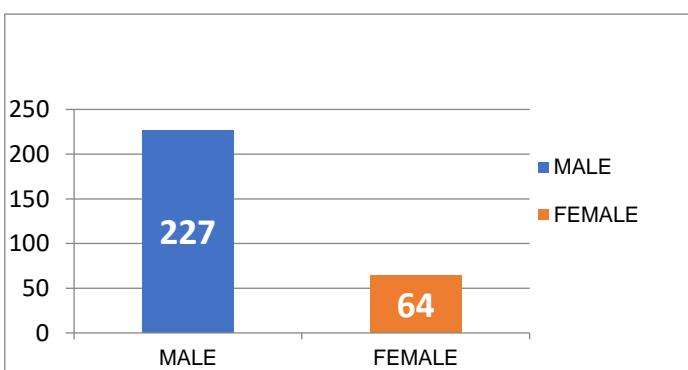
Figure 10- 6: A: Distribution of coverage ward councillor's vs the rest, A: pie chart, B: histogram

10.1.4 Representativity

During elections, PSB is required to facilitate representativity in its coverage of political parties, issues, and candidates, inclusive of genders (Deacon & Golding, 1994). News reports must therefore resemble ‘a realm of our social life’ (Habermas, 1974, p. 49), one that is characterised by deliberation and formation of public opinion (Curran, 1996; Habermas, ibid - 2001). This case study considered gender representation at a basic level and noted that the exclusion of key social constituencies in this local government election was not limited to local leaders, the electorate broadly or nonaccredited actors but also women were marginally included. Their limited exposure in the sampled bulletins was glaring as it was not commensurate with the 40 percent registered female candidates who contested the election (IEC, 2016). In the sampled news text, men dominated election coverage by 78 percent (see Figures 11 and 12 below):



A



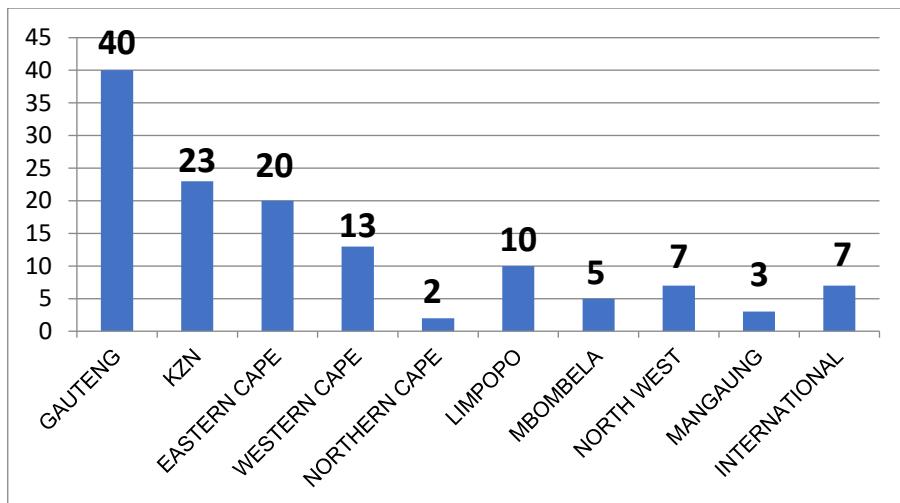
B

Figure 10- 7: Distribution of coverage of men vs women, A: pie chart, B: histogram

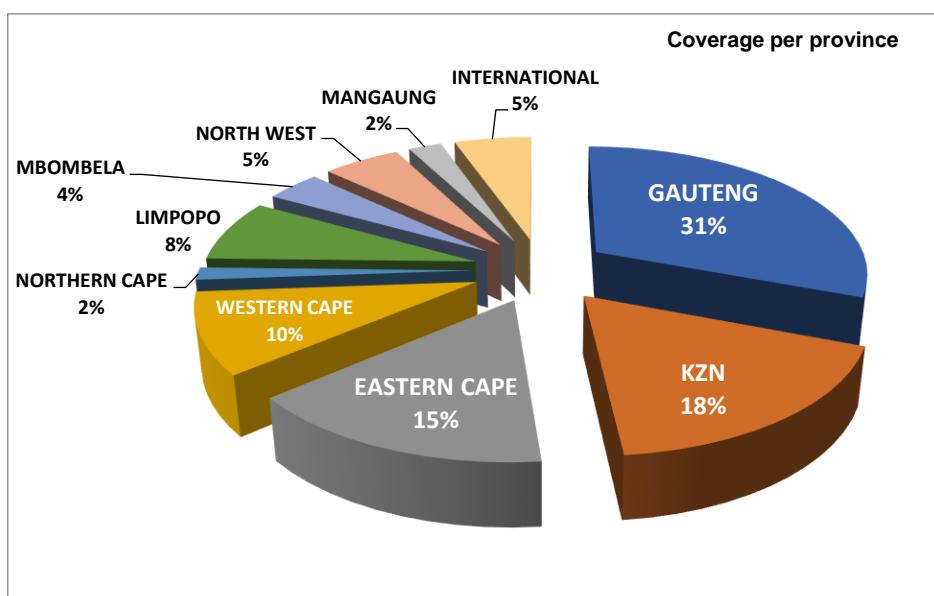
The above gender discrepancy in the sampled bulletins goes against the notion of an ideal PSB that is tied to the public sphere. SABC news and current affairs coverage is expected to facilitate inclusive access and participation of all genders and, to deliberately help limit any instances and possible forms of patriarchal limitations. Yet as the case study results show, the SABC election coverage favoured male actors much to the detriment of female voices. Although this phenomenon was not probed for content, for example, this case study did not explore what the women in coverage were seen to be talking about or whether such issues per se reinforced the position of women in the election.

The lack of representation was not limited to women. In fact, the case study results show that the SABC coverage was urban centric and did not adequately cater for election campaign activities and issues in rural and peri-urban areas. Given the statutory

duty of the SABC to ensure inclusion in terms of geographic reach, diversity of actors and the range of content, it is thus inferred that the broadcaster failed to accomplish its PSB remit as demanded by law and the constitution of South Africa.



A



B

Figure 10- 8: Distribution of coverage per province, A: histogram B: pie chart

However, this case study acknowledges that to a large extent of the geographic distribution pattern of SABC election news coverage mirrored the population estimates of South African provinces according to Statistics South Africa (2015). For example, although the Gauteng province is the smallest geographically, it comprised the largest share of the population, with approximately 24 percent living in Gauteng by 2015 (Statistics South Africa, *ibid*). At the time of conducting the research in 2016, Gauteng roughly accounted for 40 percent of the SABC coverage in the sampled bulletins. In 2016, the second largest population size, 19.9 percent, was located in KwaZulu-Natal. This province received the second highest coverage in the sampled bulletins of 20

percent; while the least coverage (2 percent) was from the Northern Cape, the province with the smallest population of 2.2 percent of the total SA population in 2016 (*ibid*).

10.2 Conclusion

This case study focused on how the SABC mediates news, in line with its PSB remit as stipulated in its Editorial Code of Conduct and Ethics, and by the broadcasting regulator ICASA. Specifically, the chapter responded to the question regarding how the SABC mediated pluralists' politics during the 2016 local government elections from the perspective of the public sphere? The findings in this chapter revealed that an overwhelming number of stories, nearly 60 percent, were driven by events hosted by the contesting political parties, mainly door-to-door campaigns, mass rallies, and press briefings, with the idea of the story likely originating from a party press release, wires, or diary of upcoming events in the public domain, whereas the ICASA calls upon broadcasters to actively seek out information and not to depend on the organised activities of political parties or the information parties bring to them. According to ICASA, relying on political party activities affords parties with more resources unfair access to the broadcaster's coverage of news, at the expense of parties that have less resources. This was a basic news making defect, especially PSB journalism, which is expected to report on all contesting parties and their candidates equitably.

The data from the sampled bulletins revealed that national leaders and other society elites were favoured at the expense of local leaders and at the exclusion of the voting electorate, in particular the voting community that has no official links to formal organisations or accredited elite status. The data showed that of the total number of actors in coverage, there were four elites or party leaders covered, for everyone nonaccredited individual shown. In the sampled bulletins, local leaders who contested the election were overwhelmingly outnumbered in coverage by national, provincial, and other elites by 80 percent. This practice was similar for women who constitute nearly 50 percent of the registered electorate but were outnumbered by a ratio of approximately three men to one woman. The study recognises that frequency in news coverage of an actor or political party does not necessarily amount to equitable distribution of coverage but posits that the more coverage a news actor or social constituency is afforded, the greater the visibility and consequently the greater the chance to project extended meaning. Paradoxically, the over accessing of the news by

certain actors can hide certain information in the hands of actors who have no access, and this can serve to narrow public debate and engagement.

In this case study, issues in coverage focused more on personalities, conflict, and competition rather than electoral issues. According to Bourdieu (1998), the principle that determines this kind of selection is ‘the search for the sensational and the spectacular (p. 19). Thus, while this work acknowledges the practice as a general occupational logic of journalism news making, it is also argued the SABC was required by its statutory PSB mandate to reconstruct a more inclusive public sphere through representation, irrespective of social, political constituency, gender, or economic status, and to facilitate deliberation, and the dissemination of useful information that the electorate can use to participate meaningfully in the election. In the sampled bulletins, there was little discernible effort to reconstruct the ideal-type public sphere through which the range of interlocutors and the diversity of views would be representative of the citizenry, including women. In this case study, therefore, it is argued that the SABC election campaign news reporting was inadequate for citizens to make informed democratic electoral choices, and as such resembled less PSB journalism, and more ‘echo chamber’ reporting. A similar practice, though focused of the economic impacts on broadcasting, is discussed eloquently in Bourdieu’s account ‘On Television’, in which he shows the ways through which the journalistic field works to generate and enforce ‘on the public a very particular vision of the political field’ including the imposition of ‘journalists’ specific interests produced in and by that field’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.2)

Chapter Eleven

Identifying the Dominant News Value in the News and Current Affairs Programming

11.0 Introduction

Chapter eleven (11) answers the specific question (3): What is identifiable as the dominant shared news value in the Current Affairs coverage of the issue of ‘land restitution’ when deciding on ‘actors in coverage’. The SABC, given its public sphere ethos, is expected to play the role of facilitating the diverse perspectives and competing discourses around land restitution in South Africa. This includes coverage of views from nonofficial or noninstitutionally accredited actors. The chapter discusses how the SABC has been used to promote the public sphere and to make it possible for ordinary people to discursively imagine, contest and articulate their complex versions of land restitution ‘from below’. In short, the study proceeds from the premise that the SABC, owing to its PSB obligations, is required to mediate key national issues in a manner that consolidates the public sphere. This work has among its objectives the identification of shared professional journalism norms and values that characterise the SABC news and current affairs coverage.

