RACISM, CRITICISM OR, INEPT REPORTING?

Racism in the Media, the Relationship between the State and the Press,
and the Standard of Journalism in South Africa.

BY

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment/thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: Date:

Racism, Criticism or Inept Reporting – Abstract

The furor around racism in the media was brought to the surface in 1999 when the *Black Lawyers Association* and the *Association of Black Accountants of South Africa* appealed to the *South African Human Rights Commission* to investigate the South African media. This request was based on the presumption that the South African media was rife with racism and urgently required attention. The subsequent enquiry was the source of much controversy and accusation.

Almost three years since the enquiries inception, the issue of racism in the South African media has not disappeared despite decreasing media coverage in recent months.

When the *South African Human Rights Commission* launched the enquiry into racism, prominent media leaders including key editors and newspaper representatives were summoned to appear before the controversial Commission. Some media leaders felt the Commission was a direct attack on the freedom of the Press. Others felt the enquiry was long overdue or slammed it as an all-time flop. Furthermore, pure and simple criticism of the government is still perceived as racism when it is the Press fulfilling its role as the 'watchdog of democracy'.

Various Press theories, for example Developmental or Libertarian, impact on the perceived role of the Press in a democratic nation. The standard of journalism in a country can also impact on the way in which the press is perceived. For example, there are times when inept reporting is misunderstood as racist reporting.

This assignment is a broad overview of the enquiry into racism in the media and the concerns around this issue as well as the response to it. It takes a closer look at the role of the media and the relationship between the media and the state. In particular, it focuses on how criticism of the government can be misread as racism, as well as investigating how the standard of journalism impacts on the way in which the media serve the public.

The *South African National Editors Forum* launched a skills audit in 2002 and the results were surprisingly negative. The general standard of journalism in South Africa was assessed as "low". This assignment looks at the findings of the audit in the light of the above questions surrounding the standard of journalism as it pertains to reporting on race and accuracy, understanding and objectivity. The last section of the assignment takes a brief look at several examples of how to report on race in South Africa and what to be aware of when considering sensitivity to race issues.

The questions as to whether it is racism, healthy criticism misconstrued as racism, or simply inept reporting, are explored. Although an expansive topic by nature, this paper provides an overview of the key issues pertaining to media ethics as it pertains to racism in the South African media.

Rasisme, Critiek of Slegte Verslaggewing

Die skandaal oor rasisme in die media was te vore gebring in 1999 toe die *Black Lawyers' Association* en die *Association of Black Accountants* die Suid Afrikaanse Menslike Regtes Kommissie gevra het om die Suid Afrikaanse media te ondersoek. Die versoek was gebaseer op die gedagte dat die Suid Afrikaanse media rasisties is en dringend aandag nodig het. Die ondersoek was baie kontroverseel en het na baie beskuldiging gelei.

Omtrent drie jaar nadat die ondersoek begin het, is die kwessie van rasisme in die Suid Afrikaanse media nog lewendig alhoewel daar minder daaroor geskryf is in die land se publikasies.

Toe die Suid Afrikaanse Menslike Regtes Kommissie die ondersoek op rasisme begin het, is belangrike media leiers – redakteurs en koerant verteenwoordiges – voor die Kommissie geroep. Sommige van die media leiers het gevoel dat die kommissie 'n direkte aanval op Vryheid van die Pers was; ander het gevoel dat die Ondersoek belangrik was en nog ander dit as 'n mislukking bestempel het. Eenvoudige kritiek van die regering deur die Pers is ook as rasisme gesien alhoewel hulle die rol van 'bewaarder van demokrasie' vervul.

Daar is verskeie Pers teories, byvoorbeeld "Developmental" of "Libertarian" wat die persepsie van die rol van die pers beindruk het. Die standaard van joernalistiek in 'n land bepaal deur hoe die Pers gesien is. Byvoorbeeld, somtyds is slegte verslaggewering as rasisties bestempel.

Hierdie opdrag is 'n wye oorsig van die ondersoek op rasisme in die media, die bekommernis oor die kwessie en die reaksie daaroor. Dit kyk nader na die rol van die media en die verhouding tussen die media en die staat. Dit fokus op hoe kritiek van die regering as rasisme misgelees kan word en gee ondersoek aan hoe die standard van journalistiek na beskuldiging van rasisme kan lei.

Die "South African National Editors' Forum" het 'n Vaardighede oudit in 2002 opgedoen en die uitslae was negatief. Die standaard van joernalisme in Suid Afrika was as "laag" assesseer. Hierdie opdrag kyk na die oudit se vindings in die lig van die bogenoemde vrae oor die standard van joernalistiek: verslaggewing oor rase en akuraatheid, en objectiviteit. Die laaste deel van die opdrag kyk na verskeie voorbeelde van hoe om oor rase verslag te gee en waaroor te dink as jy sensitief teenoor rase kwessies wil wees.

Die volgende vrae is na gekyk: Is dit rasisme; gesonde kritiek wat as rasisme bestempel word, of eenvoudig, slegte verslaggewing? Hierdie opdrag gee 'n wye oorsig oor die belangrike kwessies van media etiek in verhouding met rasisme in die Suid Afrikaanse media.

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1. INTRODUCTION

> "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable
> network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly,
> affects all indirectly."
> *Martin Luther King, Jr*

The power that the media has over society cannot be overestimated. The necessity for justice or addressing displaced power within the media arena is one that affects us all. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr, if there is injustice in one sphere of society, it is a threat to justice everywhere. What affects one directly, affects us all indirectly. This is why if there is a charge of racism in the media it has to be taken seriously, evaluated honestly and analysed critically. The media is a powerful force and needs to be held accountable to the society that it serves. In the same way, the society it serves, including the government needs to be held accountable to the media community in which it is functioning.

South Africa's relatively young democracy is getting on its feet and the media is playing its crucial· role in the process. With charges of racism being bandied around by sportsmen, politicians, civilians, public servants, the government ... it seems inevitable that the spotlight would have to be shone on one of the most influential arenas of South African society – the media. And why not? Years of stereotyping, cultural framing and racist brainwashing have obviously taken its toll on all spheres of our broken society. It would be naïve to assume that it had not done so in the media arena too. But to what extent is racism the root issue? How deep do the racial prejudices go and how deeply do they affect a journalist's reporting on race related stories? In our new democracy, is criticism of our predominantly black-led government racism or simply healthy criticism?

The issue of race and racism in the media is a colossal one. It is also an ethical one. As the introductory quote intimates – what affects one, affects all. Ethics have been defined by some as "the liberal arts discipline that appraises voluntary human conduct insofar as it can be judged as right or wrong in reference to determinative principles" (de Beer, Froneman 1994:15). This explains why the issue of racism in the media is an ethical one. No educated person would argue that racism or racial prejudice is 'right' – it is deemed by society to be 'wrong'. Therefore this is an ethical issue. If there is racism in one of society's most prized and powerful spheres, it needs

to be addressed and eradicated. If there is unethical behaviour, conscious or unconscious, within the world of the media, it is wrong. This is why the South African Human Rights Commission could not ignore the plea to investigate the issue of racism in the media when approached by the Black Lawyers Association in November of 1998.

That would be simple and cut and dried if the issue around racism and power were not so complicated in themselves. It is easy to diagnose a blatantly racist word like *kaffir*, for example, or hear a racist song, as Mbongeni Ngema's recent song, *AmaNdiya*, degrading Indians, and classify it as racially prejudiced. Where the difficulty comes in is where it is subliminal. Or where it is not blatant or tangible, and certainly not visible to the untrained or unaffected eye. The stories that are not told speak louder, at times, than those that are. The order of the news, the angle from which a story is reported, the language that is used – these are all radars for searching for who has the power behind the story. But this becomes more difficult to define as racism as those in power change from white to black, and similar tactics used by those in power previously filter through into the new order.

The Human Rights Commission of Enquiry into Racism in the Media caused a great stir amongst many sectors of the country. Many felt it was long overdue, while others saw it to be an affront of the freedom of the South African press. The furore, which followed the subpoenas issued to various editors and news organisations, did not get the inquiry off to a good start. The inquiry received much criticism and little applaud, and has sparked off much debate around the freedom of the South African press.

The definitions of race in itself has caused great consternation. What is racism? Is race a misnomer? To what extent has ingrained and subliminal racism infiltrated the media world, which was and possibly still is predominantly powered by white people. Is there a difference between racism and subliminal racism in the media? When is it racism and when is it simply shoddy journalism? Is honest criticism of the government racist? This paper will look at the ethical debate around racism in the South African media as it pertains to professionalism. What is the standard of journalism in South Africa? Are the two linked?

In 2002 the South African National Editors Forum did a skills audit of journalism in South Africa and what was discovered was a frighteningly low standard of general journalism. The obvious question is whether or not this is linked to some of the journalism that is classified as

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racist. What is good, ethical reporting and what is racist reporting? A good journalist will always aim to rise above his or her cultural framing and strive towards objectivity. This is why the standard of journalism in our country and the skills of reporting on race and race-related stories need to be honed and sharpened. And the skills of those reporting on the politics and government of the country need to purport balance and fair analysis. The myth of absolute objectivity has long been thwarted, but it is still the goal and should be the aim of every good journalist.

This paper will take a closer look at a small part of the racism in the media debate in South Africa, and how the standard of journalism affects ethical reporting on race. How can South African journalism gain credibility in the area of race reporting and maintain a healthy relationship with the community and the government?

The standard of journalism and reporting on race in a country desperately trying to get on its feet after years of oppression, racism and a press that was largely controlled by the white ruling party, is crucially linked. Our repressive history has not modelled good, healthy, honest criticism of the ruling government. It is then no wonder that our relatively fresh, newly appointed democratic leaders are suspicious and sensitive about criticism from the media.

Deputy editor of City Press, ZB Molefe, remarks: "South Africa journalists have never really operated in a climate where ethical behaviour was the primary priority. Especially during the 1980s the media focus was sharply tuned to staying alive by coping with a myriad of media laws and regulations." He goes on to say that "news has become more complex and media practitioners, as well as the media public, now need to reflect on, *inter alia,* the ethical questions confronting them in a new media and socio-political environment." (quoted in de Beer; Froneman 1994: 5)

South African journalism needs to redefine itself in its new socio-political environment. A healthy relationship between the government and the press is crucial – not a 'pat on the back' kind of relationship, but a critical and yet balanced look from both parties. How can this change be affected? And what is a healthy and credible relationship between the state and the press? The recent proposed Broadcasting Amendment Bill has certainly stirred the press and media academics as well as some politicians as it threatens to control the media in ways that are not conducive to a healthy democracy. The varying theories of the role of the press in our society affect the way in which this is received. This paper will seek to understand better the relationship

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between the state and the press as it pertains to the various theories such as viewing the press as developmental and aiding in the building of a nation, or as the *fourth estate,* which involves criticism and sharp accountability.

The South African context for journalism is unlike any other. Our history is unique, our demographics unlike the United States, for example, where white is the majority, and our socio-political situation at present is inimitable. Different cultures, tribal customs, heritages and histories are some of what make South Africa unique in its situation. It is therefore vital to investigate some of our specific issues, understand our past and gain any practical aid to taking us into the future. Practical tips on reporting on race in our country may differ from those of other countries, as different language would be deemed inappropriate in our context, and varying sensitive issues to look out for.

Language is extremely powerful. Semantics are influential. World history as well as personal experience exhibits countless examples of humans arguing around and around the same issue, coming from a similar standpoint, but disagreeing purely on the grounds of semantics. It is because of this that the definitions and explanation of terminology at the outset is crucial. Not simple, often not agreeable, but crucial nevertheless. One of the criticisms of the inquiry into Racism conducted by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) was that the terms used, such as *racism* for example, were ill-defined before the inquiry began and much time and energy was spent at the outset, discussing and arguing about the definitions and understandings of racism, subliminal racism etc.