11.1 Sourcing the Story And ‘Actors in Coverage’ as a Routine Practice

Understanding the interaction between news sources and the SABC news-making practices is important. It has allowed this study to infer on how public information is mediated by the broadcaster. This work argues that access to ‘alternative’ viewpoints and a diverse range of actors in current affairs and news coverage is necessary for the sustainability of a credible public sphere.

‘You release the story as soon as it meets the threshold of ‘good enough’. This does not mean that the story is completely comprehensive. One just knows when to stop. The decision is primarily about the likelihood of getting your ideal person to comment on the story, but often the deadline and the editor-in-chief are the ultimate arbiter’ Interview (SABC interview 16)

If the actor in a potential story is a ‘prominent’ individual or the incident is likely to shock as many people as possible (human interest), the story is likely to be deemed ‘newsworthy’. In fact, we can argue that any news value potentially turns the story into a viable ‘news product’. Here, the news editor, relying on his or her know-how of the field, what ordinarily works or does not work (capital), senses the potential impact of the story on its audiences. This ability is the result of the symbolic resource of knowing in advance what is coming ahead, often through embodied experience and in the moment, the casual monitoring of journalists in the newsroom, participating in the office ‘gossip’ as in the daily practice where the news editor wanders around, sometimes in the canteen, to determine what is happening in the minds of the team or when the overzealous reporter pitches up at the editor’s office with what they consider a ‘scoop’ at the time. Ideally, the daily diary conference is a formal system that encourages such situations – although an hour is not enough to cover as many available stories of the day. It is not every story that initiated, later on packaged, that makes it to the final bulletin. As already mentioned, some are thrown away at the editorial conference, while others do not even make it to initial diary meetings. Others are ‘still-born’, first agreed upon, but later overtaken by events, or for some other reason, simply ‘buried alive’. However, as the sampled data have shown, chasing ‘events and reliance on accredited official actors’ is a noticeable ‘taken for granted’ practice at the SABC - discernible in a large number of stories that were selected for the news bulletins. This indeed was a recurring finding. The overreliance on accredited and official news sources resulted in the omission of other voices in the public sphere. Thus, even as the SABC Editorial Code of Conduct provides for the coverage of ‘the full spectrum of opinions, perspectives and comment’ (SABC, 2020), including the ‘selection and use of guests, analysts, and specialist commentators’ (*ibid*), data from the sampled bulletins showed a tendency toward events and official voices and less debate regarding the issue of land itself.

11.1.1 Chasing the Accredited Source and Events

As already mentioned, I have considered the literature on news routines and embedded organisational norms in terms of the various ways through which journalism practice is impacted. Additionally, I have considered questions regarding bias, and how power, and influence impacts the social world – in this case the particular vision that the SABC disseminates through its current affairs and news coverage. A key question in the

literature relates to who exerts greater influence in shaping the news – is it journalists or sources? (Berkowitz, 2009). Do sources and events attract journalism, or is it the other way around? This question relating to how journalists deploy sources explains to a degree how some issues in the news are included and others excluded (Berkowitz, 2019). In the case of this study, the concern is how accredited, official sources and prediarised events are routinely facilitated to influence news output and, in this way, obscure PSB practice. In several media scholarship, this connection between journalists and their sources, owing to the often-privileged status of the latter, is thought to structure news output in favour of society elites and sources with accredited status – thus resulting in dominance over public opinion and by extension public consent (Anderson, et al., 2005; Berkowitz, ibid; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1981; Hall, 1978; McQuail, 2000).

11.1.2 ‘Wagging the Tail’: Beating Competition with the Unique Story Angle

The SA broadcast media is highly competitive, and this imposes an obligation not so much to break the story but to at least carry the best angle of the story that is already in the public domain. As seen here, to take running story from other media and merely recast it with a new story angle was a ‘norm’ at the SABC. One can draw the conclusion that it was safer to do so. Notably, matters such as the story angle and questions such as ‘what is the public interest in the story?’ or ‘what is new?’ often dominated discussions at editorial meetings. In fact, missing a popular story that had been covered by other media was usually a major concern for the editorial staff.

As one of the senior beat editors put it:

‘We can afford not to break the story, but not to miss it completely... our commitment is to provide an independent and impartial angle to the story. It does not matter who else is running with the story. We are able to distinguish the SABC with our public service ethos to storytelling. Our mandate is public service broadcasting’, adds the editor. (Fieldnote 17)

In light of the above, it is clear that knowing what the competition is doing was therefore an important tool for story making at the SABC. This is tantamount to keeping tabs on those issues and topics that are frequently and prominently presented in

the media, often with the hope of that the issues in coverage become the dominant vision of the reconstructed social reality (Weaver, et al., 2009). There are studies that have marked the mutual influences among news makers broadly as a ‘striking routine reliance on other media,’ similar to ‘pack’ or ‘copycat’ reporting (Preston, 2009, p.57 as cited in Thomsen, 2018) In this way, the media perceives itself as the avenue through which certain issues and topics are prioritised based on what is assumed people might care about. In Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus, this is a result of the subjective attitudes and dispositions; an embodiment of cultural capital, made possible by ‘a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures’... ‘schemes of perception, conception, and action, common to all members of the same group or class’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.86).

11.2 Relationship Between Events, Sources and News Makers

The relationship between events, sources and newsmakers is discussed earlier (see 11.1 in this chapter) in terms of ‘the battle for power over public opinion and consent’ (Berkowitz, 2009, p. 102). However, considering the consensus among scholars that ‘news is a product with organisational expectations’, this work considered the ways journalists at the SABC journalists select, reconstruct through framing, and ultimately put together the story for the final bulletin. In 2019, by all accounts, the issue of land became popular and highly contested in the public domain. This period coincided with my field work at the SABC. I decided to track the issue of land in the SABC main English bulletin. I sampled the bulletins between 27 October 2018 and 19 January 2019, a three-month period during which I counted ten bulletins that featured a story on ‘Land’.

All these stories were syndicated through to all SABC TV and Radio English news channels and optimised in the SABC Digital online news platform. In the ten (10) sampled news bulletins, the trend was similar to that observed in the mediation of pluralist politics during the 2016 local government elections. The data revealed the tendency to focus on what the officials were seen to be saying. Furthermore, all officials that featured were closely associated with government. The broadcast stories were noted as follows:

Table 11- 1: Summary of the ten stories covered

Story title	Theme
1. Land expropriation most contested policy among political parties.	In the story, Senzeni Zokwana, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, is shown saying the department wants to sustain and retain food production. The story reflects the policy battle between SA political parties over the expropriation of land without compensation as a viable option to maximise the ownership of land, economic growth, and agricultural production. The EFF leader Julius Malema shown saying ‘if all land was government-owned, poverty in the country would be something of the past’. /19 Jan, 2019
2. Rural Development Dept still needs to access 77% of arable land.	Government says it requires access to 77% of arable land in order to process land claims by Communal Property Associations. /19 Dec, 2018
3. Ramaphosa warns to tread carefully on land issue.	In this story, President Cyril Ramaphosa remarks in his keynote address marking Reconciliation Day that the ‘land reform poses a threat to the country’s democratic dispensation if not appropriately dealt with. /21 Dec, 2018
4. Land constitutional amendment may be delayed.	ANC Chief Whip Jackson Mthembu announces a new proposed deadline of the amendment of the land bill /6 Dec, 2018
5. Land debate has shown SA’s prospects of a healthy democracy.	Mr President Cyril Ramaphosa speaks on Human Rights Day. He says the land debate in SA has shown the enthusiasm of the citizens. /7 Dec, 2018
6. Parliament can start process of amending the constitution.	Parliament Spokesperson, Moloto Mothapo announces the decision by Parliament to start the process of amending the constitution (NCOP) /5 Dec, 2018
7. ‘Lease agreements could severely weaken rights of land occupants.’	Council for the Advancement of SA constitution warns 40-year lease agreements by the Ingonyama Trust could severely weaken the rights of occupants. /11 Nov, 2018
8. Documentary sheds light on issues of land in rural communities.	The story highlights content from a documentary detailing how a Masakhane Community in the Eastern Cape has successfully rescued its land from illegal iron ore miners. /23 Oct, 2018
9. US Secretary of State to visit SA over land issue.	International Relations Minister Lindiwe Sisulu discloses upcoming state visit by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and that seminars on the land issue will be held in both countries. /29 Sep, 2018
10. Parley committee seeks extension on land expropriation	The Constitutional Review Committee of Parliament requests its deadline to report on the amendment of Section 25 to be extended to

I attended the diary meetings at which these stories were officially positioned. With each story, exhaustive newsroom discussions regarding the merits of selection were common. There were occasions when the shared and idealised professional journalism values of the community of journalists would be brought into full display. In one such instance, the editor was asked to justify why it was worth including the visit by the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to SA over the land issue. In the story, then International Relations Minister Lindiwe Sisulu had disclosed the official visit and that seminars on the land issue would be held in both countries (Bulletin 29 Sep 2018).

‘It’s an exclusive. We shall be the first broadcaster to report the announcement. We were the only TV crew at the briefing’ (Fieldnote 9)

When the merit of this story featuring prominent officials was debated by those present. The consensus was a quick deference to news values, such as ‘high profile, topical, and controversial’. Earlier, I remarked that beat and unit editors at the SABC preferred to cover stories that their competition was covering because it was safer to do so. Although this too was not predictable, it nonetheless constituted the functional ends of the institution, tacit organisational rules, implicit policies, and the shared norms of the profession that make it easier for journalists to do their work in an uncertain reality and within production constraints.

As observed at the SABC, the key considerations for selecting the stories were many, yet simple, with the topic and the actor in coverage (source) being the key drivers. As already indicated, accredited sources, all of them with ties to government institutions, dominated the SABC news text in the sample. All the stories were initiated outside the SABC and characterised by prescheduled events. This work benefits from the growing literature that has shown how news production is often structured by embedded institutional norms such as the sourcing of news. Evidently, the sampled SABC stories were also cued by the controversial land issue that dominated all media and independent surveys during my fieldwork. Social surveys showed that land would become a key issue for the election that was held on May 8, this same year (See Social

Survey, 2019). In addition, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms were abuzz, with large numbers of people discussing land reform.

‘This was a big story and making sense of it was critical. We were compelled by the diverse nature of our audiences to explore contrasting views out there. Simply put, we could not avoid this story, even if we felt otherwise’ (SABC Interview 13).

The above extract not only reveals the presumption that the ‘land’ issue is something that is important and therefore newsworthy (meets the doxic value), but also confirms that covering topics that are already trending in other media constitutes a ‘deeply entrenched structure’ - what Willig (2013) describes as the ‘unspoken, unquestioned, taken for granted, understanding of the news game’ (*ibid*, p.3). Looking at the SABC news culture, this ensures alignment with what is perceived to matter in the public and therefore what to either exclude or admit as news at the broadcaster. This is observed as constituting a default position for the SABC – one that limits the diversity of discourse in the public domain.

11.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed the mediation of News and Current Affairs at the SABC. First, the case study (Chapter 10) has utilised the coverage of the 2016 local government elections as an entry point to the investigation of how the SABC approaches pluralists’ politics from the point of view of the public sphere. To supplement the findings of this case study, the sourcing of actors in coverage on the land issue has been considered. In both instances, a content analysis of sampled bulletins was conducted, and the arising data, as already highlighted, signifies the complexity of the modern public sphere and challenges that include media access, participation, representation and deliberation or lack thereof.

Shown in both chapter 10 and 11, this work identifies among findings, sources in news bulletins and routines inside media institutions as primary influences. Looking at the SABC, however, it is argued that while sources are indispensable in news making and hence are cultivated to ensure continuous coverage of key social sectors, the overaccess of media platforms by accredited institutional sources and power elites is cited as a drawback that leads to fragmentation of society and the subsequent elevation of elite views and opinions. In Tuchman (2002), such official political sources, economic

agents such as business owners, investors, and other ad hoc interest groups are all similar to pressure groups seeking a voice in the news, and commensurate to the resources they wield, become the primary definers of the ‘public interest’. Notably, critical theory scholars reject this idealised conception of the singular public sphere as the only space for social cooperation and human emancipation while highlighting the ‘sociological significance of alternative nonbourgeois — spaces occupied by a range of publics that ‘contribute to a rational-critical engagement with the world’ (Susen, 2011, p.16). To connect all this to what was happening at the SABC, this chapter employs Habermas’ definition of the public sphere:

‘The public sphere is seen as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed’ (Habermas, 1991, p.398)

Habermas highlights the vital aspects of the public sphere, mainly that is ideally open to all citizens and constituted in every conversation in which individuals come together to form the public (Habermas, *ibid*).

Section Five Conclusions and Future Work

Chapter Twelve Reflections and Conclusion

12.0 Introduction

From the data presented in this thesis, we can infer that the SABC does not yet resemble a transformed vibrant source of independent information, although many observers would agree hope is not lost. Scholars have addressed questions around what may be done to protect the future the SABC, specifically its role as public service broadcaster in South Africa (Fourie, 2003 – 2010; Duncan, 2000 - 2003; Mano, 2020, etc.,) Among the proposed interventions, research work by Lotter (2016) has argued that the South African parliament has a duty to ensure the SABC remains impartial, fosters fairness and is inclusive of the diverse range of actors and views in society, and questioned the manner in which the legislature discharges this constitutional obligation. On several key indicators, the SABC has achieved both commendable successes and shortcomings, but clearly benefits from a media and broadcasting policy environment that has guarantees enshrined in law (Arndt, 2007; Bronstein & Katzew, 2018). For instance, considering its valuable role of constructing the ‘imagined’ nation, the SABC’s Current Affairs and News division has succeeded in covering important key national moments, such as the national and local government elections, provided access to much of what goes on inside the South African legislature, reflected on service delivery issues, etc (Orgeret, 2008). However, there remains a widespread view in the South African public that the broadcaster is significantly failing to fulfil its PSB mandate and that, as a result, it is not fit for the task of facilitating democratic and informed citizenship (Dlamini, et al., 2017). In short, among the list of criticisms, the SABC is perceived as failing to address social issues, cover the lives and conversations of ordinary citizens, and help audiences see and understand what was happening in the country (*ibid*). This ethnographic work has sought to understand the factors outlined in some of these arguments. In this work, I have focused on the views of the journalists at the SABC, particularly regarding their own understanding of their roles as journalists at the broadcaster. Using semi-structured qualitative interviews, I documented the perspectives of the journalists in their own setting at the SABC newsrooms, observed

them in their everyday work, and experienced some striking incidents that took place during my fieldwork. I have also brought to the fore relevant documents, others featuring events that were recorded in the public domain, specifically in the media, grey literature and in scholarship on the SABC newsrooms. SABC news bulletins have been analysed to supplement this work's understanding of the construction of news at the broadcaster, specifically, how the broadcaster mediates the news in general and pluralistic politics.

Apart from the shared vision of professionalism and independence, in practice, the journalism community at the SABC was for the most part at war with its executive management. I have provided a general discussion on the conceptual clash that unfolded at the SABC newsrooms over professional values and the varied interpretations of the same. In a number of interviews with the selected respondents inside the SABC, I observed both the explicit and implicit expressions of hope in the promise of materialising good through journalism, but equally, the hopelessness arising from some of the unresolved issues and the ever-changing power dynamics in the institution. Indeed, there was no shortage of 'drama', indicating how 'power' was being expressed inside the broadcaster. Negative views concerning the SABC intensified during my fieldwork, with allegations of open disregard for existing policies by management, censorship, internal discord, and the unlawful dismissal of critical journalists (Freedom House, 2016⁵³), compounded voluntary resignations of several others (PMG, 2017). Not much had changed by the end of my fieldwork.

To date, several scholarships on the SABC has considered questions around policy, politics, and structure (Fourie, 2000, 2004, 2013; Banda 2015, Tomaselli & Tomaselli, 1989 – 2005; Duncan, 1994 – 2003; and others). As already highlighted in the introductory chapter of this thesis, there are few studies such as this work that have attempted to delve into the institutional culture of news work at the SABC on which there is little academic material that explains the role of the embedded institutional norms, including the shared professional values ingrained in practice and processes. The aim of this work was to engage with these factors by exploring possible alternative

⁵³ <https://freedomhouse.org/article/south-africa-SABC-fires-journalists-protesting-censorship>

explanations. The institutional culture approach I have employed, especially the focus on the empirical practices of newsmakers in their everyday work and on their beliefs, has been very helpful and appears to offer much insight into both the informal and formal factors that impact news making at the SABC. This has been one of the main objectives of this work to explore the extent to which the SABC news output is structured by the internal culture, i.e., ways of doing that include embedded institutional routines, norms and values associated with journalism practice at the broadcaster, and ultimately how public service broadcasting is impacted. The two key theoretical frameworks have proven to be applicable in this study, namely, public sphere theory and field theory. I have discussed each of the theories based on how they are defined by their primary proponents - Jürgen Habermas for the public sphere and Pierre Bourdieu for the field theory. Furthermore, the complexity of each of the theories is outlined, particularly the relationship and commonalities between the two theories and how both interact with one another. The two theories are operationalised in the context of the SABC newsrooms. What follows below are summary reflections of the two case studies in this work and comments on the study as a whole, including recommendations for further research.

12.1 Case Study One: Institutional Culture and Journalism Practice at the SABC

It is hoped that this exploratory case study adds useful insights to the understanding of newsroom culture inside at the SABC. Among other benefits, the research potential for an ethnographic study of the SABC newsrooms and its outputs lies in identifying factors that impact news-making processes, practices, norms, and values, all of which have enabled us to identify some of the institutional management and policy issues that ought to be addressed for the institutional culture to be transformed. The case study has discussed in more detail the power relations inside the newsroom emanating from the institutional management hierarchy and accounted for the agency of the journalists arising from their shared beliefs and values and complimented by an enabling statutory mandate that is enshrined in various legislative instruments, such as the Broadcasting Charter, the Editorial and Ethics Code and a number of official commissions of inquiry into breaches of the same. After all, not only is the mandate of SABC of academic interest, but it is also an indispensable tool for the attainment of a democratic future in South Africa, one that is characterised by informed citizenship.