It is therefore vital to briefly define some of the terminology in this paper and gain a slightly broader understanding of the language used in this discussion. When referring to the *media* in this paper, that will be speaking of the very general broadcasting and print media, but excluding the film industry as that is such a broad and varied sphere of the communication and the entertainment sector is very different in its form to that of print and broadcasting.

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2. DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION OF TERMS

2.1 Ethics

A proper understanding of what the term *ethics* actually means explains why the racism debate and reporting on race is clearly an ethical one. The word *ethics* comes from the Greek word *ethos,* which means *custom* or *character*. The *custom* or *character* of a person, an organisation or a profession, could be defined as their ethics.

A further definition of ethics, as mentioned in chapter one, is "Ethics we understand as the liberal arts discipline that appraises voluntary human conduct insofar as it can be judged as right or wrong in reference to determinative principles" (de Beer and Froneman: 1994:6).

The Oxford Dictionary defines ethical as "relating to morals, treating of moral questions" (1954 edition). There is obviously a strong relationship, negative or otherwise, between the press and the public, which depends largely on the ethics of the former. In 1922 the American Society of Newspaper Editors wrote their first *Code of Ethics* which was updated in 1975 and covers responsibility, freedom of the press, independence, truth and accuracy, impartiality and fair play. "These principles are intended to preserve, protect and strengthen the bond of trust and respect between American journalists and the American people, a bond that is essential to sustain the grant of freedom entrusted to both by the nation's founders" (Hariss 1992:64).

The ethics of the media will largely affect its vital relationship between the journalists and the people they serve, and what they all have accepted as *right* behaviour. Day says that " ...ethics is often described as a set of principles or a code of moral conduct. Ethics involves the evaluation and application of those moral values that a society has accepted as its norms". (Day 2000:3).

Sometimes these values that have been accepted are not based on truth or fact, and the value system of a society may be not deemed as *ethical* or *right*. This means that society needs to be constantly evaluated and analysed in order to be challenged if not a fair reflection. This is why racism in the media has to be investigated and viewed as an ethical issue. The term *racism* needs to be defined – if that is possible – in order to understand the relationship between racism and ethics in the media world.

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2.2 Racism

Defining racism has proven to be an immense task of its own. One definition and understanding of racism will affect the way in which racism is accepted or rejected, or whether one will admit guilt of racism or not. Heider reminds us that "Dictionary definitions of words such as race or ethnicity do not get us very far when it comes to gaining and understanding of the concepts behind those terms. For … these terms can be complex and emotionally charged" (2000:4).

The Harvard Encyclopaedia of American Ethnic Groups states that "There is not a single authoritative or scientific answer to the question of what are the races of humankind." (1980: 869) and many anthropologists and scientists say *race* is a misnomer. Heider says that in spite of this "this does not mean that a socially constructed idea of race does not exist" (2000:5). We have to try and define the terms as they are used and understood by society today. Herewith some definitions that will seek to clarify the issue, albeit a complicated one.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defined racism as:

> Any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life. (www.niza.nl/uk/media).

Margaret Legum, SAHRC panellist says that: "Racism in the modern world is the result of the theory or idea that white people are superior to black people." Some would disagree with her and argue that the age-old conflict between the Hutus and the Tutsis could also be classified as racism, though, while others would say this is purely tribalism. Her further definition clarifies her position: "Racism is the outworking in a culture of an ideology or a theory that one's 'race' is superior/inferior to another." This inferiority or superiority is adopted and assimilated into both groups of people – those that see themselves as better and those who believe they are inferior.

Joe Thloloe says that "Racism is behaviour towards another based on one's beliefs and assumptions about 'race' and the belief that one or more 'races' are superior to others" (Steenveld 2000:11). SABC's presentation to the HRC prepared by Prof Dumisani Hlope and

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Christine Qunta, a member of the Black Lawyers Association who requested the inquiry, takes it even further: "Racism is constituted therefore when prejudices are matched with the power to act on such prejudices." And senior lecturer at Rhodes University Department of Journalism, Steenveld, defines it: "Racism is the system of beliefs and practices that people can be classified into groups on the basis of presumed differences which justifies unequal allocation of power and privilege." A deeply ingrained form of racism is more hazardous. It is the subtle and often unseen acceptance of the status quo that is subliminal and based on ingrained prejudices that is arguably more dangerous.

2.3 Subliminal Racism

Racism that is blatant and spiteful is easier to define and certainly much easier to address. It is the subtle *subliminal racism* that is more difficult to define, more difficult to see, and thus more difficult to address. It is exactly that – *subliminal* – in that it is an accepted norm, a pattern of thinking or relating that is bordering on the intangible. Racism is so ingrained in the minds of people in various societies where there is prejudice based on race, that it is often not seen for what it is. Faultlines, the HRC report, defines it as: "below the threshold of sensation or consciousness." And that the 'implication for racism is that the racist idea may be held or acted on without conscious intention – even in the presence of anti-racist conscious beliefs" (Faultlines 2000:50).

Another term for the same concept is *normalised racism* whereby an attitude or prejudice has become a part of normal thinking, a pattern of thought that is not seen as incorrect or even noticed. Sean Jacobs, at the time a researcher at IDASA, states that: "Racism is not easily exposed, except where espoused by a tiny minority who have made it a religion and a way of life. A large number of people who practice racism do not own up or are not aware of it because it has become naturalised and therefore 'normalised'" (Jacobs 2000:5).

Essed defines this as *everyday racism* in that it involves racist practices that infiltrate everyday life and become a part of what is seen as normal by the dominant group. He explains it as follows:

> The concept of 'everyday' was introduced to cross boundaries between structural and interactional approaches to racism and to link the details of micro experiences to the structural and ideological context in which they are shaped. The analysis of these

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experiences has shown that everyday racism does not exist in single events but as a complex of cumulative practices (1991:288).

An example of *subliminal racism* in the advertising media would be that of 'flesh coloured' plasters which are a light pink, beige colour. A black person would fail to see how this plaster could be called 'flesh coloured'. This is neither spiteful or, to those whose skin is pink, obvious. But to somebody whose flesh is dark brown or black that would be a glaring mistake. Whilst this is not spiteful or intended to be harmful, it is based on the introspective and perceivably arrogant premise that all skin is light pink or beige.

Tobin Miller Shearer, in his thought-provoking article, *White Spaces*, addresses the issue of *subliminal racism,* naming it *white spaces*, and focuses specifically on the area of control. He says "Underlying each of these white spaces – isolation, control, loss and loathing – is the pattern of internalised superiority that racism has taught all white persons" (Shearer 2002:3). This is not purposed; it is an underlying and ingrained superiority that is classified as *normalised* or *subliminal* racism.

Racism has become normalised or naturalised to a large degree and deeply ingrained into our society, especially after years of forced separate development and trained suspicion under the apartheid regime. Just as this has had its effect on other areas of society, so it has infiltrated the media too. The HRC report states that "Subliminal, we suspect, is simply shorthand for unacknowledged or less crude and therefore, subtle forms of racism" (Faultlines 2000:60).

Rhoda Kadalie defines *subliminal racism* as *implicit racism* and a personal example of this is when she attended a conference and a white woman asked her, during a break, what her vocation was. On hearing her answer that she was an academic, the woman responded with a patronising "Oh, so you understand what is happening at the conference". *Explicit racism*, as defined by Kadalie would be more blatant, for example, if she called somebody a 'white bitch'. (Kadalie 2002).

While many would disagree with this terminology and inaccurately believe that there is no such thing, it seems that this subliminal or normalised thought pattern which may be racist in nature, is linked to prejudice and stereotyping which are two buzzwords in the political and social arena today.

2.4 Racial Prejudice and Stereotyping

The attitude, belief, and mental construct that make judgements about people on the basis of their own presumed race or background. The word p*re* means *before* and the second half of that term *judice* obviously indicates *to judge*. Therefore, this term would imply judging before one knows the truth about a situation. In terms of racial prejudice, it is simply pre-judging a person or a situation based on racial criteria. This is defined in a similar way to stereotyping which Day describes as "a fixed mental image of a group that is frequently applied to all its members (Day 1991:279).

Retief states that the result is "an uncritical and oversimplified view of the world and society, based on a set of preconceived ideas, distortions and prejudices" (Retief 2002:193). He goes on to say that stereotyping is most common in the areas of race and gender (Retief 2002:193). These are arenas that need to be looked into from an ethical standpoint to maintain credibility and trust between the media and their community.

2.5 Cultural Framing and Ethnocentrism

Culture plays a huge role in a journalist's understanding of what he or she is witnessing and reporting on. The framework on which ideologies, worldview and operating system are built depends largely on the culture into which they have integrated. Tuchman wrote about how specifically the news media determines the frames though which people belonging to a certain culture, view events. He states that those frames are created ultimately sustain the status quo (Heider 2000:9). Gitlin explains how the framing process takes place, often without the news workers acknowledging it:

> Normally the dominant frames are taken for granted by media practitioners, and reproduces and defended by them for reasons and via practices, which the practitioners do not conceive to be hegemonic. Hegemony operates effectively; it does not deliver the news, yet outside consciousness, it is exercised by self-conceived professionals working with a great deal of autonomy within institutions that proclaim the neutral goal of informing the public. (Gitlin 1980:257)

Geyer, a reporter in a foreign land, warns against ethnocentrism:

We cannot judge others by ourselves – this is the ultimate and unforgivable egocentricity. We must go further than good reporting, we must somehow incorporate into our writing and implicit understanding of different truths that other cultures are living by – and dying by." (Starck and Villanueva: 1993:13)

Racial prejudice, stereotyping, cultural framing, ethnocentrism all have their roots in the underlying framework of thought patterns which affect opinion and behaviour. If journalists allow their cultural framework or worldview to negatively affect their accurate and fair reporting, the media world loses its credibility.

2.6 Credibility

The media loses its credibility when there is a break of trust between themselves and the public for whatever reason, and in this case, when there is seen to be ongoing unfair reporting, or reporting based on stereotyping.

"To be credible is to be believable and worthy of trust. From an ethical perspective, credibility is the point of departure in our dealings with others and our full membership in the moral community." (Day 2000:10). This is a fine definition of credibility and refers to the relationship between the one who is either credible or not, and the community around them. This relationship would be dynamic in that it would not be fixed in a community and may change according to current issues being dealt with. When a party loses credibility it is not easily regained.

The credibility of the press in South Africa was challenged by the accusation of racial prejudice in the media, which precipitated the Human Rights Commission of Inquiry into Racism in the Media. It was directed at the print media with the spotlight being shone on editors and newspaper groups. What began as a micro-level complaint by a specific group towards a specific group grew into a macro-level debacle and investigation into an extremely broad debate. The inquiry was dogged with criticism, accusation, attack, defence, suspicion and bewilderment in some circles.

The South African Human Rights Commission received complaints and requests for investigation on a regular and large scale. What precipitated this massive launch against the South African media, especially against some of whom had been labelled 'alternative' and instigative under the previous regime? This will be dealt with in the next chapter.

3.   THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY

3.1.   Background

The South African Human Rights Commission launched an enquiry into racism in the local media on 11 November 1998, prompted by an appeal from the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa. These two groups were specifically concerned about the newspapers, the Sunday Times and the Mail and Guardian, and made accusations that these two papers were guilty of racism. Fourie says, "It was particularly felt that the Mail and Guardian, in its anti-corruption investigations, unfairly targeted black professionals" (2001:70). Although the accusations were initially against the above-mentioned newspapers, the commission decided to launch an inquiry into the more general sphere of other media groups too. Barney Pityana, who headed up the commission, made a comment that is so true that it is a dramatic understatement:

> It was obvious to us from the beginning that an investigation into racism in the media of the kind we embarked upon was an ambitious project. And yet we may have underestimated the enormity of the task." (Faultlines Report.)