The data arising from observations the SABC newsrooms, interviews, and document analysis, all together presents an SABC institutional culture that is remarkably diverse with respect to values and beliefs and a healthy contest regarding the interpretation of the PSB and professional journalism mandate – that is in spite of some of the shortcomings identified in this work, including that translated into dissonance in the newsrooms – described in this work as a conceptual clash between journalists and their management. I explain the latter in terms of interactions between habitus, doxa, capital, power and agency - taking the cue from notions in Bourdieu's concept of the field (see discussion in my conceptual theoretical chapters 3 & 4 of this work). Respondents have shared their role perceptions and their professional ethos, and so has this study accounted for the conceptions of management actors who in many ways are linked to the institutional structure of the SABC. Moreover, the interactions between journalists and their management inside the newsrooms significantly constitute the institutional culture itself.

This work has considered equally the internal practices, as well as values and beliefs. The study has presented practical incidents or events in the newsroom through which the process of cultural negotiation can be identified. With regard to the above, I drew on Bourdieu's field approach, which moves us beyond simplistic assumptions that some external power, often in the form of policy or regulation, politics or the economy, frames and directs media narratives. Such departure is considered important in this study because of the inherent challenges associated with attempts to observe functions inside organisations that cannot be directly observed through the formal day-to-day activities, authority lines outlining the roles and responsibilities of each actor in the newsroom, and neither is it possible to develop a holistic picture from accessible documents and artefacts, or even through interviews or surveys. As Breed (1955) emphasised with regards to instances where power is expressed in the newsroom – power is hardly expressed overtly in the news product since this would infringe on the professional notion of objectivity, the shared idea that journalists are independent in the way they do their work. On the other hand, 'Newsmen define their job as producing a certain quantity of what is called news every 24 hours... This has to be produced even if nothing has happened...' and the journalist 'is rewarded for fulfilling this, his manifest function' (Breed, 1955, p.331). The foregoing characterisation ties with Bourdieu's conception of the journalistic field, habitus, doxa, and capital, in that it

points to the relations within context. The concept of habitus represents the ‘deal-typical pattern of action’, in which action is considered in relation to what is possible with the context of power (Bourdieu, 1990, as cited in Swartz, 2012, p. 107). In the context of power relations, Bourdieu (*ibid*) argues that not all social options are equally accessible to everyone... neither are all courses of action available to everyone... ‘only some are plausible, whereas others are unthinkable’ (Bourdieu as cited in Swartz, 2012, p. 107). Here Bourdieu argues that actors ‘shape their aspirations according to concrete indices’ (*ibid*)... This becomes an ‘encounter between opportunities or constraints presented by situations and the durable dispositions’ that actors bring to situations (Swartz, *ibid*). Thus, while this study has indeed benefitted from fully acknowledging the strategic ‘rituals’ at the SABC, particularly those embedded in the ‘ways of doing’ at the newsrooms and specifically in the form of routine practices, institutional structures, and the shared professional norms and values of journalists at the broadcaster, equally, it has been the objective of this research to understand what and how journalists perceive the demands of practice (constraints and opportunities) within context and how they choose to internalise existing professional rules. For example, it is recognised that whereas neutrality in the context of the institutional and functional end of news making denotes objectivity and the need to ensure the ‘right to reply’ in controversial stories, for some of the journalists at the SABC, the ‘objectivity’ concept or the news value of conferring the ‘right to reply’ both work to enhance the likelihood of a story or event to be selected as news and also to ‘play it safe’. This is how news values are broadly employed by journalists in their daily work. In this reasoning, Drier (1978) suggests that journalists do not necessarily aim for the truth more than they strive to safely ‘balance’ competing ‘claims of truth’. According to Drier (*ibid*), the difficulty lies in that often it is the power holders that ‘initiate events’ and ‘thus have an advantage’. This what the SABC Editorial Code and ECA regulations warn about in respect of inequitable coverage during elections arising from the over reliance on events generated by political parties and powerful official actors. Those with more resources and therefore more powerful get more coverage than those with less resources. However, Drier (*ibid*) notes that when confronted with imperatives such as the pressure of deadline or other, this tension is resolved through strategic ‘rituals’, that is, the embedded ‘ways of doing’ in the form of routine practices in the newsroom, organisational structures, and the shared professional norms and values of journalists. Even then, the challenge with shared professional values is that their application

arbitrary – as shown in Drier (*ibid*) and Bourdieu (*ibid*), the aim is to make the story more likely to be selected for the news. The question becomes how professional values are justified by journalists in their daily work.

Bourdieu's field theory offers the advantage of accounting for the embedded institutional routines by exploring 'the relations between the newsroom and the journalistic field and the field of power' (Schultz, 2007, p 192). It is argued in this work that power inside the SABC newsrooms is characterised through the everyday 'superdependence' on the most 'hierarchical' senior individual in the newsroom. This 'superdependence' presupposes that the said individual is routinely the only person in the newsroom who is sufficiently equipped to make sound journalistic judgements. This organizationally driven practice, which is firmly the preserve of those who possess the 'symbolic capital' by virtue of their position in upper echelons of management, is normalised and considered vital for the coordination group activity through the allocation of clear roles. Furthermore, it is viewed as reducing the need to bargain and argue over decisions. However, there is a downside. Various studies have shown how 'lower-level people, who by virtue of their standing in hierarchical cultures, and who by extension embody less symbolic capital, are less likely to speak up about the problems they see' (Kelman, et al., 2017). In hierachal environments, the symbolic capital that is ensured through one's position in the newsroom, it is argued, suppresses dissent among journalists who occupy positions at the lower ranks of the editorial management spectrum, who may feel not sufficiently equipped to challenge the status quo imposed by those at the top. The remark by Suna Venter when she decided to join the dissenting colleagues in the newsroom was revealing.

'As junior as I am, please record my voice as dissenting against this' (Suna as cited in Krige 2019, p.49)

Acknowledging her position, what Suna did here was in fact acknowledge the powerlessness she felt towards her seniors; an attribute often identified with journalists who happen to have less experience in the newsroom, or in Bourdieu's parlance, a perceived lack of 'symbolic capital' through which one could 'transact' as an equal. At that point, the editorial code of conduct could have served as the 'great equaliser', but it

did not. Rather, it was Suna's individual agency and the ultimate disregard of her own positionality that defined the moment.

12.1.1 The Discreet Orchestra

In Chapter 8.6.1, I described editorial meetings that were attended by Phathiswa Magobeni in her new capacity as the new SABC Executive of News and Current Affairs Research. I characterised these meetings as resembling a 'conductor-less orchestra', citing the way these meetings were conducted and particularly noting the integrative positionality displayed by Magobeni during discussions on the news stories. Perhaps this episode also presents a good way to unpack Bourdieu's vision of the 'lifeworld'; specifically, his rejection of the 'rational choice theory' and his presumption that individuals actively generate their own behaviours through 'practical logic' that they apply to their own lives, whereby social 'dispositions' shape actions through words or actions in direct response to 'everyday dynamics' (Settekorn 2015 and Park 2014). The discussions were participatory, and Magobeni played the mediating role. On the one hand, it can be inferred that this 'disposition' was indicative of 'participatory editorial decision-making'; on the other hand, it indicated some form of interdependence on everyone attending the editorial meeting. This thesis highlights the expressed calls by SABC journalists for the broadcaster to embrace newsroom democracy, viewed in terms of minimising the role of any top management in news editorial decision-making, the GE of News and Current Affairs included; while empowering journalists themselves with the prerogative to decide on the merits of story selection and the determination of which actors to include in news coverage. In this regard, the journalists that were interviewed in this work were in favour of 'democratising editorial decision-making and SABC internal newsroom'. Given this context, we can infer that Magopeni's disposition was not coincidental but representative of the 'habitus' in the SABC newsroom. The dominant social and cultural conditions for the 'conductor-less orchestra' were ripe.

SABC is important to the public sphere. It resembles the normative place where 'actors' in media coverage (including the institutions they represent) simultaneously contest their visions of the social world, reconstruct versions of reality, and ultimately generate what approximates public opinion (Dahlberg 2004). For this to happen, the SABC, owing to its PSB claim, is expected to facilitate the ideal conditions for the public

sphere to strive. The participating public is not automatically included. Rather, the SABC is expected to formalise such inclusion by deliberately ensuring ‘discursive equality’. Informal restrictions may unwittingly hinder participation, such as the lack of autonomy from state and corporate power, including the overaccess of the media by powerful individuals at the expense of the less-powerful (*ibid*, p.10; Habermas 1996, p. 308).

Broadly speaking, the Habermas conceptualisation of the normative public sphere corresponds with Bourdieu’s notion of the media as the ‘field’ where actors perform and strive to gain influence in the public sphere (Benson, 2005). Indeed, points of convergence between Habermas’ public sphere theory and Bourdieu’s field concept are exist. However, Bourdieu’s uniqueness lies in the fact that he does not conceive of the decline of the ‘field’ solely in terms of Habermas’ ‘diminishing public readiness to take part in critical debates’ (Calhoun, 1992, p. 24), generated media through personalised accounts of politics as Habermas conceived it in respect of the public sphere; rather, it is the embodiment of intersections between the habitus, doxa, capital and power, which can also be explained in terms of the limited embrace of ‘codified and uncodified protections’ of the autonomy of the media ‘field’ (Benson, 2005 p.,184). In short, Bourdieu reminds us that the ideal public sphere is constructed, and with Magobeni, it was reproduced. In Bourdieu’s words, ‘a subjective but not individual system of structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group’ had been established (Bourdieu 1977 p. 86). These ‘internalised structures’ and ‘schemes of perception’ structure the shared views of the subject’s social domain (*ibid*). The observed experience and views of journalists at the SABC newsroom suggests that in regard to editorial decision-making, ‘superdependence’ on management hierarchy, in this instance, the head of news, is devalorised, while democratic newsroom practices are ascribed with value and legitimacy. The outcome of this new ‘habitus’ was that no incidents of newsroom dissonance were observed; nor were there any incidents that resulted in journalists seeking external recourse, in the courts of law or statutory compliance bodies outside the SABC. This was a shift from the culture preceding Magobeni’s ascension as Head of News.

12.2 Differing Perspectives of What PSB Represents

As discussed throughout this work, the SABC positions itself in terms of PSB. Several media scholars have likened PSB to the Habermasian public sphere narrative (Ramsey, 2010; Goodman, 2012). According to Ramsey (2010, p. 1), ‘public sphere principles of inclusion, deliberation and opinion formation’ support the mandate of PSB. On the principle of *inclusion*, PSB that is tied to the public sphere ‘is open in principle to all citizens’ (Habermas, 1997, p.105). On the value of *opinion formation*, PSB is mandated ‘institutionally and structurally to commit to a certain amount of public service content’ (Ramsey, ibid, p. 9). Habermas has helped clarify the normative role of PSB from the perspective of the public sphere. In all the above, Habermas (2009) argues that ‘functional imperatives of the market economy into the ‘internal logic’ of the production and presentation of messages’ make the re-feudalised ‘commercial and market-driven broadcasters’ less effective at providing the necessary infrastructure for a functioning public sphere (as cited in Ramsey, ibid, p. 10). It therefore follows that an effort to examine PSB performance includes normative debates about the public sphere. However, while Habermas and the public sphere concept remain a valid yardstick or template through which PSB can be explored, this normative criterion presents a challenge for empirical research. It remains valid from the perspective of offering the ideal type of PSB, particularly its role as facilitator of democratic citizenship and the pressures faced by PSB arising from both the state and the economy. In short, the normative debate advanced through the public sphere theory concerns the ideal role of PSB in a democracy. In this work, the public sphere is presented as the ideal model of what is expected of the SABC during an election. However, as a conceptual apparatus, the public sphere concept remains underdeveloped as a tool for understanding how and why the SABC produces outcomes in news bulletins. Bourdieu and other reflexive sociology scholars are moving in to fill this gap. Their model facilitates the achievement of a more holistic view of the SABC newsroom practices, one that includes the exploration of internal structures and voices, which include their own set of experiences and beliefs about what matters and how. It is the premise of this work that both the public sphere and field theories are useful and complementary for understanding the SABC and, in the case of my study, useful for exploring the news making processes and output. For example, in Habermas, the public sphere theory, through rational and critical deliberation, raises the question of how to achieve free politics that is devoid of domination and posits values such as ‘inclusion’ and diversity

(Colombo, 2010), in short, forcing us to ‘think and rethink the contours and limits of democracy’ (*ibid*, p.20).

The newsroom dissonance that was observed at the SABC during my fieldwork is thus viewed in terms of a conceptual clash between actors the SABC newsroom and the broadcaster’s management hierarchy. For instance, PSB is conceptually associated with development, social transformation, and indeed public good. However, an exploration of the various conceptions of ‘development journalism’ in some instances shows very high conflation with ‘sunshine journalism’. The latter is often touted by governments because it is seen to serve development goals as defined by the same governments but is equally shunned by others as a ‘scheme’ to conceal difficulties on behalf of the ‘powerful’. Small wonder, when then SABC COO Motsoeneng made an appeal for the ‘nation-building’ narrative in the news, claiming all he wanted was to ‘protect public property’, he was vilified by much of the journalistic community⁵⁴.

‘My thinking is when you deal with positive stories, you’re building a nation. You’re building the future of the kids. That is what I believe all of us in the media should do’ Motsoeneng (2013⁵⁵)

The paradox arises when journalists report shortcomings in the planned projects of government. They are likely to be characterised as unpatriotic and not supportive of the nation-building project. All this says little about what constitutes good or bad journalism, i.e., stories that either measure to or fail to meet the basic threshold of orthodox news values defined in terms of being well researched, accurate, fairly presented, and impartial, etc.

‘I think journalism is at its most useful when it is challenging, probing and disruptive, and the main problem with the kind of reporting we are seeing on the SABC is that it is terminally boring’ Haber (2013⁵⁶)

⁵⁴ <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-11-i-banned-coverage-of-violent-protests-to-protect-public-property-hlaudi/>

⁵⁵ <https://mg.co.za/article/2013-08-30-00-SABC-calls-for-70-happy-news/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.bizcommunity.com/PDF/PDF.aspx?l=196&c=15&ct=1&ci=99781>

However, would more positive news be helpful? Is this a case of development vs sunshine journalism? Is it all bad in the world? Several commentators have argued that often the news presents the world as a darker place than it is. For instance, a study by Beckett (2011) with a range of newsmakers globally, from Buzzfeed, the Daily Mail and others, showed how shock and alarm, a key orthodox value of ‘hard news’, sometimes frightens audiences and can leave media consumers feeling disempowered, alienated and, worse, insensitive, apathetic, and even unwilling to learn about the social world beyond their protected enclaves. Beckett (*ibid*), a former news editor and writer himself, asks whether there is too much negativity in the news agenda and proposes how it might be done differently. The conclusion in Beckett’s study was not for journalism to lose its ability to ‘tell it like it is’ or to avoid reporting issues that people do not want to hear. Rather, journalism, particularly in the context of PSB, is called upon to find ways to provide context and to promote understanding by ensuring audiences engage with the news as distinct from being ‘shocked’ by the news. Put differently, if news is going to empower its consumers, it must be ‘constructive’. This requires journalism to evolve better ways of creating and delivering news content that is more relevant and responsive. Applied to the SABC, the issue should not be whether a story is disruptive or challenging, has a positive or negative ethos, development oriented or otherwise, or whether it qualifies as a competent work of professional journalism. For example, it has been the case in some instances that development journalism has been interpreted by journalists in terms of the ‘watchdog’ approach, which entails critically examining the existing development programmes and goals of government and holding those officials responsible for implementation accountable for their promises. However, practically speaking, this study notes that the seemingly self-evident orthodox news values are at times ambiguous. Journalism ethnography researchers examine the routines, values, norms, beliefs, rules, and other factors that structure editorial decision-making processes and how journalists decide what is newsworthy (Cottle, 2007; Schultz, 2007). Investigating these values that are embedded in journalistic practice is an important task for present and future studies. (*ibid*).

12.3 Case Study Two: Failing the Public

To supplement our understanding of the institutional culture of news making at the SABC, Case study 2 considered how the SABC mediates pluralistic politics in its

coverage of news. The case study examined the television news coverage of the 2016 local government elections in South Africa by examining the extent to which the SABC fulfilled the mandate of PSB (see Chapter 10 Section Four of this work). Prime news bulletins were sampled, coded into thematic categories, and analysed to understand whether or not the SABC met its PSB obligation. The arising empirical data revealed an overreliance by the SABC on political party activities for news coverage instead of actively seeking out information and issues, thereby giving parties with greater resources inequitable amounts of news coverage (see also Dlamini et al, 2017). Further, officially accredited actors, including party national leaders received more coverage during the election campaign period and on the key public issue of land restitution – all this to the detriment of including the voices of ordinary voters and the public in general. Also notable were patriarchal limitations in which the voices of women actors were marginalised by an overwhelming male presence. In all, strategic values such as personalisation and conflict coverage were prioritised instead of issue coverage. However, the physical geographic spread of the SABC coverage reflect that of the national population spread across all regions in South Africa. This kind of structural access is key for PSB and can assist with the construction of a more inclusive public sphere and with the dissemination of important information – a public sphere in which potentially all citizens can be represented, deliberate, and contribute opinions, regardless of gender or position in the social structure.

12.4 Contributions to Current Studies

When I began my research journey, my initial focus was on how the SABC mediates pluralist politics from the perspective of the public sphere, with the identification of professional norms and values as the secondary objective. Given the broadcaster's statutory role in public service broadcasting, I assumed that there would be a significant difference between the SABC news bulletins and those of its competitors. Watching the news broadcasts live and switching between competing local national news channels, it was easily discernible that all South African national broadcasters tended to cover the same stories and interview the same actors in coverage, albeit in varying ways. As my fieldwork unfolded, I revised my research objective from solely considering the news bulletins to exploring the factors that impacted its construction. The new approach offered the promise for distinct findings while simultaneously contributing to covering the gap in newsroom scholarship on the SABC. For my study, although I conduct a

content analysis of sampled news bulletins, this is done as an entry point to the revised larger objective of my work, which is exploring the culture that impacts editorial decision-making and, by extension, news making inside the newsroom. As already mentioned, there are studies that are occupied with analysing the content of SABC news bulletins, but in opting for newsroom ethnography, I am able to make informed inferences on the bulletins based on my understanding of the culture that produces it and through the lens of the journalists who produce the news. With this approach, this work was able to explore the broader structure of the newsroom in terms of strategic power, editorial management hierarchy, and in respect of professional values and examine the ‘hierarchies of credibility’ between journalists in the same newsroom who each embody different forms of capital.

My work joins the emerging body in newsroom studies and ethnographic field work, which places less of a focus on ‘strategic power’ and resituates attention on practice above structure. I am cognizant of the changes that are currently underway related to technology convergence, digital migration, and associated practices. The thesis work by Oosthuizen (2020) is specifically acknowledged. This research examines the changes in the professional identity of SABC journalists following the introduction of online journalism practices in all three SABC newsrooms: television, radio, and digital news. Oosthuizen (*ibid*) concludes that SABC journalists are cognisant of the hierarchical structure of news management at the broadcaster. ‘While they, the journalists, sometimes allowed editors to change their stories, this was not done without resistance; it was a strategic compromise, since they understood the greater balance of their work to serve the public’ (*ibid*, p. 2). This work is invaluable to the understanding of journalistic attitudes towards editorial decision-making practices, a contentious issue at the SABC newsroom, and falls within the specific period 2016 - 2021, which is the period studied for my ethnographic account and through which I highlight some of the newsroom processes and practices that ‘structure’ how news is selected, produced into bulletins, and ultimately broadcast to generate a particular version of reality. This period is interesting because it is also a moment in time when the SABC newsroom is characterised by editorial turmoil that was widely reported by the media in South

Africa⁵⁷. This work highlights both the shared professional values among SABC journalists and the normative contests inside the newsroom. Disagreements about the selection of news often culminated in a series of newsroom dissents. The journalists that were not comfortable accommodating themselves to what would have been the daily routine of news work were ‘maligned’ by their managing executives, while others, and arguably for lack of power to reorganise news work according to their priorities, decided to take their disagreements to the country’s courts of law and statutory bodies of parliament.