The task was enormous. And the research limited. But the reason that the enquiry was put into action had its roots in what may have been a valid quest. If the country has a history of racism and white superiority, with decades of brainwashing and privilege, it is only natural to assume that there may be streaks of racist, prejudiced, stereotypical or normalised/subliminal racist thought patterns in the minds of those who were conditioned by the previous regime. It was this that the commission sought to investigate – or so it seemed. There appears to have been some misunderstanding as to what exactly the commission were out to do, and with that came varying opinions as to the validity of the research and inquiry.

In the meantime, suffice it to say that the objectives and underlying principles of the investigation were not malicious, but noble in their joint purpose to address and eradicate any forms of racism left in our society. The methods may have been flawed, intent not carefully analysed and ideology not completely clear, but the initial objectives and underlying principles of the commission, as laid out below, cannot be condemned.

3.2.   Objectives

The principles underpinning the investigation were as follows (as laid out in the HRC of Inquiry documentation – Background to the Investigation):

- All humans' rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related. South Africa has no reason to place freedom of expression above other rights.

- Human rights need to be seen in the context of our country, which has a long history of racism and inequality.

- The investigation is not the same as the court process and will rather attempt to find the best means of promoting human rights. The media is a powerful force in a democracy and must act responsibly.

- The media is as vulnerable to racism as other sectors in our community. What the commission aims to do is to assess the impact of racism in public life, the language and idiom, the symbols, expressions and actions that show the reality of racism.

The objectives of the inquiry were:

- To investigate the handling of race and possible incidents of racism in the media and whether such as may be manifested in these products of the media constitutes a violation of fundamental rights as set out in the Constitution:

- To establish the underlying causes and to examine the impact on society of racism in the media if such racism is found to be manifested in the products of the media:

- To make findings and recommendations as appropriate. (Retief 2002:197)

The commission hoped that the inquiry would inform the South African public about racism that was existent, and 'generate debate and dialogue among South Africans about the nature, meaning and incidence of racism in South Africa." Another hope was that the media would gain understanding about how their work is viewed by others and engage all South Africans to seek solutions to racism. The commission stated that:

We believe that South Africans, through dialogue, will learn, understand and have the facility to use face theory and analysis so that there need be no defensiveness: will adopt

practical and relevant language; and will be sensitive to one another, especially when it comes to accusations of racism (Faultlines 2000).

So the mission was not vindictive in its quest, and the ideals on the surface seemed quite acceptable, but the methods and manner in which it was delivered by the commission and received by the journalistic community was blemished by accusation, condemnation and misunderstanding – not an uncommon characteristic of South Africa's new democracy.

3.3.   Response and reception

Whilst all of the above is honourable and certainly valid in its outset, there were a variety of responses, mostly unenthusiastic, to the investigation. The initial response was extremely negative due to the process in which the desired dialogue began. Sending out subpoenas to various editors and newspapers was not the ideal way to launch this kind of enquiry whose success would depend largely on whether it was an open dialogue addressing a broad and serious issue, or what would be deemed as an attack on a certain group.

Faultlines, the report issued after the inquiry process, stated that they "saw this as an unique opportunity to begin dialogue with our media on this very important question of racism in our society and the role that the media was playing in either combating or promoting it." (Faultlines: 2000: Executive Summary). Unfortunately, the subpoena furore tainted the process before it even began. Editors felt wrongly blamed, the press were reminded of the legal 'strong arming' tactics of the past, and accusations of racism were flying.

In fairness to the commission, Pityana did state in the final report that editors were seemingly not that keen to be a part of the process initially and that the subpoena issue was brought on by a lack of eagerness to participate in the debate, until after the furore where they seemed to intimate that they had been open to it all along. Whatever the initial reasoning, the fact that the editors and newspapers were legally subpoenaed got people understandably hot under the proverbial collar. Once the commission had met with SANEF and discussed alternative routes to the process, the subpoenas were withdrawn and the press encouraged to attend the hearings as well as present their submissions to the panel.

Many journalists, both black and white, were concerned about the hearings as they seemed reminiscent of the 'bad old days' when editors who criticised the government were brought

before panels of discipline. Many of the public were against it. The Freedom of Expression Institute of SA, an organisation formed in 1994 from a merger between the Campaign for Open Media and the Anti-Censorship Action Group, to campaign for freedom of expression, had various criticisms but also responded with "The Institute believes that it contains a genuine attempt to balance freedom of expression rights with the rights to equality and dignity." (**www.fxi.org.za**)

There were varying levels of negative and positive responses to the investigation as well as the hearings, mostly as it pertained to the following issues.

3.4. Concerns

There were many and varied concerns surrounding the inquiry. One of the primary ones being that, as already mentioned, given the sensitivity and controversial nature of the issue, the brutal and hard-handed manner in which the media was presented with subpoenas was destructive. Those issued with subpoenas were warned that failure to comply with the summons could earn them fines or up to 6 months imprisonment. A comment from IDASA was that the subpoena debacle 'compromised the prospects for a substantive inquiry" (Jacobs; Masuku 2000:2). Sean Jacobs stated, "The SAHRC could have adopted a less confrontational approach." (quoted in Retief 2002:201).

Another criticism levelled at the inquiry was that it was a macro level social inquiry that was initiated by and focused on a micro-level complaint. Racism is everywhere. Pityana emphasises this in an Institute for Justice and Reconciliation lecture at Stellenbosch University:

> Everyday in South Africa, we are confronted with the issue of racism. It is a matter we cannot avoid. It confronts us daily in news reports and in the experiences we have in our neighbourhoods and in the market place, if only we had the eyes to see and the heart to feel what others experience." (Pityana: Racism and Reconciliation Lecture: 2000).

To deny that racism exists would be like the proverbial ostrich burying his head in the sand, but to attempt to do a macro-level social inquiry based on some micro-level complaints was unrealistic and irrational.

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Much criticism was directed towards the research, or lack thereof, of Claudia Braude, a freelance writer with a degree in comparative literature. Her work made up most of the initial report and was harshly criticised by many, Guy Berger of the Journalism Department of Rhodes, in particular. Her research methods were found to be faulty, and limited. The black-owned and edited, Sunday Times, which was one of the first accused in the debate, stated of the initial HRC Report: "The document is a staggeringly inept hodge-podge of confused thinking, pseudo science, half truths, distortions of fact, and, in some instances, wholesale departures from reality." (Hawthorn 2000: www.time.com). Another criticism was that she spent much time investigating the conservative right wing press which, in the words of a comment in the Sunday Independent, was like 'looking for anti-Semitism in Der Sturmer." (Hawthorne 2000: www.time.com) Retief furthers this in quoting Jacobs: "… not only was the research sloppy, it also lacked definition. The debate over what constitutes racism should have been settled before the public hearings started." (2002:201)

Terminology was questionable and varied. *Racism* was not defined adequately before the commission and this was a substantial criticism to the entire process. Much time was spent debating what racism really is and various terminologies including subliminal racism. Dr Howard Barrell, then political editor of the Mail & Guardian expressed concerns around definitions of racism. He stated that one way of thinking is that only whites can be racist, and the other that anybody can be a racist. He felt that it would be problematic if the panel took the narrow viewpoint. IDASA's official response also cited the concern over the lack of definitions of racism (Jacobs; Masuku 2000:2).

Definitions of terminology are crucial. Language is powerful and one's definition of racism will affect one's admission or denial of guilt. A class example of this is the case of Radio Pretoria that denied guilt based on the definition of racism. Faultlines records that Radio Pretoria believed that it was not possible for them to be racist as the term implies power and control, and they are a minority group that, they alleged, are powerless. Siwiwe Minye, former IDASA journalist, says of this: "I move from the idea that for racism to be effective, power has to be part of the variable" (Personal email:2002).

Whilst the criticism of the flawed research was valid and the Braude report seemingly insufficient, the broader issue was substantially lost due to this reportedly inadequate paper. It was the cause of much sidetracking and unnecessary debate with the deeper and broader issues

of racism being diluted and misunderstood. Jacobs and Masuku state that: "The Braude Report also served as scapegoat for opponents of any discussion about the impact of race and racism on media in South Africa to declare the hearings and the enquiry a nuisance and a witch hunt as well as conveniently link racism with press freedom" (Jacobs; Masuku 2000:7).

Fears of the freedom of the press being thwarted were not allayed, but only spurred on by the strong-armed way in which the inquiry was initiated. Fourie states: "Very quickly the issues of racism in the media were overtaken by accusations from within South Africa and abroad, regarding the violation of press freedom, which threatened to sidetrack the investigation." (2001:71). There was much fear and suspicion regarding legislation and press freedom. This is understandable when seen in the light of South African media history. 'There was concern that the Commission would act like the censorship police of old and invade newsrooms or would go about doing a headcount of who constituted the newsroom. We wanted to discount that notion." (Pityana 2000:7). The notion was not discounted, by any manner of means. If anything, it was fuelled.

The concerns around the freedom of the press were the strongest and most perplexing in many circles, of all shades. The commission claimed to be aware of these and their response to this was that "the best guarantor of press freedom is a society that respects human rights" (Background to the Investigation). The fear and suspicion around the freedom of the press and the concern that any criticism of the government was perceived as racist and unpatriotic will be discussed in greater depth at a later stage in this assignment.

There were various other concerns from all sides of the fence surrounding the commission as well as the debate that ensued. Pityana voiced a concern that many white South Africans were inclined to deny or avoid any substantive discussion of racism (2000:7). Sadly, this is often true when it comes to debate about racism and more especially, South Africa's sordid past. This was clearly reflected in the difference in percentage of white South Africans as opposed to black South Africans that followed the well publicised Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with the white population of the country not engaging in the process to the extent that black population did. For whatever reasons, and they are diverse and would be the material of a thesis on its own, it does seem that white people are often less willing to engage in the racism debate.

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From a purely personal experience, many white colleagues will say "Rubbish, there is no such thing as racism in the media – don't waste your time" whereas equally educated black peers will say, "Of course, there is – if you know what to look for, and have been on the 'other side' of the fence for your entire lifetime" The fact that many of our black contemporaries and peers are aware of what appears to be racism or race prejudice means that it is something to be addressed, whether it is visible at first sight, and obvious to the untrained eye, or not. Pityana seemed to be frustrated and concerned about the fact that many white people took it as an affront and accusation and were not prepared to dialogue. Again, this was fuelled by the initial approach and the lack of genuine dialogue and fair research, as well as the ingrained defence mechanism in most human beings that says "I am NOT racist, or guilty, or arrogant, or …" and will fight to prove it.

There were also concerns from black editors about the way the inquiry was portrayed by the media in the run up to the proceedings, and that it seemed that white editors were being used as spokespersons for all editors. An example of this was how they felt that the media gave the public impression that the subpoenas were 'an assault on the freedom of expression of all editors, and secondly, that the inquiry was part of a secret agenda by the commission to intimidate white editors despite the fact that black editors had also been issued with subpoenas." (Faultlines:2000).

The hearings were well documented and are available on the Human Rights Commission website for further reading (www.sahrc.org.za).

3.5 Summary

To summarise the findings of such a commission in such limited space is a challenge on its own, but a general look at the conclusions and responses by the press and public to the final report, Faultlines, as well as the procedure, is important. While there were substantial circles that believed the entire process to be a waste of time, money and resource, there were others who felt that it had played a vital role in the race awareness process.

The final report characterised the South Africa media as 'racist institutions' that are insensitive with a 'reckless disregard for the effect of racist expression' (Faultlines).

Fourie records the summary of the findings by Lawrence and Nkutha:

- The media are racist in that they reflect persistent patterns of racist expressions

- The media offer a 'unipolar' (or unicultural) worldview, largely because they do not reflect South African cultural diversity.

- While the mainstream media do not indulge in blatant racial hatred or incitement to racial violence, there is much evidence in the press of condemnation of hate speech.

- Racism occurs at the institutional or structural levels where there are racial imbalances in the editorial staff of most media institutions (Fourie 2001:72).

The Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa reported, "The investigation on racism in South Africa's media has come to an end. After two years of mutual bickering between the South African Commission of Human Rights (SAHRC) and the media, nobody will be surprised by the final report. Yes, the media are racist. Be it direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious, they are influenced by prejudice and stereotypes on the different races." (http://www.niza.nl/uk)

A joint submission by five black editors expressed concern about the ownership and management of the leadership of news organisations being still largely white. The editors: Mr Mike Siluma (Editor: Sowetan), Mr Charles Mogate (Editor: Sowetan Sunday World), Mr Phil Molefe (Editor-in-Chief: SABC News), Mr Kaizer Nyatsumba (Editor: Daily News) and Mr Cyril Madladla (Editor: Independent on Saturday), touched on the issue of subliminal racism:

> Yes, there is indeed racism in the media. Much of that racism, however, is of a subliminal nature, which would explain why some of those who have protested too much have been so bold as to say that they do not believe it is an issue deserving of this public scrutiny which will result from the HRC hearings. Quite often, one has to be black and African, with all the hurt and indignity of the past uppermost in one's mind, to be able to recognise racism (Faultines Report).

I believe that this sums up a lot of the debate. Subliminal racism is quite different to that of blatant racism. It is more difficult to recognise, easier to ignore and often only noticed by those whose 'eyes' have been opened to it either by experience or intense listening to those who have experienced it and are therefore more sensitive or aware of it. Many wrote this terminology off completely and guised it as a last attempt of the HRC to 'find' what they were looking for.

Retief says that although the Commission found no hard evidence they were forced to "revert to the highly subjective term 'subliminal' racism" (2002:200). And that this showed a lack of commitment to real evidence. He goes on to ask "How does one regulate something that is not consciously done?" (2002:200) It is questionable as to whether the aim of the Commission was to 'regulate' anything. According to Pityana and others, it was initiated and set in motion to open up dialogue and present the press with a challenge to be unbiased in their service to the community.

Whilst the way in which this was done was flawed, as has been discussed, and some motives unclear, the foundational motive was seemingly not to silence the press, but to seek out racist attitudes and unequal power, and eradicate it. Whilst ideologies and ownerships and underlying practices may be addressed, racism, in its subliminal or normalised form, is not something that can be addressed by searching for evidence for or against, an error of assumption that, some believe, the commission made.

3.6. Evaluation

Whilst admitting there were flaws in the procedure, Dr N Barney Pityana felt that it was a 'watershed initiative in the annals of the nascent democratic South Africa." It seemed clear that an area for growth and one that would help in the transformation of the media arena, was more adequate training for young black journalists as well as those aspiring to leadership in the media business. The five black editors mentioned before stated that: "Given our history of racial discrimination, it is imperative that special attention is paid to the training at all levels, but especially in senior levels, of black media professionals. Simultaneously there ought to be training aimed at assisting media workers to report on and interpret issues involving race." (Faultlines)

As any academic has to take heed of, I am aware that there are always the proverbial two sides to every story and most of the analysis and reports researched found during this study was of a very negative nature toward the inquiry. I am well aware of the fact that I never interviewed Pityana myself or consulted the five editors who were concerned or the members of the Black Lawyers Association who laid the charge against the M&G and Sunday Times that initiated the inquiry. It is obvious in reading the various responses for and against the commission, its initial findings as well as the final report, that many 'missed the boat' in the entire process, and for want of a better idiom, the baby was thrown out with the bathwater.

An editorial in the Sunday Times sums up a balanced, yet critical approach of the entire process and outcome:

> No critics of the commission disputed the need to tackle racism. There was agreement that there was plenty of racism in the media, as there was in the rest of South African society. This racism manifested itself in demographics, in personal relations and in the content of media products. There was agreement that urgent measures needed to be taken to excise this cancer. And opponents of the probe accepted that the media should take the lead in helping South Africa rid itself of this scourge. However, they warned that such a probe – with its emphasis on analysing subliminal messages supposedly contained in media products – would set a dangerous precedent for a country still trying to build its floor of basic rights and norms.

The author of the editorial went on to say what many felt, that the 'commission wasted a process that could have enriched our understanding of racism and helped us tackle it.'(Sunday Times editorial 27 Aug 2000. **www.suntimes.co.za**)

TIME magazine published a response by their South African based correspondent, Peter Hawthorne, who stated: "That racism persists within a South African press that was once almost exclusively white is of no surprise to most people. But many of South Africa's media … are now black owned or editorially managed. In the new, post-apartheid South Africa high profile black politicians, civil servants and business executives are now the subject of media focus because of their status, not their colour" (**www.time.com**). The statement about many of South Africa's media being black owned or editorially managed is questionable, as the SANEF Skills audit states that "Except for Johannesburg, the results indicate that the majority of newsrooms, especially those in Port Elizabeth, are still to a certain extent white." (Sanef Report 2002:23)

Although Pityana and others stated that this was no trial, that there were no accused, but participants in a legal process of discovery and seeking a way forward, what the commission did accomplish, was a growing mistrust between the media and government. Pityana admits that fear and suspicion fuelled a great deal of the furore about the investigation, and much of this was fear of restrictive legislation. He stated that, "There was no rational justification for that but it was there nevertheless" (2000:7). He also stated that the inquiry was about racism and not so much

about freedom of expression. Many would disagree. One who vehemently disagrees is Rhoda Kadalie, a previous Human Rights Commissioner and academic, who fiercely believes that the press should be the watchdog of the government.

> What is clear is that the hearings have left deep marks. The government accuses media of unfair reporting whereas journalists feel scapegoated by a government that cannot handle criticism from its former allies. And the suggested race-sensitivity training for all journalists will not be able to change this very easily." (**www.niza.nl/uk**)

The Freedom of Expression Institute summed up the criticism well: "Many media and human rights organisations, both in and outside the country, saw the Human Rights Commission's investigation into racism in the media as a threat to the freedom of expression, a right which the Commission is expected to protect" (Retief 2002:199). FXI's reponse to the final report was positive: "Despite a finding that South African media can be characterised as racist institutions, it is also reassuring to note that the commission found no evidence of the mainstream media indulging in blatant advocacy of racial hatred or incitement to racial violence" (**www.fxi.org.za**).

Whether one believed that it was a watershed development of South African democracy in that it promoted and protected human rights, or that the investigation was a travesty of media freedom, Fourie states fairly that: "Whatever one's views, the hearings sent shockwaves throughout the media." (2001:72). He sums up much of the final debate in the following, quoting Glaser:

> As far as the press was concerned, the problem was not the revelation that there is racism in the press, nor that the SAHRC tried to counter it, but that the SAHRC was seen as having set itself up as the final judge in deciding what was or was not racist, that is was equating criticism of the government with racism and that it was using its statutory powers to force the media to appear before it (Fourie 2001:72).

This was one of the greatest legitimate concerns around the investigation, and one that requires a deeper look into the various theories of press freedom and journalistic expression and restriction. Often the boundaries are fuzzy as to what is racism and what is criticism. Often what is completely valid criticism of those in power is diminished and belittled by those accused, as racism. When is it racism? When is it healthy criticism? A broader understanding of the role that

the press is to play on the stage of society with all its complications, human inconsistencies, power struggles, insecurities of leaders, and suspicion of followers, is vital.

Governments have been criticised by the press since both of their inception. It would seem that the only press that doesn't censure their governments, are those that are intimidated or owned by the former. In our complicated socio and political South African society, racism and criticism are often, and quite understandably, confused.

4. RACISM VERSUS CRITICISM

Is honest criticism sometimes misconstrued as racism? When the Mail and Guardian criticises corruption within the ranks of the government, are they being racist simply because the government is largely black, or are they performing their role as the *watchdog* of the government and society? The way in which one perceives the role of the press in society today, will largely affect how one accepts or rejects the current role that the press is playing in our relatively new democracy. A brief look at the history of the press and press theories will help.

4.1 Early History and Press Ideology

Napoleon said, "A journalist is a grumbler, a censurer, a giver of advice, a regent of sovereigns, a tutor of nations. Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets." (Hachten 1999:15). That the pen is mightier than the sword is true. The extent of the power that the media and those who play its game hold is immeasurable and wars/elections have the potential to be won or lost on this score. Journalists have the power to influence the thinking of the people. They have the power to shape the actions of those in power. They give power to the powerless. The media shapes public opinion in a way that not much else can compete with.

Leaders throughout the centuries have known this inescapable truth and been threatened by it. In 1671 Governor Berkeley of Virginia in America made the following statement: "I thank God we have no free schools or printing. And I hope that we shall not have them these 100 years. For learning has brought disobedience and heresy and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them and libels against the government. God keep us from them both." (Bradley 1965:5).

Much of global society has moved away from this way of thinking as democracy has developed. Thomas Jefferson said, "When the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe." (Hachten 1998:36). Thomas Jefferson also said in 1787 "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Hence the intense interest of the government in matters of the media and how they portray those that rule.

The relationship between the government and the media is a complicated one with a serious investigation into it beyond the scope of this assignment. Whilst we cannot look into it

extensively it is vital to briefly touch on it because of the often-misunderstood criticism vital in any healthy democracy. What an unhealthy relationship is could be another debate, but suffice it to say that a 'free press' is the basis of a healthy state. This has not always been understood and, in some societies, still not perceived or practiced today.

A complicating factor in this debate is that the newspapers are a private business enterprise that operates as a public institution crucial to society. Bradley states: "As public institutions, they are expected to serve the good of the public, but as enterprises they must look to their own interests. It has been suggested that since they are necessary for the public welfare the government should help to support them, but the thought of government support carries with it the threat of government supervision which is repugnant to a free press" (1965:18).

The underlying foundation to the manner in which the press is perceived depends largely on the theory of the press that one holds to.

4.2. Related Press Theories

There are various theories that affect the relationship between the government, society and the press. Hachten states, "A basic tenet of the following analysis is that all press systems reflect the values of the political and economic systems of the nations within which they operate. The trend towards internationalisation notwithstanding, print and broadcast systems are still controlled and regulated by their own national governments ..." (1996:15) And this is obvious by the fact that still today, in our modern and 'global' village, there are various societies with diverse ideologies that are holding onto opposing press theories.

4.2.1 Authoritarian Press Theory

The name of this theory sums up most of its canon. Hachten summarises it in one succinct definition: "The basic principle is quite simple: the press is always subject to the direct or implied control of the state or sovereign. A printing press (or later, a broadcasting facility) cannot be used to challenge, criticise, or in any way undermine the sovereign. The press functions from the top down; the king or ruler decides what shall be published because truth (and information) is essentially a monopoly of those in authority" (1996:16).

Fourie says that this type of theory prevails in dictatorial societies and sums up the function of the press: "... the press is nothing else but an instrument and mouthpiece of government."

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(2001:270). A simple glance at the globe and other countries with dictatorship-type leadership, and the manner in which they manage their press reveals the truth in this statement. An appropriate modern day example of this kind of theory coming from government is Robert Mugabe's draconian laws regarding the freedom of the press in Zimbabwe. This has been on the increase during the past few years, but as his position has become less secure, so has his grip on the media (and entire country) tightened. The Voice of the People radio station was destroyed on September 2, and as TIME reports "The incident, in which no one was hurt, comes after claims by the government of Robert Mugabe that the independent media are conducting an anti-government campaign" (TIME Email news: 2 September 2002).

4.2.2   Western Libertarian Press Theory

This theory was birthed out of a reaction to the authoritarian model, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. It was largely founded on the emphasis on democracy and personal freedom that emerged from the enlightenment era (Fourie 2001:271). The western concept of journalism claims to believe that government should not interfere in any way with the news process. Hachten describes it:

> The press, in theory, must be independent of authority and, of course, exist outside of government and be well protected by law and custom from arbitrary government interference … The ideals of Western libertarian journalism are, to a large extent, a by-product of the Enlightenment and the liberal political tradition reflected in the writings of John Milton, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, and John Stuart Mill (Hachten 1996:19).

It is Milton's self-righting principle that undergirds much of the western theory of non-censorship and freedom of expression. He said that:

> And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously, by licensing and prohibiting, to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; whoever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter (Altschull 1990:41).

The libertarian theory promotes the fact that people are able to discern between truth and lies, between good and evil, and the press are vital in this search. Fourie states: "… the press is seen as a source of information, … informing people about government … and enabling them to

monitor their government and form their own ideas about policy. The press should be free from government control and government influence" (2001:271).

The press, in this theory, is seen as the *fourth estate,* which is there to keep a watchful eye on the government and guard the freedom of the people. It is where the press have been "encouraged to act as a fourth estate along with the legislative, executive and judicial authorities in the governing process" (Fourie 2001:271).

A diversity of news is encouraged in this model, and a free press applauded. The United States of America boasts a free press, and certainly, in comparison to many other countries, they are one of the most 'free' presses in the world today. Their famous First Amendment states: "Congress shall make no law … abridging freedom of speech or of the press." In spite of this though, they have too been guilty of the temptation to quieten 'negative' press and hide truth for fear of propagating a less than positive image. Peter Arnett, reporting on the Vietnam War, states that apart from the hazards of the battlefield there was intense pressure from the government to "get on the team" (Arnett 1994:175). Those who reported the situation as they saw it were labelled as 'unpatriotic.' "Caught between the truth of what we saw and the nation's sense of patriotism, the Vietnam reporters became something like outcasts, destined to defend their professionalism for the rest of their lives." (Woodhull, Snyder 1998:23).

It is clear that in all societies, even so-called free and advanced democratic ones, the threat that the government feels towards a critical press is, at times, overwhelming to leaders in any kind of crisis or power struggle.

4.2.3   Development Theory

This press theory claims that the press has a role to play in the development of the nation, and that positive and helpful press coverage is vital to any developing country. Fourie defines it as: "…the positive use of the media to promote national development, autonomy and cultural identity." And that "common objectives are given priority over individual freedom" (2001:274). McQuail identifies the basics of this theory, which is helpful to understand some of the media and government debate that is growing in South Africa at present:

- The media should make a positive contribution to the national development process.

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- The state should be able to restrict the media if economic interests and the development of society are at stake.

- The media should give preference to information about national, cultural and language issues.

- The media should also give preference to information about other developing countries that at geographically, culturally and politically akin to one another.

- Journalists have both responsibilities and liberties in obtaining and distributing information.

- To protect development objectives, the state has the right to intervene by restricting and censoring the media. State subsidies and direct control are therefore justifiable (Fourie 2001:274).

It is helpful, at this stage, to take a closer look at the history of the media as it pertains to our country and its lack of press freedom during earlier years.

4.3 Media and Government in South Africa

4.3.1   Tensions in Early Press/Government relationship

Newspapers have often been the thorn in many a government's side – especially if they have not bought into the development theory and are self-appointed 'watchdogs' of the leadership of the country. This is no new phenomenon in South Africa. From the days of the *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser,* first published in 1800 at a government-owned printing press at the Castle, the leadership has attempted to control what the press say about them. Lord Charles Somerset had much control over what went into this paper and ensured that it was leaning towards colonialist interest. The first non-government paper, *The South African Commercial Advertiser* did not last long because the editors addressed the slave trade in less than favourable terms to Lord Somerset. They were duly punished and banished in disgrace, and their paper unceremoniously banned (Fourie 2001:35).

The first edition of *The Journal* was printed in 1824 by Thomas Pringle and John Fairbairn, and became unpopular with the then government. Within two months they had been warned that the paper would be closed if they did not stop criticising the authorities (Fourie 2001:35). This interesting little part of the history of the press in our country simply indicates how most

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governments feel threatened by criticism by the press. It is often misunderstood that with the Apartheid regime came the restriction of the press. It certainly increased, which becomes obvious as is shown in just a few examples below, but it is not the first time in South African history that the press have been silenced. It has been happening for centuries.

4.3.2. The Press and Apartheid

Like most countries, South Africa has a long history of its own power struggle between the media and the apartheid regime. The apartheid regime produced a 4000 page Press Commission Report that took 13 years to prepare, examining foreign press coverage of their country and rule. It was found that 67.25% of the coverage was negative and hostile to the government. The report suggested that there be some kind of 'statutory control over the obviously wayward press' (Hawthorne 2000: TIME).

In 1971 Eschel Rhoodie, then press officer for the South African embassy in The Hague, convinced John Vorster, then Prime Minister, to fund the project of enhancing South Africa's image overseas. An agreement was negotiated with a Dutch publisher who helped start up *To the Point*, which was to counter foreign bad press coverage. This was financed by the South African government, who also put R32 000 million into an English, pro-government newspaper called *The Citizen*. News of this leaked out and Prime Minister Vorster was forced to resign in 1978 because of the scandal.

Taxpayers' money and government funds were used to finance these and other media projects by the new prime minister, PW Botha's Department of Defence. Other forms of propaganda grew out of the government's fear of criticism and exposure. Notorious Eugene de Kock confirms this in his biography: "Stratcom (Strategic Communication) was a peculiar web of covert propaganda projects, emanating from the SSC (State Security Council) but run by different departments (the police, the SADF and the department of Foreign Affairs)." He continues, "The SAP, for example, oversaw the AIDA Parker newsletter, a rightwing publication. Foreign Affairs apparently ran a West German news service aimed at 'countering negative reporting on South Africa." De Kock also admitted that "Among the SADF projects were Project Guano, intended to 'build the image of the security services among the population groups; and Project Seeppot which was intended specifically to influence the media ..." (De Kock 1998:94).

There were those in the press, predominantly the English press, who opposed the government where possible, although censorship was strict and editors and journalists harassed. Much of the Afrikaans press had close ties with the government and these links were obviously detrimental to just reporting. Roelofse explains: "… they did not expose or investigate graft or corruption, even when they knew something about it. They became victims of self-censorship in exchange for favours from prominent people in government" (Fourie 2001:44).

The South African press did not have free reign. The Information Scandal of the 70s exposed the government's will to control and shape the media. Democracy and society is never entirely free of this threat of manipulation and control though and, as showed before, the tension is an ancient based more on fear and threat of loss of power than racism or anything else.

In more recent history, the truth about the notorious 'Arms Deal' was seriously threatened as an attempt was made to make the ANC government and certain prominent parties therein, look less irresponsible and guilty by simply avoiding press coverage of the issue. Noseweek editor, Martin Welz, speaking at a press club in 2001, said "the South African media and public should be asking the same questions over the current government arms deal if they don't want to see the same bad mistakes of the Information Scandal repeated" (www.news.24.com)

The degrees to which the press was silenced largely depended on which side of the fence they were standing – the right, in more ways than one, or the left. The government predominantly funded the broadcasting side of media and programming was controlled and agendas up front and clear. The government largely controlled television and radio, whilst this was not as easy within the print media. Newspapers were more difficult to control and much time, resource and energy was poured into keeping a beady eye and tighter control over those who were putting pen to paper. The government would not allow criticism from the mainstream press, and desperately squashed any criticism from various other circles within the borders of its control. The alternative press were silenced where possible by the leading powers' fear of exposure, and the press allies to the government were silenced by their own ideology and pats on the back by their superiors. The role of the media, especially the print media, during the apartheid regime is a vast study on its own and does not fall within the scope of this assignment, but suffice it to say that there has been no healthy example of a free press in a democratic society in South Africa. Current leaders have not seen the advantages or even seen the sting of a critical press in our society. It must be added here, that although it was largely pressure from the outsider press that

precipitated the eventual fall of apartheid, the basic idea of a free and critical press within the country has not been modelled. In the light of this, it is not difficult to understand why some of the players are shouting cries of 'foul play' and 'racists' from the sidelines, and often the field itself.

4.3.3 Post Apartheid Press

It is clear that South Africa has not had a good role model of a healthy press that can criticise the government. During apartheid, as discussed, the press was strictly censored and controlled by those in power – in this case, a white government. During the so-called State of Emergency in the mid eighties, severe restrictions were put on the press. The areas where political unrest was at its highest were off limits to the press. There was no freedom of the press and what the public had the 'right to know' was completely formulated and controlled by those in power. The press, particularly the alternative press, which included papers such as *The Weekly Mail* and *The Guardian Weekly*, were suppressed and pressurised, as were the more mainstream editors who dared to criticise the government.

Today when the press criticises the ruling powers, which are predominantly black ANC leaders, the lines between healthy 'watchdog' criticism and racism are fuzzy. This is largely because some sectors of the press are still predominantly white-led, and the government is made up of largely black men and women. There has been no healthy role modelling of the *fourth estate* of the press being a part of society that is in good shape. It is easy to see how this can be misunderstood and fuel the fires of racism critique and debate.

Where does the media's role in democracy fit into the government's right to decide what is beneficial for the public to know? Thabo Mbeki once said whilst still Deputy President, that those "who had vision of the revolutionary transformation which faced South Africa to redefine the news and position the media, so they would also become an important element in the engine that would lead to the country's destination." Versfeld, Kruger and Smith feel that this statement 'urges media criticism to be restrained by patriotism for the 'new' South Africa." (www.sun.ac.za/journalism/sji/1996/sunshine.html)

Alarming words if one follows the theory that the press is the watchdog of the government and should be there to hold it accountable and critically analyse its movements. It was Lenin who said with certain ignorance in 1920, during a speech in Moscow:

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Why should freedom of speech and freedom of the press be allowed? Why should a government, which is doing what it believes to be right, allow itself to be criticised? It would not allow opposition by lethal weapons. Ideas are much more fatal than guns. Why should any man be allowed to buy a printing press and disseminate pernicious opinions calculated to embarrass the government?" (Bradley 1965:74)

A hard-hitting comment from Rhoda Kadalie that addresses the non-critical stance that many white and black people take towards the new government, as well as how the government see themselves:

While most liberation movements have the moral high ground because of their legitimate struggles against colonialism, post independent governments feel that they can still trade on this morality, even though they mimic their former oppressors in every way (2002:8).

Helen Zille, once journalist and former MEC of Education in the Western Cape, stated on this:

When any government, group or individual runs out of arguments, they choose the easy option – and in South Africa the easy option is to accuse your critics of 'racism'. The tendency of hiding behind easy arguments so that one does not have to address the real issues, is particularly prevalent in South Africa, given the history of institutionalised racism, and the difficulties of acknowledging the validity of criticism (Zille 2002).

Often criticism is seen as a lack of patriotism. Sean Jacobs explains that many black editors and journalists are pressurised by the government, or their seniors to "defend the gains of April 1994 and to act in 'national interest' by supporting the current regime." (1999:1) It is into this racially divided and complex democracy that many individuals within the press are struggling to find their way, not forgetting their past, but trying to walk free into the future.

The debates around the HRC of Inquiry into Racism in the Media, as well as current dialogue around the press's criticism of the government, may sound vaguely non-threatening on a surface level and many may simply write it off to differing opinion. But the underlying foundational ideology and philosophy regarding the press and its relationship with the government is frighteningly in the balance when leading voices such as that of Thami Mazwai of the SABC, express concern about criticism of our ANC led government. And anyone who threatens to

uncover corruption and negligence in governance is duly labelled racist or unpatriotic, or even better, about to stage a coup. Jacobs sums much of the situation up: "Under apartheid the press operated in a context of repression and censorship and of extreme partisanship. The post apartheid context has presented the media with a context in which they can thrive ... the media has responded by insisting on greater independence, to report more informatively on the business of government" (1999:9).

4.3.4   Tension in the ranks

The deeper root of the tension that is mounting between the government and the press is founded in the various understandings of press theory, and the role of the media in the process of good governance. Sean Jacobs explains why this tension results:

> The fault-lines are clear. The government is overwhelmingly black-led; the media is still largely white despite recent attempts to change ownership, management and personnel patterns as well as news focuses. Government appeals to a set of media values informed by a 'developmentalist' approach; the media (with a few exceptions) harbour 'liberal-humanist' notions of their role in the new democracy (1999:1).