12.5 Future Research Recommendations

An important finding in this work is that the sampled SABC news bulletins are not consistent with public service broadcasting principles. This is discussed at length in Chapters ten (10) and eleven (11) of this thesis. Furthermore, based on the reviewed literature, the broadcaster has a poor record of living up to its mandate as a PSB, and yet its institutional validity has remained intact. The SABC’s relevance is anchored on its statutory PSB mandate. In the Reithian sense of PSB and its values, the SABC is expected to be the custodian and provider of the arena for free public deliberation, open debate, promoter of plurality and diversity; accommodate minorities; and to contribute to nation-building and development; focus on good programming and not audience numbers; promote creativity rather than restriction of content creators; accessible to all; and importantly, address audiences as citizens and not as consumers (Scannell 1990; Raboy 1995; Price and Raboy (Eds). 2003). However, with the global arrival of the multichannel environment, social media platforms and the consequence of competition for audiences, the SABC, in particular, has been among the PSB institutions confronted with the challenge of reevaluating its approach to its audiences to retain them. This has meant proving the SABC’s utility through audience ratings, but importantly and at a more general level, new journalistic practices have been introduced to cater to the new competitive and digital news ecology. How this affects traditional systems of news making and the way practicing journalists adapt to the changed circumstances to produce specific forms of news as required is underexplored ethnographically. The value of this work is that it has considered how journalism practice at the SABC is

⁵⁷ <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/opinion/the-solution-to-sabcs-turmoil-is-clear>

understood by journalists themselves. It has done so by identifying the conceptual and other factors that impact their interpretation of news. However, research is recommended to reveal the complexity associated journalism practice, particularly how their views are shaped by the ever-evolving institutional routines of news production and processes owing to developments in the social world.

Regarding news-making processes and practices, apart from what was observed during my fieldwork, there were no officially documented Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or evidence of such. More studies could further deepen the existing understanding regarding the complex ways of news making at the SABC by mapping the editorial decision-making processes over time. During my fieldwork, the SABC newsroom was initially characterised by the widely published dissonance in the newsroom, and towards the end, there was a switch towards extreme calm. The extreme states of the newsroom made it difficult to generalise or establish the dominant culture of practice inside the SABC newsroom. Some of the routine processes, editorial management issues, norms and values that impact the selection of news are captured in the ethnographic methods from various angles: participant observation of the newsroom, particularly the daily editorial meetings, interviews with journalists in the course of their everyday work and the body of documents that were considered in this study, including reports from commissions of inquiry, court and parliamentary committee proceedings, submissions from civil society organisations, media reports, and more. As already shown, during my fieldwork, I have enabled journalists at the SABC to reflect on their own experiences, professional ideals, and shared understanding of what constitutes good journalism in the context of public service broadcasting. Habitus and the other concepts in Bourdieu's theoretical canons allow us to empirically investigate the 'seemingly self-evident orthodox news values as well as making visible the doxic news values imbedded in journalistic practice' (Schultz 2007, p 190). It is the suggestion of this work that more research be directed specifically at the journalist community inside the newsroom. Journalists across rank-and-file share professional values and ideals of journalism, values such as evidence-driven objectivity, independence, originality, and more. These are important values that I found every journalist at the SABC was excited about. SABC has a reputation for this kind and level of excitement among journalists, many of whom now occupy major competitor broadcast newsrooms throughout the country and others abroad. Exploring the

journalist community in their setting has the further advantage of bringing out the ‘epistemologies, heuristics, competences, and aesthetics, as well as social organisations, hierarchies, rituals, and technologies’, and all these together constitute the worlds in which journalists live and work (Peterson 2003, p. 162).

This work has alluded to the important insights on the SABC gained from a range of scholars, in particular newsroom studies focusing on its News and Current Affairs division (Orgeret, 2008; Arndt, 2007), and the relatively well researched political economy of PSB journalism in South Africa, including the range of studies on institutional and regulatory arrangements in the South African broadcasting environment. Scholars such as Duncan (1994 – 2000); Ruth Teer-Tomaselli & Tomaselli, Kenyan (1994 – 2005); Ryan (2000); Fourie (2000); Banda (2015); and others have presented clear accounts of on the legal framework, the public service mandate, the structural transformation, and other factors, as well as developments inside the SABC have provided my study with the necessary historical and contextual background. For example, the study by Arndt (2007), which explored the institutional culture at the SABC focusing on editorial independence is considered ground-breaking in the sense that it brought to the fore the beliefs (journalists' role perceptions), values (news values and the professional ethos) and internal practices (news decision-making, internal debate etc.), and also grappled with the issues of agency, structure, power, and power relations within the SABC (see Arndt, 2007). This important focus on the internal dynamics inside the broadcaster is distinguishable from many of studies on the SABC that have done well to highlight the various impacts from external factors such as the political economy, regulation, reform and more. Nearly 15 years later, my work complements Arndt (*ibid*) by broadening the empirical understanding of the SABC newsroom – in particular bringing to the fore the internal dynamics of news and current affairs making at the broadcaster from the perspective of the journalists themselves as they experience their everyday work. Like Arndt, my work discusses power, agency, and structure at the SABC. Notably, while Arndt's analysis is on the ways dissent was managed at the SABC, instead, my work examines the SABC newsroom culture more broadly. With the help of two separate case studies, the study builds on Arndt's institutional analysis by bringing to the fore identifiable attributes, and linking the same to the internal processes, journalistic practices, beliefs and ultimately the production and reproduction of the newsroom ecology. Bourdieu's reflexive sociology of the field,

in synthesis with Habermas' public sphere concept supplements Arndt's essential account of the SABC as an institution and as a collective body of journalists by introducing interface between new units of analysis; namely, the journalistic habitus, doxa, and capital. My study has shown that apart from the external and structural influences that impact the SABC newsrooms, the way individual journalists respond to certain situations is determined by the habitus – through which behaviour is exhibited spontaneously almost without thinking. Bourdieu's field theory allows us to identify the shared beliefs, opinions, values, and practices explain some of the attitudes in the everyday work of journalists. In this sense, as in Arndt, an attempt is made to understand the institutional and social structure of news work, and how it contributes to such attitudes. For Arndt, institutional culture takes us to a very good understanding of some of the objective experiences in the SABC newsroom. The ethnography in my work takes us further by highlighting what Bourdieu (1985) describes as the "...durable network... of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 248), through which multiple actors establish relationships arbitrarily for specific reasons. Thus, while Arndt does well to illuminate the dissent by journalists inside the SABC newsrooms against censorship, my work builds on her findings, for example by revealing empirically how censorship transforms into self-censorship, through some of the specific, identifiable attitudes, interests, and behaviours of journalists themselves. Arndt theorises this phenomenon extremely well in her study and does so in a manner that accounts specifically and extensively the debates around institutional culture, journalists' roles, and professional values. The newsroom ethnography in my work supplements the various scholarly efforts that seek to deepen the empirical understanding of the lived experiences of SABC news workers and their management, including the institutional ways of doing, routines, norms, and values. More work needs to be done, specifically to connect further the internal dynamics inside the SABC newsroom to its news output so as to develop an even more holistic understanding of the journalistic culture at the broadcaster.

12.6 Conclusion

This thesis has discussed Habermas' public sphere theory and Bourdieu's field theory and endeavoured to operationalise the two in the context of the SABC News and Current Affairs Division. Both concepts were employed to better understand the relationship between PSB and democracy, the institutional culture of news making at

the broadcaster, and how journalists and the SABC as an institution interact to produce and reproduce News and Current Affairs programming.

For example, was it possible for the SABC8 or COO Motsoeneng to exercise objectivity in instances where there existed a sympathetic understanding of the issues or actors in coverage? In Becker (*ibid*), it is impossible to be neutral. In an article titled ‘On Whose Side Are You On’, Becker (1967) introduces the concept of the ‘hierarchy of credibility’, which he uses to explain how news values tend to be active at several levels. Becker (*ibid*) questions the relationship between our values and our political choices in regard to how we perceive and respond to situations. In his subsequent article titled ‘Social Problems’, Becker wrote about the challenge of understanding issues that are connected to our social worlds, particularly the risk of becoming conflicted. This paradox is always present, and the different approaches are often contested. In Berker (*ibid*), some may even urge that ‘not to take sides’ is ‘to be neutral’, while others will argue ‘neutrality is to present information ‘that is technically correct and value free’. Yet still, some will insist that ‘information is shallow and useless if it does not express a deep commitment to a value position’ (Becker, 1967, p.239). Considering Berker and other related analyses, it is therefore the conclusion of this work that much of the dissonance that has been alluded to with respect to the SABC newsroom stems from conceptual differences and position taking within the journalistic field, specifically respect of news values or criteria and the ideal way to operationalise the same. Bell (1991) defined news values as ‘the often unconscious – criteria by which news workers make their professional judgements as they process stories’ (p. 155). How such news values impact general practices in the newsroom and interact with the personal beliefs (dispositions) of news workers and their media organisations is explained in Shoemaker and Reese (1996); however, it is in Bourdieu’s concept of habitus that we are encouraged to view all actors in a disagreement as perceiving themselves to be right in their own eyes and to understand that everyone pursues the logic of the field but in ways that are determined by the specificity of the issues and the assets that one can bring to bear (Bottero, 2009). For example, if we employ this logic, we therefore must contend with the idea that both the SABC8 and COO Motsoeneng, all through assuming diametrically opposed positions in their portrayal of what constitutes the SABC mandate, in essence both perceive themselves to be right in their ‘own eyes’. Thus, for those seeking a deeper understanding of the culture inside the

SABC, focusing only on institutional structures that enable or constrain news making (e.g., management vs journalists), may well yield a partial picture. Indeed, the range of embedded institutional routines, the hierachal management of the news-making process, ingrained norms, and news values do matter. However, in Bourdieu's view, the conceptual approach must combine all 'durable dispositions of individuals which guide social practice' (as cited in Grenfell 2004) or durable dispositions that facilitate structured improvisations of individuals, all guiding social life and often protecting them from punitive field conditions (Park 2004). By adopting Bourdieu's analytical concepts of 'journalistic field', 'news habitus' and 'newsroom capital', this work has been able to draw the connection, albeit 'fluid', between the agency of individual journalists in the newsroom and the inherent hierachal structure of the editorial management processes and how these enable, but sometimes constrain, editorial decision-making.

I highlight the term 'fluid' because, already discussed concerning Bourdieu's notion of the 'flux' between structure and agency (see discussion in Chapter 8.3.1.1), while this newsroom ethnography is concerned with the inner workings of the SABC newsroom setting, particularly the practices and logic of the actors inside the newsroom, Bourdieu challenges us to bridge the gap between the agency of the actors and the structures in which they operate. In this way, the field theory of Bourdieu facilitates an understanding of the forces that shape the journalistic field (Willing, 2013). In the case of the SABC, field theory helps explain how and perhaps why journalists inside the SABC newsroom employ certain shared professional news criteria, i.e., news values that they consider to be the basis for ethical journalistic practice. News values relate to aspects of events that belong to an established taxonomy of news, which makes the event more likely to receive coverage (Braun, 2008).

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Approval of Proposal

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Faculty of Humanities - Postgraduate Office

Private Bag 3, Wits 2050, South Africa • Tel: +27 11 717 4000 • Fax: +27 11 717 4037 • Email: madille.moeketsi@wits.ac.za



Student Number: 0516522R

Mr Tula Dlamini
50 Danie Street
Schoemansville
Hartebeespoort
Brits 0216
North West South Africa

20 October 2016

Mr Tula Dlamini

APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY REPORT IN JOURNALISM AND MEDIA STUDIES

I am pleased to be able to advise you that the readers of the Graduate Studies Committee have approved your proposal entitled "Public service broadcasting for which public? A study of journalistic practice and news construction at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)". I confirm that Dr Sarah Chilumbu has been appointed as your supervisor.

The research report is normally submitted to the Faculty Office by 15 February. If you have started the beginning of the year, and for mid-year the deadline is 31 July. All students are required to RE-REGISTER at the beginning of each year.

You are required to submit 2 bound copies and one unbound copy plus 1 CD in pdf (Adobe) format of your research report to the Faculty Office. The 2 bound copies go to the examiners and are retained by them and the unbound copy is retained by the Faculty Office as back up.

Please note that should you miss the deadline of 15 February or 31 July you will be required to submit an application for extension of time and register for the research report extension. Any candidate who misses the deadline of 15 February will be charged fees for the research report extension.

Kindly keep us informed of any changes of address during the year.

Note: All MA and PhD candidates who intend graduating shortly must meet your ETD requirements at least 6 weeks after your supervisor has received the examiners reports. A student must remain registered at the Faculty Office until graduation.

Yours Sincerely

MM Moeketsi

Madille Moeketsi (Ms)
Postgraduate Division
Faculty of Humanities

Appendix B: Ethics Approval



Human Sciences Research Council
Lwagofa la Dlolyakilelo id a Semahla le kha. Setho
Ra ad vir Goe net wau eno mdcap illo Nava nting
Umkhando u Wezoku cu an Ingq. Ngwazayen! Yes intu
Ibhru ngq. Lo pha ndo Ngwazu lu-lau ar iKamtha

Human and Social Development

24 October 2016

Human Research Ethics Committee
University of Witwatersrand
1 Jan Smuts Avenue
Braamfontein 2000
Johannesburg,

Re: H16/09/05 Dlamini

I have gone through the corrections made by Tula Dlamini (student no 0516522) to the ethics application on the project *Public Service Broadcasting for which Public? A study of journalistic practice and news construction at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)*. I am satisfied that the applicant has addressed the concerns raised by the Ethics Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. chiumbu'.

Sarah Chiumbu, PhD
Supervisor

Appendix C: Coding Form

Coding Form

Date: 4 July 2016 6.30 pm SABC Main Bulletin / Headline Story 1

Frame	Description	Code
Personalisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story contextualised around an actor, e.g. political leader 	Relates the resignation of the party chairperson and subsequent withdrawal of the decision to resign. There is discussion on the merits or de-merits of neither the court decision nor the implications thereof.	x
Conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hard Bargaining • Contentious • Competitive • Focused on winning • Lacks compromise 	NFP Vs IEC - The report states the NFP plan to challenge to High Court decision in the supreme court.	x
Other/ None of the above attributes	No voices from rank and file nor from unaccredited publics	

PSB Indicators						
Story issue	Description – issue related to election campaign e.g campaign event, press conference, service delivery, critique of govt. policy etc. (See methods chapter)					
Election – NFP vs IEC NFP Chair retracts resignation	The story begins with the case between the National Freedom Party (NFP) and the IEC, in which the NFP lost its bid to contest the elections due to administrative failure to pay fees required by the IEC on time.					
Story issue	Description – issue un-related to election campaign e.g. accident, whether etc.					
Actor / Name & Title	Constituency of actor		Gender	Story origin/Dateline		Duration of story
	Accredited	Non-Accredited	M F	KZN		2 mins 10 sec
AHMED SHAIK EMAN NFP NEC Member	x		x			
MAWETHU MOSE IEC Provincial Electoral Officer	x		x			
Prof NHLANHLA KHUBISA NFP Secretary General	x		x			

Coding Form

Date: 4 July 2016

6.30 pm SABC Main Bulletin / 2nd Headline Story

Frame	Description	Code
Personalisation • Story contextualised around an actor, e.g. political leader	Unidentified protestor justifies the protests. Police spokesperson PAUL NYATHI reacts to the rioting and claims the riots are a result of criminal elements. The two are at variance with each other.	x
Conflict • Hard Bargaining • Contentious • Competitive • Focused on winning • Lacks compromise	Protesters Vs Govt - Zimbabwe police arrest 30 people and impound 10 vehicles in running battles with rioters over salary dispute. Teachers and health care workers threaten to down tools. The narrative moves to include anger at the Vice-President Phelekezela Mpoko over his prolonged government sponsored stay at an upmarket hotel allegedly for over a year while his house is being refurbished. The report contains no right of reply nor offers any context.	x
Other/ None of the above attributes	Unidentified protestor justifies the protests.	

PSB Indicators	
Story issue	Description – issue related to election campaign e.g campaign event, press conference, service delivery, critique of govt. policy etc. [See methods chapter]
Story issue	Description – issue un-related to election campaign e.g. accident, whether etc.
Riots in Zimbabwe	The protests (described as wild-cat) were carried out by motorists who accuse the police of brutality and unnecessary roadblocks. The report further alerts the viewer of the pending nationwide civil servants strike over unpaid wages. "Zimbabweans known for being passive are passive no more" concludes the reporter.
Actor / Name & Title	Constituency of actor
	Gender
	Story origin/Dateline
	Duration of story
	Accredited Non-Accredited M F
Unidentified protestor	x x
ZRP Spokesperson Paul Nyathi	x x

Coding Form

Date: 5 July 2016 6.30 Main Bulletin 1st Headline story

Frame	Description	Code
Personalisation • Story contextualised around an actor, e.g. political leader	1. ANC Secretary General, Gwede Mantashe campaigning for the ANC in the Buffalo City Metro in the Eastern Cape 2. ANC Mayoral candidate Xola Phakathi 3. Unnamed female member of the ANC.	x
Conflict • Hard Bargaining • Contentious • Competitive • Focused on winning • Lacks compromise	ANC Vs Opposition Gwede: "There is not one Metro including the Cape Town which should be governed by the opposition... we are going to win the elections here" Phakathi: "We are happy to receive our national leadership" Unnamed: "It's a good thing the ANC is campaigning and reminding the people what it has done" Focus is on winning. Mention of Nelson Mandela Bay as highly contested area. No substantive policy or electoral issues discussed	x
Other/ None of the above attributes		

PSB Indicators	
Story issue	Description – issue related to election campaign e.g campaign event, press conference, service delivery, critique of govt. policy etc. [See methods chapter]
ANC Election Campaign Event	ANC SG Mantashe (National leader) drumming up support for the local ANC branches in Buffalo City in the Eastern Cape. No policy or electoral issues mentioned in the story – only the promise to win.
Story issue	Description – issue un-related to election campaign e.g. accident, whether etc.
Actor / Name & Title	Constituency of actor
	Gender
	Story origin/Dateline
	Duration of story
	Accredited Non-Accredited M F
ANC SG General, Gwede Mantashe	x x
Mayoral Candidate Xola Phakathi	x x
Unnamed member of the ANC	x x

There was a total of 41 SABC main bulletins sampled for the Case Study Two (2): 31 bulletins covering the 2016 local government election campaign period; and ten news items on coverage of the issue of land restitution over a 3-month period (October 2018 - January 2019).