The clashing of these two theories is the root of the tension. If one believes that the press is there to be used by the leaders to promote and 'build' the nation then it is understandable that any criticism of the leaders will be seen as a negative thing. Whereas if the press is seen as the *fourth estate,* there to guard the community from corrupt and self-serving leaders, and ensure good governance, criticism of leaders by the press will be seen in terms of them fulfilling their vital role in society.

Loud voices in the cry for a patriotic press are Thami Mazwai and John Qwelane, both journalists who suffered under the hand of a non-free press and who have, according to Jacobs, "long held white press owners in contempt for their hypocritical obedience to press freedom under apartheid." (1999:5). The basis of their beliefs are founded on the idea that the press must now help build the country and serve the government's objectives, as it is assumed that the current government is noble because it took over from such a corrupt and wicked system, the exact opposite of "noble". It is easy to forget the warnings from history and books such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where frequently the oppressed become the oppressors, no matter how noble their initial fight for control.

Respected leader, ex-president and icon, Nelson Mandela, articulated some of this ideology in a speech at the ANC National Convention in 1997. He accused the press of being 'counter revolutionary' and 'undermining' the government's attempts to work at implementing the ANC's plans of the reconstruction and development of our country (Jacobs 1999:7). This sums up much of the ANC's attitude towards the press and the underlying press ideology of developmental journalism.

Mazwai states that he supports freedom of the press: "We worship press freedom. Hence we even went to jail while some of our white colleagues damned us for being activists but did not see anything wrong with themselves for donning the then South African Defense Force uniform. However, press freedom does not exist in a vacuum. It must serve South Africa and help us achieve national objectives … every freedom has limitations" (Jacobs 1999:6).

More recent statements made by Thami Mazwai have led to the Congress of SA Trade Unions (Cosatu) calling for his resignation as the deputy chair of SABC news programming. Some of these included: "There is always a tendency to try and compare the SABC with the other media. This is a grievous mistake." And " You can't afford to be driven by old clichés such as objectivity and the right of the editor." These statements would be laughable were they not so dangerous, was the feeling of the Union. (www.itechnology.co.za)

Our structure of our media systems today is largely due to the policies of the past. For example, in 1948 the Schoch Committee suggested the 'commercialisation and decentralisation of radio" and the government continued in its monopolistic way which has given The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) the strongest broadcasting position in the country. It's the country's oldest broadcasting agency and has dominant control since its inception in 1936. Fourie explains why they have been seen as the government voice piece and are still, by many, today:

> … alternative points of view, particularly of a political nature, were excluded from programme content for many years. This led to that the SABC was a government mouthpiece. Despite regulation of the airwaves, the SABC still continues to dominate the broadcasting environment by virtue of its sheer size … (2001:3)

There have been attempts to distance the SABC from the government, and the birth of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) in 1993, was one such attempt. It was developed to give the SABC better credibility, particularly during the elections in 1994. Among its roles, was to regulate and monitor all broadcast. (Fourie 2001:16). Since then there have been various and significant changes in the SABC and its relationship with the state and commercial interest. [1]

A serious concern in many circles is the power that monopolies in media have. Concerns surrounding the SABC and the new Broadcasting Amendment Bill are growing. The bill basically allows the SABC to become a public company with two independent divisions: a public service division and a commercial one, with the state being the only shareholder in the new company. FXI Executive Director, Jane Duncan, says: "The Broadcasting Amendment Bill represents the death of public broadcasting and the rebirth of state broadcasting." (www.mg.co.za). SANEF's chairperson Mathatha Tsedu said that "if these amendments are actually tabled for discussion, it will be a clear indication that the government intends to turn the SABC from the public broadcaster into more of a state broadcaster. That should be avoided at all costs" (www.news24.com).

Thami Mazwai's comments added to the rumblings of the new bill, have caused a stir in many circles, but others deny any reason for alert. SABC Board Chairperson Vincent Maphai said, after speaking with Communications Minister Ivy Matsepe-Cassaburri, "The minister affirmed that the SABC's editorial independence was never in jeopardy, and would be protected and not compromised by the Broadcasting Amendment Bill." (www.news24).

There has been much criticism of the bill and it is interesting to note that ANC Congress MP Nkenke Kekana said that any comments were "premature attempts by newspapers to portray the SABC in a bad light" (www.news24.com).

The establishment of the Press Ombudsman, whose role is to investigate complaints, in 1996 – with this "the press has moved away from an era of government regulation and government induced self-regulation towards a regulation by the press itself in order to serve the interests of the public" (Fourie 2001:74).

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[1] For more on this read Fourie 2001:31.

4.3.5 Threat to Democracy

Silencing the media in any shape or form is a serious threat to democracy. "The first casualties of undemocratic governments are usually restrictions on press freedom, the harassment and victimisation of free thinking independent commentators and crucial journalists" (Kadalie 2002:5).

This is nowhere as obvious in our African neighbourhood as in Zimbabwe at present. President Robert Mugabe has done the stereotypical dictatorship act of suppressing any media that has criticised him. Only in Zimbabwe, it is black press that is criticising him, so he has turned to playing the 'race card' on a more global level too, lashing out at Britain and any country who speaks out against his draconian laws on the press. One of his most recent, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Bill, is aimed at clamping down (as if it has not been clamped down on already) on private media that have been too critical of his governance. It also enforces greater control over foreign media operations.

When seen in the light of what is happening, and has happened, over the past twenty years of Zimbabwean independence, it is no wonder that South Africans, particularly in the media arena, are getting jumpy about some of what South Africa's government is concerned about regarding criticism.

"Post-independent governments everywhere are sensitive about how they are portrayed in the media, to their constituencies and particularly to their international allies who helped them achieve democracy" (Kadalie 2002:3). She goes on to remind us that most governments, even in democratic countries, hate media criticism, and this is something that those who constantly cry that the 'media is unpatriotic and not committed to transformation' often forget. On World Press Freedom Day Tony Blair, whose government is harshly criticised by the press, stated:

> A free press will sometimes make uncomfortable reading for any politician. But any passing embarrassment or justified indignation must never blind us to its vital role in both the health and protection of democracy. Those who wish to destroy democracy and its freedoms know this well. It is why their first act is often to try and muzzle the media. It is also why we must be vigilant in safeguarding the freedom of the press at home and abroad (Kadalie 2002: 3).

While men like Thami Mazwai are asking for press freedom and editorial independence not to be placed above national interest, others are seeing the possible threat to our democracy. Anti-apartheid veteran Helen Suzman stated, in response to comments that Mazwai made during the meetings around the selection of a new SABC board: "It is extremely dangerous in terms of our democracy. He (Mazwai) is an open racist. He always makes anti-white remarks. In his eyes anything anti-black is against the national interest." She also stated that national interest best served by "a fearless opposition inside Parliament, a vigilant press and non-governmental organisations outside parliament …" (Sunday Times 21 November 1999).

Cosatu expressed their concern over the fact that the SABC did not disassociate themselves from Mazwai's statements and stated that: "Mr Mazwai should resign his position in the SABC board and all other journalistic professional bodies. By so doing we will all be spared public broadcaster brown-nosing and perhaps have an SABC that is salvageable." (www.woza.co.za)

The Freedom of Expression Institution states that:

> To accuse a group of professionals of being unpatriotic, particularly the media also poses a threat to democracy because it begins to stifle input into national debates. Democracy demands that people express their opinion on all matters that affect their lives without fear and the media is a mirror of that (www.fxi.org.za).

When reporting is imbalanced, one-sided and unfair in any way, that is unethical journalism. The myth of absolute objectivity has long since been thwarted, but when any media agent only looks at one side or only criticises one aspect of an issue, in this case, the government, that can be classified as racism or bad journalism. The truth is that in many of the more conservative white people's minds, the new black government can only do wrong – they are doomed to fail. And negative reporting that is unbalanced or unethical merely feeds this kind of thinking.

The flip side of this is what Rhoda Kadalie calls "bending over blackwards", a humorous yet profound summary of the need of some white people to overcompensate for lack of activism during *apartheid,* resulting in a non-critical view of the government. Government will often be defended at all costs based on the past, in spite of allegations of corruption and malpractice.

The media need to challenge the government in a healthy and balanced way, without constantly knocking everything they do. They also need to report in a fair way on the successes of the ruling government whoever that is. This is good journalism. Anything less can be viewed as sloppy.

5. RACISM VERSUS INEPT JOURNALISM

5.1 Incompetent Journalism

"Never attribute to malice what is best explained by incompetence." These words of Kanthan Pillay sum up much of a large area of concern within the media community (2000:45). Incompetent reporting and sloppy journalism is often misunderstood as racism or malice in our country. When journalists do not do their homework properly, or report on only one side of an issue – whether their prejudices are behind this or not, it is one of the most telling signs of inept journalism. Bad journalism is often mistaken for racism, and given the earlier research of this paper, one can see why.

Sean Jacobs, researching the relationship between media, power and democracy says: "Any serious interrogation of racism in the media must, among other things, look at the work practices and journalistic routines of the media, the gate-keeping functions and practices of editors and reporters in selecting news items and news sources and, indeed, the agenda-setting roles and strategies of the media and news sources" (2000:5).

At the Racism in the Media hearings, e-tv was strong on this. Faultlines records:

> E-tv drew a distinction between racist reporting and bad journalism. While they
> conceded that there was racism in the media, they said sloppy journalism
> remained the problem, and the two issues should not be conflated, as
> two different strategies were needed to address them. E-tv recognised
> the importance of training, as improved training should lead to
> fewer complaints of racism (Faultlines).

A story by Justin Arenstein, a reporter in Mpumalanga, speaks of a case of this. He writes:

> Mpumalanga public works MEC Steve Mabona has lashed out at a 'racist' media for
> distorting the truth about escalating costs at the province's new legislature, saying that

the lavish complex would cost taxpayers only R637,4 m and not the R800 widely reported. Mabona also said reports about orders for 350 executive chairs at a cost of R12 000 were untrue … the entire tender for new furniture would cost only R15 m, and Mabona said "Reports saying otherwise are all lies and distortions."

This is a classic example of inaccurate reporting being labelled as 'racist'. (The ethical debate on the cost of the furniture would arguably be bordering on corruption, but that is a completely different issue. It turns out that Mabona did eventually resign after an inquiry into corruption and it was Justin Arenstein who exposed much of the dirty play. Mabona was challenged to apologise to Arenstein for labelling him racist simply because he was exposing corruption – (www.fxi.org). The point of using this story though is to show how the reporting of the story was labelled as 'racist' regardless of whether it was purely criticism of government spending, or simply inaccurate reporting. If the reports were 100 percent accurate, there would be no room for his cries of racism.

Jacob Zuma stresses that a reason for bad relations between the government and media are reports done by 'inexperienced journalists' and are often 'factually incorrect' and write stories that 'lacked focus and purpose, poorly researched that lack depth, analysis and balance" (Kadalie 2002:5).

While this may be true, Kadalie stresses that the possibility remains that if the skills are improved and that "acrimony will intensify with more experienced journalism that is indeed rigorous and better researched" (Kadalie 2002:5).

Pillay makes an important statement:

> Yes, racial stereotyping exists. Yes, the attitudes of both black and white journalists do not always contribute to racial harmony. Yes, the media often, and without malicious intent – demonstrate racism in the manner in which whites or blacks are portrayed. But bad journalism often underpins this." (2000:45)

Many saw the racism in the media issue it as an indictment on the standard of journalism in South Africa. A more recent report done by the South African National Editor's Forum on the

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standard of journalism in South Africa highlights some of the need to differentiate between sloppy journalism and pure racism.

5.2   SANEF'S 2002 National Skills Audit

The standard of junior reporters in South African newsrooms has been the cause of some concern and cannot be separated from the racism in the media debate. If there is a high standard of journalism, in every sense of the profession, there will be less room for cries of racism in the media. For example, a high standard of investigation and research into an issue, combined with an ethical stance on the amount of publicity around any given topic, will be less likely to be accused of being racist if it can defend itself by professionalism.

5.2.1. Purpose

Due to concerns surrounding the general standard of journalism, the South African National Editor's Forum launched a skills audit earlier this year. Chairperson, Mathatha Tsedu, is quoted as explaining some of the reason why this was so necessary:

> One of the biggest problems facing the media industry is the juniorisation of the journalistic skills base. This comes at a time when the South African story is becoming more and more complicated. We have to get our house in order in a very quick way in this sense." (Sanef Final Report 2002: Cover)

The main purpose of the audit was to conduct a 'situation analysis of journalism reporting, writing and accuracy skills among reporters with between 2 and 5 years experience.' (Sanef Final Report: 1). There were other issues that were investigated that are challenges facing the media in South Africa today, such as the apparent lack of training and standards of training facilities. Amongst the issues, one in particular was highlighted - the perceived mistrust between the government and the media. The relationship between the government and the media is a complex one, and the HRC Inquiry has done nothing to nurture or develop this to a healthy degree. The government feels the media is out to get them and the media are concerned that the government are out to silence them.

The SANEF report states:

One of the major issues leading to the audit was the perceived mistrust between the government and the media, which government felt resulted in unfair and unbalanced reporting on their policies and activities. Apart from this, government also indicated an 'irritation' with the fact that reporters apparently lack the experience and skills to accurately report on individual's names, titles and positions (SANEF Final Report 2002:1).

It would seem fair to say that it is not only the criticism that the government resents, but also misinformation and inaccurate reporting. The Tim Modise Show on SAFM hosted a discussion in July 2002 about the *Mail and Guardian* and why it was critical of the government. An unnamed Member of Parliament phoned in and stated on air that amongst some government circles it was nicknamed the *Mail and Garbage*, because of the standard of some of the reporting. She had been misquoted on a number of occasions and facts about her life completely incorrect. As discussed before, the media loses its credibility when it is found guilty of inaccurate or inept reporting. Once that credibility is lost, it becomes more difficult to define the boundaries between fair or unfair reporting, and in our situation, racist or simply critical journalism. Just how low is the standard of reporting in our country? And is this an issue when dealing with the challenges that are facing our media today? That is what the audit hoped to discover.

5.2.2 Method

The project focused on major print and electronic media in the Durban, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and Cape Town areas, and was directed towards editors as well as reporters with between two and five years of experience. The reporters were asked to fill in a questionnaire that focused on two areas, namely, News awareness and Professional Profile. It was not a vast study in that fewer reporters per newsroom were questioned than initially intended, and the sample can "at best be described as a combination of convenience/accidental sample, but also as a purposive and volunteer sample". Only 13.5% of the country's reporters were interviewed and mainly in the English sector of the media, although Afrikaans and Zulu was included.

SANEF's final report goes on to say that because of this "One would therefore not be able to generalise the findings, although it would still offer a broad national scope of reporter/reporting skills being audited for the first time in South Africa" (SANEF Final Report 2002:3).

In spite of the weaknesses in the method of the audit (noted in detail in the footnote on page 4 and 5 of the final report) it did give a basic idea of the general standard of reporting that cannot be denied, as dismal as it may be to face it in some areas. It is stated that the findings of this audit offers only an "indication of what may exist" (SANEF Final Report 2002:4).

5.2.3   Important Considerations

The areas that emerged as needing the most attention were summed up in the final report as these three areas:

- The news gathering process (eg: gathering of information, insight into the depth/context of news, a sensitivity to and an awareness of South African news issues, and an understanding of legal and ethical issues, especially as they relate to fairness and gender/race sensitivity, an being able to identify elements contributing to a news story.) *All of these issues were found to be valid problems that need to be addressed.*

- Writing the final product (eg: organising the facts, writing the copy, using correct grammar and reporting style). *Through interviews with editors and news editors, it was specifically found that junior reporters need more guidance in organising facts and writing stories. This problem was addressed in some cases by more senior staff members guiding and coaching (mentoring) junior reporters, while in some other cases it was indicated that senior staff members had to rewrite stories in full in order to bring the final product up to the required standard.*

- Accuracy (eg: spelling mistakes, typing errors, inaccurate presentation of facts, and attributing information to sources). In the majority of cases, news editors stressed the fact that they encourage all members of staff to represent all stories as accurately as possible. Again, the way in which this specific issue was tackled varied between different media and needs further investigation (SANEF Final Report 2002:11).

These are just some of the basic areas of concern regarding the standard of journalism in our country.

5.3   Concerns Around South African Journalism

The findings, in the words of SANEF's chairperson, Mathatha Tsedu, were, "not a nice picture." The general standard of journalism in South Africa was surprisingly low, with some areas that need specific attention. Long before the skills audit there were reservations about the skills of journalists, especially the younger generation of new reporters. Herewith are some of the concerns arising out of the audit as well as others that threaten media organisations and the profession in general all over the world. It is not an exhaustive list, merely some of the major concerns arising out of the audit.

5.3.1   Lazy Journalism

Journalists are more and more often being accused of being lazy, and the easier it is to get stories and news off the Internet, the less in depth, hands on research seems to be required. Talk on the streets, informal conversation with various professionals of career paths, tends to lean toward the idea that journalists are not doing the 'leg work' that used to be required of them because of the easy access to information and non-confrontational interaction, for example, via email. Rhoda Kadalie agrees: "Current journalism is characterised by a lazy journalism that is detrimental to the profession and sustenance of a free press" (Kadalie 2002).

She tells how stark the comparison was between an interview of her by the BBC which was thorough and extensive, including a visit to the place where her old home was in District Six, and an interview by a South African women's magazine that was vastly more shallow. Helen Zille says: "Bad journalism can be linked to many failings in the media. Poor news editing and the consequent lack of adequate 'management of journalists' on matters ranging from 'issue selection' to fact checking are particularly evident" (Zille 2002).

5.3.2   Lack of General Knowledge

The lack of general knowledge proved to be of concern. Some striking examples of this are the fact that 30 percent of the reporters did not know what the HRC is an abbreviation for, and 20 percent were unaware of what the TRC stands for. A lack of general knowledge almost definitely will lead to a lack of understanding of the broader issues that surround stories and the news.

5.3.3   Lack of basic skills

There was found to be a lack of basic interviewing, writing and accuracy skills. The audit found that eighty three percent of journalists in Gauteng alone lack interviewing skills. (www.sabcnews.com) The audit also found that the language skills were lacking and it was stated that whilst in the past many journalists had no formal training, they did have high standards of language skill whereas it seems to have reversed. Today most journalists have formal training of some kind but, according to the report, lack the basic language and grammar skills. It was also argued that this could be exacerbated by the fact that many of the journalists are writing in a language that is not their first language. (Sanef Final Report 2002:34)

5.3.4   Juniorisation of Journalism

There is also a stark lack in the training and mentoring of young journalists. Time constraints with a highly competitive media market and increased deadline pressure are not helping the problem of unskilled journalists. Kadalie says in the same personal interview that when the likes of Helen Zille were training as journalists, they were scrutinised, harshly rebuked, challenged, trained and critically analysed by their superiors in order to produce highly skilled and motivated journalists. She feels that today this is missing and it is becoming more and more notable. Many skilled editors and journalists left the country before 1994 and more after, leaving a largely unskilled workforce behind. There is also the added, but hopefully not significant amount of veteran news people who were not prepared to train up and mentor young black men and women in the news arena.

The audit states that it is not only about the juniorisation of the industry, but "more to younger people being promoted to higher positions too early in their careers, without having the skills and/or experience to cope with the demands and pressures of these positions." It also stated that news editors were becoming younger and less experienced (Sanef Final Report 2002:25,26).

5.3.5.   Lack of Finance

The audit noted a dangerous trend in the newsroom. "Smaller newsrooms, smaller budgets vis-à-vis larger demands to increase circulation, increased competition, and deadline pressure results in in-house training becoming almost impossible." (Sanef Final Report 2002:29). Many media infrastructures are poorly supported due to lack of finances, and thus journalists are overworked and are forced to produce more information and more stories with less substance and shallow research.

Kadalie recognises this too: "The reluctance to invest in investigative journalism and the emphasis on profits undermined the integrity of the profession substantially leading to sub-standard journalism"

5.3.6   Deadline Pressure

This is not an issue isolated to the South African journalism context as newsrooms around the world are having to produce news faster and faster as competition and technology races ahead, but it is certainly one of the issues that arose out of the audit. When the pressure is on and time is short, the first thing to go is accuracy and further in-depth reporting. SANEF's report stated that:

Between 10% and 34% of reporters were evaluated as submitting a story by deadline, even though there might still be mistakes or not enough information. Increased pressure on newsrooms was identified as one of the facts contributing to this situation …(2002:42)

Some news editors felt that this could have become an excuse for lazy journalism though (2002:43).

5.3.7   Intimidation and Self-censorship

There has always been the threat of 'self-censorship' where the journalist actually censors him or herself, sometimes even unconsciously, due to the societal pressure and intimidation from politicians and peers (Sanef Final Report 2002:36). The fear of being labelled as a racist, for example, will turn many a journalist away from reporting the truth about a specific situation. RW Johnson, a journalist who freelanced for various British publications during the mid 1980s when violence was rife between the ANC and the IFP (Inkatha Freedom Party), speaks of his experience of this: "It seemed to me then, and seems to me now, that this was a war with no good guys and a great deal of ruthless violence on both sides. This opinion was hotly resented by struggle journalists who simply took the ANC line on the whole ghastly business, and I was quickly branded an Inkatha supporter" (2000:19).

It is interesting and positive to note that the areas of lack that were of greatest concern to the news editors, were largely the same as the ones identified by the reporters. The strongest example of this emerging is that the reporters identified the same need for acquiring conceptual, practical, newsgathering and writing skills in their training, an apparent lack in the training system (Sanef Final Report 2002:10).

Although the audit did not bolster the sentiment towards or confidence in the South African media, it certainly was a step forward in addressing the issues of the standard of journalism in our country.

5.4   REPORTING ON RACE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Each country has its own complexities and socio-political DNA, and whilst there are many general guidelines for ethical and sensitive reporting on race, South Africa's specific situation calls for specific guidelines. How do we report on race in the new South Africa?

There are specific things to move away from or be aware of, that will aid in the process of understanding and transformation in South African communities. These are some thoughts and tips on reporting and terminology, as well as head and heart attitudes, of which there are no laws but only ethical boundaries that will be constructive.

- Don't let personal prejudice shine through in any writing – for example, an article reporting on Mark Shuttleworth's display and talk at a science centre in Khayelitsha was poorly attended. The journalists' personal opinion and lack of understanding of the challenges that schools in the lower socio-economic bracket was displayed by a statement he or she made about the schools not 'showing up' because transport had not been previously arranged. The feeling one gets whilst reading it was that the writer of the article was making a point about the lack of organisation of the 'black' school.

- Be aware of consistency with the space and time that various stories receive. For example, because there are higher levels of crime in some of the townships, news of a black woman being raped may not receive as much coverage and attention as a white woman.

- We have to move away from the idea that racial differentiation is racist. By defining a person's skin colour, as one would their hair colour, or the colour of their eyes, is not incorrect. David Goldberg states that: "Racial differentiation – the discrimination between races and their purported members – is not in and of itself racist" (Berger 2001:43). There is nothing inherently 'wrong' with being black or white, for example, or stating that fact completely factually, but it is when the race is of no consequence to the story or news that it is wise to omit that fact.

- Listen to those with hurts and opinions even when you don't understand it. Keeping an open mind is vital to good journalism. Philip van Niekerk, previous editor of the *Mail and Guardian,* is quoted as saying "When a white person says something, a black person often hears something different and vice versa. People of different races often do not even listen to each other" (Faultlines 2000:).

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- Don't refer to people by what they are not. An example that was raised in the Faultlines report that the five black editors previously mentioned raised this issue: "Then there is the offensive use of words to describe black people (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) by what they are not, which still does happen from time to time. It is not rare, for instance, occasionally to come across words like 'non-whites' or 'people of colour' in some media in reference to black people."

- Be aware of language that may show disrespect and offend others. For example, there has been much debate about the use of the president's name as Thabo as opposed to Mbeki. Many people felt that it was 'racist' and disrespectful to call the president by his first name. The Tim Modise Show aired several callers who were mortified at the press calling Mbeki by his first name, and many seemed to be offended by it, while others simply called it pure racism and patronising 'white' press.

- Be sensitive to consistency in language that is used when reporting on specific race groups of people. A common example of this is when people speak of or write about 'white people' but will refer to the 'blacks'. This seemingly innocent omission can speak volumes and enhance the 'them' and 'us' mentality that many in this country are aiming to challenge and break down.

- Another example of using language carefully is when referring to 'African' people. This is the subject of much controversy and many people; both black and white disagree with the idea that a person born and raised in Africa is thus, African. Black people being referred to as African whilst white people are referred to as European or British is offensive to many white 'Africans', myself included. A white person may be of European descent, but to be called European when never having set foot in Europe is offensive and insensitive to a person born, raised and committed to the continent.

- Be aware of your own perspective and remove bitterness or arrogance from your script as soon as you see it. If others see it, be open to the criticism because often where there is smoke there is fire. It is important that journalists keep an open mind to how they come across. We need to be careful that we are not racist in our own

tackling of the subject. The way we see something depends so much on our perspective. Abbey Mokoe uses an example that amplifies this in my mind – He compares how the country perceives Makhaya Ntini, cricketer accused of rape … "Some lily-white women's groups still persecute him to this day. On the other hand, Hansie Cronje admitting to taking money … there has been no condemnation of Hansie, like there was of Ntini." His perspective blurs Mokoe's perception, as is often the case with most journalists. Many white South Africans would disagree that Cronje received 'no condemnation' as Mokoe stated (Mokoe 2000:15). And others would argue that where there was a difference, it may be due to the crime – alleged rape as opposed to match fixing. This could be an example. And there are many others, on all sides of the political fence.

The Poynter Institute has basic helpful tips on reporting on race that are more general and will challenge and help any journalist striving to rise above their cultural framing and ethnocentrism to sharpen their skills. They ask the question 'How do you take reporting and writing about race relations up a level?' and answer it with 'It requires a strong focus on the fundamental tools of good journalism, along with an investigator's resolve to work through this subject's unique obstacles' (www.poynter.org). This confirms the obvious, but sometimes overlooked truth that a higher standard of reporting and journalism skills will impact the way in which race is reported on and understood. And in a country such as South Africa, with its very specific racial conflicts and history, it is vital that the media lead the way. The power that the media has over society is unquestionable and our democracy will flourish unless the health and standard of our media ethic is raised.

6 CONCLUSION

That racism is still in an issue in our country is incontestable. That there is racism in the media is undeniable too. There is racism in every sector of society, on all sides and from all diversities. In the words of the man with whom this paper began, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere". That is why this debate about racism in the media is an ethical one that cannot be ignored. If there are people in our community and country who believe there is racism in the media, it is our duty, as a nation, to investigate it and enter into dialogue. The Human Rights Commission had no choice but to enter debate as to the issue of racism in our media. The methods may have been flawed, and the outcome not particularly successful, but the issue is real and has to be addressed in ways that will build our nation and democracy and not jeopardise it in any way.

Subliminal racism is something that many people fail to grasp because it is in most cases, ethereal and often intangible. It is probably very similar to the concept of prejudice or stereotyping although it is more specific in that it is related to race. Often the people who grasp it are those who have experienced it on a more personal level, and if those who do not grasp the concept listen carefully to the former they too will begin to partially understand what it is like living as a black person in a white empowered society. This is even more prevalent as the divides are often widened by lack of resource, education and privilege. There appears to be a difference though, between blatant or explicit racism and subliminal racism or stereotyping. One is purposed and the other not of malicious intent.

The definition of racism is, as has been discussed, a complex one. The definitions and difference between *racism* and *subliminal racism* is a controversial one, although probably purely based on semantics. Sean Jacobs stated in a e-mail interview that he believes that: "The debate on racism versus subliminal racism is a non-issue and is a debate about semantics which comes from a too literal interpretation of post-modern debates about race in the West." He goes on to say though that: "There is definitely racism in the South African media, structurally in defining markets (as black and white), advertising, employment practices, the world view of editors and journalists, and in marginalizing stories/narratives of certain audiences" (August 2002).

The International Council on Human Rights Policy states that: "Racism has not disappeared… we confront forms of racism that are covert or more complex or are linked to wider issues, such as changes in the nature of the state, gender discrimination, or marginalisation due to developments in the global economy." http://www.niza.nl/uk/media/newsletter/01/racism.htm

Racism exists. Nobody in his or her right mind would argue that. Does it exist in the media in South Africa? The Human Rights Commission of Inquiry did not find one instance of blatant and overt racism in the forms of media and publications that they investigated. This is encouraging. Does stereotyping or subliminal racism exist? Of course! As that affects other spheres of human existence, so it will affect the world of the media. Often less than in other spheres but perhaps more notable by the sheer public nature of the press. Given our political and social history and some of what our country and its citizens have been through, it is plausible that sectors of society are crying 'racism'. The HRC of inquiry into this affront was valid in its quest. The issues are real and they could not ignore them, but the way in which it was done has arguably not enhanced transformation.

What is ironic though, is that one of the first accusations that precipitated the inquiry was one that was laid against the Mail and Guardian. A survey initiated by Business Day to establish the views of the public on racism found that not one respondent named the Mail and Guardian as seen to be racist in any way in their opinion (Fourie 2001:73).

Sean Jacobs stated that: "Racism in the media is a complex issue. To completely unpack it requires a careful, systematic inquiry and a longitudinal approach." This is indeed where most of the criticism of the inquiry lay. It was not completely 'unpacked' and the research was flawed and by no means systematic. There was much criticism around the initial report that the commission produced based on research done by Claude Braude, as well as the subpoena furore that followed and was eventually worked out vaguely amicably with the intervention of the South African National Editors Forum.

Some of the commission's objectives were met through the process and it certainly created room for heated debate, even if much of it was accusation of racism being thrown back and forth. What it did do was provoke and challenge the thoughts and actions of people in the media and government. The heated debate solidified opinion, broadened understanding and raised the public and media's awareness of issues surrounding race and freedom of the press.

There was public outcry at the thought that the freedom of the press was being challenged in any way. In many ways, this detracted from the actual issue of racism in the media. Given our history of control of the press, that is understandable. The crumbling democracy of our northern neighbour, Zimbabwe, does nothing to allay these fears. President Robert Mugabe's initial most drastic steps during the past few years have been to pass draconian laws regarding the freedom of the local press.

Where does racism end and the freedom to criticise the government, whether they are black or white, begin? Often criticism is misunderstood as racism in South Africa because the press is largely white-powered (although that is changing) and the government is largely black. The view that one takes regarding criticism of the government largely depends on the understanding of which press theory one is holding to. Throughout history governments have been threatened and pressured by a free press. Leaders have trembled at the power of the media, which is why it is often the first sector of society to be controlled.

Much of the tension that exists between the government and the press today is rooted in the clashing of the two basic types of press theories. The one being *developmental* which, as discussed, holds to the theory that the press is there to serve the government in its ideals and steering of the country. The second theory is the *western libertarian* ideology that holds to the notion that the press is the *watchdog* of the government, there to criticise and act as the *fourth estate,* guarding from corruption and bad rule or governance. The current debate discussed in this paper, regarding the SABC and the ANC's policy on positive press modelled by Nelson Mandela, is a good example of the clash. Thami Mazwai has come under much attack for his statements and seeming disregard for press freedom. His intent is also not overtly malicious. Most would agree with him, especially in a country where the news is riddled with depressing stories of crime and violence and corruption, when he says he wants to get to a place where "South Africans are beginning to be proud of what they see on the box, of what is happening in their country and how their country is leading the continent and indeed the world in various issues, including human rights, gender equality and so on."

But when this encroaches on the freedom to criticise the government and express valid concern over issues in the country, it becomes frightening. When he makes statements such as the following: "We have to create a news model, that takes into account that this is a nation that is

looking into the future with hope, and with determination …" journalists and media specialists start getting anxious as this is a significant step towards a great threat to our democracy. Whilst complete freedom of the press will never be achieved one hundred percent, as Fourie reminds us that: "When we consider the concept of the press within South African circumstances, we need to do so within the context that we cannot find absolute freedom of the press anywhere in the world." (2001: 69). It is nevertheless, a good goal to strive for.

The Prime Minister of Sweden, Gora Persson stated correctly that: "Only a press characterised by diversity, both as regards opinions, technologies and ownership, can be really said to be free. The monopolisation of the mass media leads to uniformity which threatens its role as watchdog and seeker of truth" (Kadalie 2002:7).

Journalists are warned against pandering to the needs of the ruling power or as Kadalie put it, *bending over blackwards*, and ignoring corruption or bad governance. RW Johnson has challenging words for us:

> It is extremely sobering to hear Zimbabwean journalists lament how they originally abstained from all criticism of Mugabe in their eagerness to make the new nation work, and in the case of whites, to shrive their colonial guilt. All this did was to make Mugabe expect a totally lavish press and resent criticism to the point where two black journalists were horribly tortured for days on end last year for writing things he didn't like. Spineless Journalism in South Africa has only encouraged the ANC to lean harder and harder on the press…. If journalists surrender their independence to censorship or self-censorship, they know exactly where that ends (2000:19).

Criticism is not the only thing that gets misread. Often incompetent reporting, shallow research and simple bad journalism are equated with racism. Another aspect of the inquiry that was helpful is that it helped precipitate a deeper look into the skills and training of journalists in South Africa. The issue of the lack of journalistic skills was raised at the inquiry on numerous occasions as this is often confused with racism as has been discussed at length in this paper. SANEF launched a skills audit earlier this year with some alarming results, which indicated the need for greater care to be focused on the training and educating of young journalists in South Africa. As the chairperson Mathatha Tsedu stated: "We need to get our house in order."

How can the press maintain a healthy relationship with the government that is critical, yet balanced? Zille sums it up with "By having a multiplicity of media, with a range of journalists, who are professional and skilled and out to establish the 'truth', accepting that they may be wrong, not setting out to prove that they are 'right' (Zille 2002).

The spotlight is on the press at the moment. Its relationship with the government is strained and the standard of journalism in South Africa being severely challenged. Racism is still around, if not maliciously intended. Where do we go from here? Confusion of the issues at hand is one of the greatest threats at present. It is important to see racism for what it is and the intent behind it, and criticism for what it is even if it seems harsh at the time, and inept reporting for what it is; and not confuse the three issues as they tend to blur into one. We cannot ignore the issues in our country and the press has to be humble enough to look into their own hearts and minds. As Sunday Times's Phylicia Oppelt says: "It would have been short-sighted and irresponsible to retire to a defensive position, declaring the commission useless. And it would have been equally foolhardy to exempt ourselves – as one of South Africa's biggest and most influential media institutions – from introspection" (2000:51).

Introspection is a good and necessary process. It is what leads to progress on an individual and corporate level. In doing this we can also take heed of the words of Guy Berger, Head of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University: "We must rage against racism and we must repair its damage. But if we really want to eradicate this disgrace, we have to go further. That means a quest to erase race from the prominent place it occupies in how we make sense of the world and how we seek our undecided future" (2001:57). Healthy introspection and accountability will cause journalists to keep on the right track in terms of their integrity, sensitivity towards issues of race, as well as their professional ability to report fairly, accurately, honestly and without prejudice. We can strive for no less.

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