Appendix D: Sample Coding Form: Line 'Talk' Editorial Meetings

Tuesday 21 April # Election Plan # N27 million budget
Editorial = Chairs
Kiran Pillay

CODING FORM FOR OBSERVATION OF EDITORIAL MEETINGS

Date:	17 April 2019		Kiran Pillay
The observation to focus on the type of negotiation during the editorial meeting, specifically on following types of negotiation:			
1. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation positional? Yes refers to:	Yes	No	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> hard bargaining contentious competitive focused on winning lacked compromises included hidden agendas and one-sided arguments 	# timelines values driven Demand for deployment plans for staff resources field/story deployment		
2. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation integrative? Yes refers to:	Yes	No	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> soft bargaining adaptable focused on finding win/win solutions encouraging of compromise cooperative oriented toward problem solving 	include field/story deployment		
3. Executive Editor/ Mediator's Role? The mediator is a facilitator of the process (Yes or No?) The mediator's skills and focus are on the empowerment of parties to the dispute and the relationships between them or was it distributive and positional?	Yes	No	Security concerns
4. Was there any Reference to news values? E.g. balance, accuracy, fairness, right of reply, developmental agenda, inclusion, etc	Yes	No	Quality * & timeliness
5. Upward referral: Did the discussion lead to upward referral?	Yes	No	
6. Discussion Tone Positive	Yes	No	
7. Production outcome: Did the production pan out as discussed and agreed at the editorial meeting? Features to look out for in the negotiation	Yes	No	Upward referral Has been planned Editorial planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed actors in coverage as diarised and agreed framing of the coverage as diarised and agreed the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed 			
Re: Hotel Berlin for the election Editorial Agency noted			
Reported & set for 1st time said first time Expected to sign off			

Chair: Nyana

* Editorial/Reporter
Agency
encouraged

CODING FORM FOR OBSERVATION OF EDITORIAL MEETINGS

Date:

18 April 2019

The observation to focus on the type of negotiation during the editorial meeting, specifically on following types of negotiation;

1. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation positional? Yes refers to:	Yes	No
• hard bargaining	✓	
• contentious		✓
• competitive		✓
• focused on winning		✓
• lacked compromises	✓	
• included hidden agendas and one-sided arguments	✓	

- hard bargaining
- contentious
- competitive
- focused on winning
- lacked compromises
- included hidden agendas and one-sided arguments

2. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation integrative? Yes refers to:	Yes	No
• soft bargaining	✓	
• adaptable	✓	
• focused on finding win/win solutions	✓	
• encouraging of compromise	✓	
• cooperative	✓	
• oriented toward problem solving	✓	

- soft bargaining
- adaptable
- focused on finding win/win solutions
- encouraging of compromise
- cooperative
- oriented toward problem solving

3. Executive Editor/ Mediator's Role? The mediator is a facilitator of the process (Yes or No?) The mediator's skills and focus are on the empowerment of parties to the dispute and the relationships between them or was it distributive and positional?	Yes	No
	✓	

4. Was there any Reference to news values? E.g. balance, accuracy, fairness/right of reply, developmental agenda, inclusion, etc	Yes	No
Public interest	✓	D

5. Upward referral: Did the discussion lead to upward referral?	Yes	No
Discussion Tone Positive	✓	
7. Production outcome: Did the production pan-out as discussed and agreed at the editorial meeting? Features to look out for in the negotiation	Yes	No
• the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed		D
• actors in coverage as diarised and agreed		
• framing of the coverage as diarised and agreed		
• the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed		

- the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed
- actors in coverage as diarised and agreed
- framing of the coverage as diarised and agreed
- the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed

Trap
ic
testin
device

Breathay

#

Contentious issues
raised by publics

Blade Neimande

Easter storm
unpacked
call for context

FOREIGN
DESIL - Editor walks out after
presenting

ANC - request made to join
with package from
MBB
ANC PEC
EFF SABC
BUSI
PO
SABC
Bias

CODING FORM FOR OBSERVATION OF EDITORIAL MEETINGS

Date:	23 April 2019 2:30 pm	
The observation to focus on the type of negotiation during the editorial meeting, specifically on following types of negotiation		
1. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation positional? Yes refers to:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hard bargaining • contentious • competitive • focused on winning • lacked compromises • included hidden agendas and one-sided agreements 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation integrative? Yes refers to:	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • soft bargaining • adaptable • focused on finding win/win solutions • encouraging of compromise • cooperative • oriented toward problem solving 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Executive Editor/ Mediator's Role? The mediator is a facilitator of the process (Yes or No?) The mediator's skills and focus are on the empowerment of parties to the dispute and the relationships between them or was it distributive and positional?	Yes	No
4. Was there any Reference to news values? E.g. balance, accuracy, fairness, right of reply, developmental agenda etc.	Yes	No
5. Upward referral: Did the discussion lead to upward referral?	Yes	No
6. Discussion Tone Positive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
7. Production outcome: Did the production pan out as discussed and agreed at the editorial meeting? Features to look out for in the negotiation	Yes	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed • actors in coverage as diarised and agreed • framing of the coverage as diarised and agreed • the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

* Why have they not reported to ICASA ?
 * SABC agrees to run to the story

EMS - demand for verified footage
 +1 storm + floods (JHB)
 Walks out after prevent
 DPA allegations
 will be given
 if it is right

Appendix E: Sample Coding Form: Ilungelo Lakho 'Your Rights' Current Affairs Programme

Ilungelo

CODING FORM FOR OBSERVATION OF EDITORIAL MEETINGS

Date:	28/10/19	
The observation to focus on the type of negotiation during the editorial meeting, specifically on following types of negotiation;		
1. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation positional? Yes refers to:		
• hard bargaining ✓ • contentious ✓ • competitive ✓ • focused on winning ✓ • lacked compromises ✓ • included hidden agendas and one-sided agreements ✓		
2. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation integrative? Yes refers to:		
• soft bargaining ✓ • adaptable ✓ • focused on finding win/win solutions ✓ • encouraging of compromise ✓ • cooperative ✓ • oriented toward problem solving ✓		
3. Executive Editor/ Mediator's Role? The mediator is a facilitator of the process (Yes or No?) The mediator's skills and focus are on the empowerment of parties to the dispute and the relationships between them or was it distributive and positional?		
4. Was there any Reference to news values? E.g. balance, accuracy, fairness, right of reply, developmental agenda etc Yes ✓ No		
5. Upward referral: Did the discussion lead to upward referral? Yes ✓ No		
6. Discussion Tone Positive Yes ✓ No		
7. Production outcome: Did the production pan out as discussed and agreed at the editorial meeting? Features to look out for in the negotiation		
• the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed ✓ • actors in coverage as diarised and agreed ✓ • framing of the coverage as diarised and agreed ✓ • the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed ✓		

What happens in the editorial schedule
Stages of the editorial process
on the economy
Epi / W-U-S
Language
1st Eng 2nd Signer 3rd

Debate on the Panelist candidate

I lungelo

CODING FORM FOR OBSERVATION OF EDITORIAL MEETINGS

Date: 28 | 10 | 19

The observation to focus on the type of negotiation during the editorial meeting, specifically on following types of negotiation;

1. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiator positional? Yes refers to:

 - hard bargaining
 - contentious
 - competitive
 - focused on winning
 - lacked compromises
 - included hidden agendas and one-sided agreements

Cohesive

2. Reporter/Editor/Executive Editor: Was the negotiation integrative? Yes refers to:

- soft bargaining
 - adaptable
 - focused on finding win/win solutions
 - encouraging of compromise
 - cooperative
 - oriented toward problem solving

3. Executive Editor/ Mediator's Role? The mediator is a facilitator of the process (Yes or No?) The mediator's skills and focus are on the empowerment of parties to the dispute and the relationships between them or was it distributive and positional?

4. Was there any reference to news values? E.g. balance, accuracy, fairness, right of reply, developmental agenda etc.

- 5. Upward referral: Did the discussion lead to upward referral?**

- ## 6. Discussion Tone Positive

7. Production outcome: Did the production pan out as discussed and agreed at the editorial meeting? Features to look out for in the negotiation

- the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed
 - actors in coverage as diarised and agreed
 - framing of the coverage as diarised and agreed
 - the issue of coverage as diarised and agreed

~~WhatsApp Initial Schedule~~

Date:
The obs following
1.
2.
3.
4.

Debate on the Panelist candidate topic

Epi / W-US

Language

Appendix F: Informed Consent Form

Alt: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Dear respondent:

Greetings!

Thank you for accepting the request to participate in my study entitled 'Newsroom Culture and Journalistic Practice at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC): An Ethnographic study'.

In this regard, I hope you can help by commenting on the below questions.

Interview Questions

It is anticipated that additional interview questions may arise during and after the envisaged observer participation of the SABC news editorial conferences and newsrooms. However, the following specific questions will be included aimed at journalists and editors alike:

- What do you consider as your specific role at the SABC newsroom?
- What are your criteria for deciding on the stories of the day?
- Are there any discernible organisational routines or internal rules that impact on your practice as a journalist at the SABC?
- Are there any identifiable pressures from any organised societal formation, be it interest groups, the market, or the state; which impact unduly on your journalistic practice at the SABC?
- What does public service broadcasting mean to you as a journalist?

In-depth and semi-structured interview procedures

I propose that we meet at the SABC premises, either in your office or canteen for the personal interview. You are encouraged to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time, without providing an explanation for doing so. I pledge to conduct my research in an ethical manner according to the University of Witwatersrand, and according to any laws that may apply.

Participant's signature:

Date:



Researcher's signature:

Date:

Cell: [REDACTED] | Tel: [REDACTED] | Email: [REDACTED]



Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Dlamini

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: H16/09/05

PROJECT TITLE

Public service broadcasting: A study of journalistic practice
and news construction at the SABC

INVESTIGATOR(S)

Mr T Dlamini

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT

SLLM

DATE CONSIDERED

23 September 2016

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE

Approved

EXPIRY DATE

26 October 2019

DATE

27 October 2016

CHAIRPERSON

(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr S Chiumbu

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and ONE COPY returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House,
University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and
I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research
procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. I agree to completion of a yearly
progress report.

Signature _____

_____/_____/_____

Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES