Learning Freedom of Expression
Perspectives on the Role of the Media in the New South Africa

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Abstract

This study investigates opinions of what the role of the media in the young democracy in South Africa ought to be, and relates the different views to normative theories of mass media. This is done by a qualitative analysis of documents on the government’s position and in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, researchers and politicians.

A clear tension between the government and the media and a contest of democratic ideals are found, as well as influences from both developmental media approach and libertarian media theory. The media workers differ mainly in focus and priorities when they define their role in the society, although most of them try to combine developmental concern with liberal ideals.

The discussion on the role of the media in South Africa bear the stamps of the history and the inequalities in the society, and often limits the rhetoric colours to black and white. Yet the debate is lively and the country clearly in a process of learning how to handle the newly won freedom of expression.

Keywords: patriotic journalism, developmental journalism, libertarian media theory, freedom of expression, access to information, criticism of government, political reporting, South African media, Thabo Mbeki

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Introduction

During half a century the people of South Africa were separated by law, and in practice even longer. Poverty and degradation lived side by side with modern cities and well-being. In 1994 the first democratic election was held and the first black president, Nelson Mandela was elected.

When the people of South Africa today try to build their new equal society it’s not only a social process of redoing, restructuring and redistributing but also of rethinking the society. This formulation process has resulted in many lively debates, among them the one about the role of the media in the new South Africa. The past determines the present in many fields and the newsroom is no exception. The debate is coloured by the history and reveals ideological positions.

During the past 15 years there have been incredible changes in South Africa. But a lot of things have not changed. People ask themselves how it can be so different from the past, yet so much the same. How long is the transition going to be? How do you as a journalist report in an era of transition? How do you use your newly won freedom of expression? What do people in the countryside care about what's happening in the big cities when at the end of the day they don't have running water? How long can people with responsibilities just go on learning?

In a new democracy people have to ask themselves: What ought the role of the media be under those circumstances?

Minor Field Study

Going to a previously unknown country to do a minor field study obviously means that you experience and learn a lot about things not related to your study. But it also means that you get a deeper understanding of your topic.

Travelling by bus from Cape Town to Johannesburg I got to know a four-year-old girl named Joy. She was sitting in my lap as she took my western designed glasses and put them on her nose. The shape of her nose was so different from mine that the glasses almost fell of. But Joy proudly looked at me and asked "Do I look like a white lady now?" I didn’t know what to answer, but I got a notion of the frustration people feel about the transition.

In South Africa I had nothing for free. A lot of what I learned back home didn’t correspond with the society on the other side of the world and I didn’t want to apply western theory on African reality. I had to start by just reading the paper to get an idea of journalism in the country. I didn’t know anybody and depended a lot on my field supervisor and on advises from people I met. Working under those premises result in that it’s harder to follow the scientific logic and demands. I’ll discuss that problem in the method chapter.

Demarcation and disposition

The role of the media in a society is very complex. The debate in South Africa is not only on the relationship between the media and the government, but also about racism in the media, ownership of the media, representation of different views in the media, the constitution of the newsroom and so on. Although all the different aspects are closely related to each other I will try to keep my focus.
Since I’m primarily writing for a Swedish readership the background is extensive and the theory of development media approach further developed than those theories better known in Sweden. To make the reader able to understand the positions of the interviewed that are closely related to what happened during the spring of 2001 and the following debate, I will describe the political turns and report some of the voices of the debate.

Definitions and Concepts
The word apartheid means distinction in Afrikaans and was the slogan of the National Party in the 1948 elections in South Africa. They won the elections and created the policy of racial discrimination with laws categorising people as white, Asian, coloured, or black (Population Registration Act), forcing those not categorised as whites to carry passport and to live in special regions of the country (Group Areas Act). The racial distinction is still very clear in the South African society and deeply rooted in the mind of the people, as the rhetoric and argumentation in the quotes of this study will show.

The words press and media is often used with the same signification. Freedom of the press does not exclude freedom of the broadcasting media, but originates from the time when there were no such thing.

Liberal, libertarian and western theory are also different words for the same thing. When researchers do their categorisation of the theories of the mass media sometimes they create their own concepts. Yet they all allude to the media theory based on British liberal philosophy.

In the same way development and developmentalist media approach is just two words for one thing. Patriotic media approach is closely related but a stronger word that strikes the eye of some people. Nevertheless the patriotic concept seem to be more widely used in South Africa and among journalists. Development and developmentalist are the words researchers often choose.

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The Aim

The aim of this work is to contribute to a better understanding of different views on the role of the media in South Africa as a third world country in transition. The emphasis is on the relationship between the government and the media. Important factors in this relationship are freedom of expression, access to information and the government’s acceptance of critique.

This study is mapping the government’s opinion on the role of the media and different views among media workers in South Africa, focusing on the debate about this issue in the press during the spring of 2001.

It is impossible to separate ideas about the "objective" relationship between media and society from "normative" or even ideological considerations because the concepts used to describe the way the media work involve some sort of value judgement.² Therefore I will relate current opinions to mass media theories.

My main questions are:

- How do decision makers and media workers see the role of the media in the young democracy? Do they differ? In what do they differ?
- How are the different roles and goals of the media related to mass media theory?

**Background**

In the process of rethinking the society the debate on political reporting is animated. Therefore my study will focus on ideological pressure, mainly from the government. I start by drawing the picture of the media landscape and by summarising the relevant legislation and policies.

**The South African Media Landscape Now and Then**

Access to and participation in the South African public sphere, from the beginning of media developments in the 1800s until 1996, were limited to hegemonic white interests. This hegemony was formed around colonial, mining and capital interests which later evolved into apartheid.³

Thus, South Africa has a history of partisan news media. Television and radio, long dominated by the state broadcaster, have a history of bias in favour of the apartheid government and the main newspapers targeting white people sided with mining capital.⁴

The first democratic elections in 1994 showed the gap between the media and the people: The majority of the mainstream newspapers endorsed the Democratic Party, but this political party only got two percent of the votes.⁵

**Print Media**

The first issue of a government newspaper, *The Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser/Kaapsche Stads Courant en Afrikaansche Berighter*, was published in 1800. The first independent publication, *The South African Commercial Advertiser*, was published in 1824. Eighteen issues later it was banned and reappeared only after representations had been made to the authorities in London.⁶

The early English press invoked ideas from political developments in Britain as the basis for libertarian values such as press freedom. These values originated in political and economic developments in Europe where the press was seen as a forum of critical debate. After the 1880s the English press developed with profits from mining. This investment sustained the power of a new class closely associated with British imperial interests.⁷

Antagonistic to this class was the Afrikaans-language press, which developed from the propaganda organs of the National party in the beginning of the 20th Century. The National Party, with their slogan "apartheid", won the elections in 1948. They ruled the country until April 1994.

In opposition to English derived liberalism and Afrikaner nationalism were the ideologies of the Black Consciousness movement in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The movement started among students at the University of Natal in Durban. Steve Biko, who died in prison in

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1977, was the major leader.\textsuperscript{8} Compared to the political movements like the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress, the Black Consciousness movement was more of a philosophy that grew out of the idea that blacks must first liberate themselves from the sense of psychological inferiority bred by three centuries of white rule.\textsuperscript{9} It was not until in the 80s though, with the portable video and desktop publishing that an alternative press serving the racially oppressed blacks was able to develop.\textsuperscript{10}

Today, South Africa has sixteen major newspapers of which eleven are daily newspapers and five are weekly newspapers (see appendix1). Tree of them are published in Afrikaans and the others in English. There are some smaller dailies and weeklies and over 100 community and country newspapers, most of which are weekly tabloids serving particular districts or towns. Even in the countryside were most people have English as their second or third language the majority of the papers are published in English

The size of the country – 1500 km separating the main centres of Cape Town and Johannesburg – and a poor infrastructure in the countryside still precludes national dailies in the true sense of the word. The truly national newspapers are the Sunday Papers.

The Irish newspaper investor O’Reilly bought shareholds in South African newspapers from 1994 until 1999 making him the owner of the biggest Newspaper Group, Independent Newspapers. That makes him dominate Cape Town and the Natal Region as well as to assure a strong position in the Gauteng province (with Johannesburg and Pretoria).\textsuperscript{11}

Other important media players are Nasionale Media Bpk, CTP/Caxton and Times Media Limited.\textsuperscript{12} Since 1994 a black dominated investment consortium, New Africa Investment Limited (NAIL), owns the largest daily newspaper, the \textit{Sowetan}. The trend is towards more black owned papers.

\textbf{Radio}

The first radio broadcast was made by the South African Railways, but the first regular ones were broadcasted by the Associates Scientific and Technical Association of South Africa during 1924.

The national South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was established in 1936. The SABC is the public broadcaster and helped to consolidate the National Party’s hold over the white opinion after 1948. SABC also worked in close co-operation with the institutions (The Department of Bantu Education and the homeland administrations etc) forming the views of the black, Asian and coloured people as inferior to whites.\textsuperscript{13}

Restructuring SABC has been an issue concerning the people. On 25 August 1990, 2,000 South Africans marched to the SABC under banners reading: "The People Shall Broadcast!

Democratise Radio and Television!" This was five months after President F W De Klerk announced that the Government had appointed a group to make recommendations regarding the future development of the SABC.14 Today, the SABC has 19 radio stations attracting some 20 million listeners daily. They broadcast news in all the eleven official languages.15

More than 80 community radio stations have been licensed since 1995 and about 40 of them have been established. In some remote areas of the country the community radio is the only radio broadcasting reaching the people. There are also a number of successful private radio stations. The largest one, Y-FM, broadcasting in a Zulu-language in Johannesburg is reaching over a million listeners.16

**Television**

The SABC introduced a one-channel television service in 1976. The state owned television was as well as the radio in the hands of the National Party until the 1990s. Today, the SABC offers six television channels in 11 languages. Four of the channels are free-to-air and the other two are pay television broadcasting into Africa by satellite. There are over four million licensed television households and about 14 million adults watch SABC daily.17

South Africa’s first private subscription television service, M-Net, was launched in 1986. Today, it has more than million subscribers in 41 countries across the African continent.18

Since October 1998 South Africa have a privately owned free-to-air television channel – e.tv. It is a commercial service and depends on advertising since it does not charge subscription fees. E.tv is operated by Midi Television owned to 80 percent by a variety of South African investment groups and to 20 percent by Time Warner Bros.19 On their home page they proudly state that they have 6,7 millions viewers and are still growing.20 The channel is primarily a competitor to the SABC’s news and entertainment.

**The South African Media Legislation and Policy**

The process of radical changes going on in the South African society during the last ten years has produced fundamental changes in the legal position of the media. The 1993 Constitution, also known as the Interim Constitution, came into force in April 1994. During the interim phase, which lasted until the general elections in 1999, a final Constitution was drafted. That Constitution was adopted in May 1996.

Freedom of Expression, for example, is stated in the Constitution from 1996, but was also guaranteed in the Interim Constitution and thus the South African people have enjoyed Freedom of Expression since 1994.

Some of the constitutional changes, among them the Access to Information Act, have been hard to implement and there are still restricting laws from the apartheid era in operation.

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid
18 Ibid
**Freedom of Expression**

The right to freedom of expression is protected in the Bill of Rights set out in the Constitution from 1996. Section 16 states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes:

(a) Freedom of the press and other media
(b) Freedom to receive and impart information and ideas
(c) Freedom of artistic creativity
(d) Academic freedom and freedom of scientific research

Those rights are limited by the general limitation clause limiting all rights in the constitution and the derogation from the Bill of Rights in case of a declared state of emergency. Furthermore Section 16(2) contains the following specific limitation:

The right of freedom of expression in subsection (1) does not extend to

(a) Propaganda for war
(b) Incitement of imminent violence
(c) Advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm

According to the Freedom of Expression Institute, the constitution offers a more explicit guarantee in some respects than international standards, for instance by specifically including freedom of the press.

The government proudly states that the American Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) *Freedom House* in 1998 ranked South Africa among the 15 countries in the world with highest press freedom. (Between those 15 there is no ranking.) 186 countries were in the survey measuring press freedom by assessing the effects of laws, government decision and economic and political influence on the content of news reporting.

In the *Freedom House*’s latest ranking made in 2001 South Africa is in the second highest group – among the 15 countries from place 15 to 30 (without ranking between them).

**Access to Information**

The South African peoples right to access to information is guaranteed in section 32 in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution from 1996. It states:

(1) Everyone has the right of access to
   a. any information held by the state; and
   b. any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights.

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22 Ibid, p. 3.
24 [http://www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org), 01-07-29 12:44.
(2) National legislation must be enacted to give effect to this right, and may provide for reasonable measures to alleviate the administrative and financial burden on the state.

There is a central difference between information requested from a public body or a private body. In respect of private bodies the requester has to establish that the record sought is required for the exercise or protection of any rights. This "need to know" (it’s not enough with the "right to know") imposes an additional obligation on those seeking the information.

The access to information is limited by the general limitation clause, the derogation from the Bill of Rights in case of a declared state of emergency, in the same way as the right to freedom of expression is. There are also quite some exceptions from the Act to protect the privacy of individuals and trade secrets among other things. It reflects the need to balance the right against the need to safeguard conflicting interests.

Even though the Access to Information Act is in the Constitution and the promotion of the Act was passed by the Parliament in February 2000 it is still not operating in practice. Section 32 was suspended until a supporting legislation had been passed. The Act implies such a huge change that it took several years to draft the legislation dealing with the practical operations as who will give the requester the information, within which time frames and at what fees. The South African Human Rights Commission was required to prepare a guide on how to use the act.

According to Karthy Govender, Professor of Law and Human Rights Commissioner, the law operates at two levels:

- It has an instrumental objective, in that it seeks to foster a culture of transparency, accountability and propriety in private and public bodies. At another level, it simply recognises that we have an inherent right to have access to information and this is an end in itself.

**The Broadcasting Act**

The Government is of the opinion that there is a need for a media and communication policy that will define this sector’s characteristics. The Government Communication and Information Service has established the Media Communication Unit. Through this unit the government try to speed up the transformation of the South African media sector by regulations and legislation.

The Broadcasting Act (Act 4) of 1999 is aimed at establishing and developing a broadcasting policy to regulate and control all broadcasting. It was created to:

- contribute to democracy, nation-building, the provision of education and strengthening the moral fibre of society
- encourage ownership and control of broadcasting service by people from historically disadvantaged communities

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26 Govender, Karthy, An assessment of limitation on access to Information in the Promotion of Access to Information Act and the danger that disclosure will become the exception rather than the norm, Paper written at the Department of Constitutional Law, University of Natal, 2001, p. 4.
28 Ibid, p. 5.
29 Ibid, p. 2.
31 Ibid.
- ensure fair competition in the sector
- provide for a three-tier system of public, commercial and community broadcasting services
- establish a strong committed broadcasting system to service the needs of all South Africans

More specific objectives of the public broadcaster SABC is set out in a separate section of the Act.

Censorship Now and Then
During the apartheid era the media editors had a book of several hundreds of pages of censorship legislation. The editor of Sunday Tribune, Peter Davis claims that book was the bible. Before 1994 he looked in this every week before publication. Now he haven’t looked in it for half a year or so. Nevertheless some of the laws are still in force. The laws regulating the possibility to publish facts about arms trade and about children are among them.

Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977 is another law still in force. It provides for the subpoenaing of any person who is likely to have material or relevant information of an alleged offence. There are similar laws in many other countries, but in South Africa this section gained notoriety during the years of apartheid trough the government’s use of it to intimidate journalists and suppress information. Journalists have been highly critical to it and some even calling for its repeal.

The Section 205 has been widely discussed in connection with the Pagad case. In 1996 Benny Gool, a journalist and photographer at the Cape Times, witnessed and recorded on film the killing of Rashaad Staggie, a criminal with reputation for dealing in drugs. Staggie was killed and set alight by People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad) operating without mandate to found order in the town ships on the poor areas around Cape Town.

Benny Gool have been called to witness in the case together with other journalists. Several people witnessing against members of Pagad in other cases have been killed and Benny Gool have received death threats. In an interview in Cape Times he argues that there are two things he has to consider. One is testifying as a journalist, which he is not prepared to do at all. Secondly, there's the question of security. "Witnesses have been killed left, right and centre. Police can't serve me with a subpoena and not even talk about providing security."34

Even if the threat in this case doesn’t come from the police or the state as it did in the old days, it has renewed the discussion. In a media statement from the Freedom of Expression Institute the organisation stated:

Placing Gool in this position may well fuel a perception on the part of the public that journalists are acting as agents of the police, assisting them in undertaking their investigations.35

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32 Interview with Peter Davis (Editor of Sunday Tribune) at his office in Durban, 01-04-25.
35 Duncan, Jane, Freedom of Expression Institute, Media Statement for immediate release, 2001-05-03.
The Debate
Until April 2001 President Mbeki had been criticised on mainly two important issues: HIV/AIDS and Zimbabwe. The critics were from the whole world and nationally some of the harshest critique came from the media. During the spring of 2001 the critique in the media accelerated and a discussion on the role of the media in the country followed.

Earlier Critique
When the medical expertise on HIV/AIDS had a congress in South Africa in 2000 Mbeki made a controversial statement that by many have been interpreted as questioning the connection between the virus and the syndrome. He later denied that but then the whole world already talked about him not taking his responsibilities towards the great number of infected in the country.

As the crisis of land distribution and occupation and violence against white farmers in neighbouring Zimbabwe deepened the critique of Mbeki for not reacting strong enough was getting louder. The quiet diplomacy towards Zimbabwe’s president Robert Mugabe didn’t seem to give any result and many political commentators around the world expected more from the economic power of southern Africa.

Media Tenor, an international institute for media analysis, have on their own initiative categorised more than 15,000 reports focusing on the government in five daily papers, almost 5,000 reports in six TV news reports and more than 3,000 reports in eight weekly papers. The reports are from February 2000 until April 2001. In the daily papers the positive reporting dominated in February and March 2000. Since then the negative reports have dominated. In the TV news the positive reporting dominated during six of the 15 months. And in the weekly papers the reporting have generally been negative during the whole period. 36

The Womaniser Story
The 8th of April of 2001 Max du Preez (senior journalist, previously at SABC) in the radio programme The Editors said: "It is publicly known – and I think we should start talking about this - that the president has this kind of personal life. I’m not saying it’s scandalous. He’s a womaniser. " The statement was made in a discussion about a leaked letter written by Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in which she denied talking about the presidents alleged indiscretion. Du Preez said the issue was important because it could influence Mbeki’s job as head of the state and that openness was part of a democratic society.

The next day the ANC national representative and Head of Presidency Smut Ngonyama accused du Preez of racism and claimed:

From Du Preez's allegations, the ANC has learnt that among some sections of our society, respect and dignity are accorded only to those with a certain type of pigmentation (…) Max du Preez and ‘his old friends’ have clearly embarked on a war path and such statements on the ANC are a declaration of war.37

Max du Preez responded to the reactions from the ANC and Belinda Beresford reported in the Mail & Guardian:

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37 Duval Smith, Alex, Racial tensions and mud-slinging growing threat to rainbow vision, Sunday Independent, 01-04-15, p. 5.
Du Preez accused the ANC of a ‘hysterical overreaction’ to his comments, saying it reinforced suspicions of a power struggle within the leadership of the ruling party.

Such an accusation by Ngonyama is ‘completely ridiculous’

I think the ANC’s reaction to it shows that it’s a much bigger issue than I thought it was. 38

In a statement entitled Presidents must expect to be criticised published in The Sunday Independent the Freedom of Expression Institute expressed concern about the turn of events following the programme The Editors and writes:

The Institute is especially disturbed by calls on the part of the ANC Western Cape to enact legislation outlawing insulting the president. Such a law would without doubt be a violation of freedom of expression, and will have a chilling effect on critical comments about the presidency. 39

Less than two weeks after the radio program the Safety and Security Minister named three former ANC-politicians, Mathews Phosa, Tokyo Sexwale and Cyril Ramaphosa, and accused them of trying to overthrow president Mbeki. They denied being involved in any such thing and the government was criticised for using state money to investigate internal problems of the party as the undeclared intelligence unit was playing a key role unearthing the plot. 40

After the alleged plot some people felt the need to publicly state their trust in the President. Among them where the columnist Abbey Makoe writing for The Star. 41 Under the title Keep up the good work, Mr President he wrote an open letter "stemmed from an emotional dialogue . . . with a colleague". He closed the letter with: "Till we meet again, rule wisely and be strong. Yours sincerely, Abbey – still black and beautiful."

The strongest statement was the full page advertisement The Media vs. President T.M Mbeki in the Sunday Times May 6 2001(Read the whole advertisement in appendix 2). The signatories are eleven black professionals among them a TV-producer, an advertising executive, a lawyer, and two veteran captains of black empowerment. In essence, they are alleging a right wing conspiracy in what they call the white media to systematically discredit blacks in powerful positions. This sparked of a meaningful debate about the role of the media in the post-apartheid democracy.

Summary
South Africa has a history of partisan news media. English derived liberalism, Afrikaner nationalism and the Black Consciousness movement influenced the print media. The broadcasting media was long dominated by the state broadcaster SABC that during the apartheid era supported the National Party.

Freedom of Expression and Access to information is guaranteed in the Constitution adopted in 1996. The government’s media policy is defined in the Broadcasting Act. Among other things it stresses the media’s responsibility to contribute to democracy and nation-building.

38 Beresford, Belinda, Du Preez sticks to his gun, Mail & Guardian, 01-04-12, p. 4.
39 Freedom of Expression Institute, Presidents must expect to be criticised, Sunday Times, 01-04-15, p. 5.
40 Brümmer, Stefaans, Inside the ANC’s spy, Mail & Guardian, 2001-05-04, p. 2.
41 Makoe, Abbey, Keep up the good work, Mr President, Saturday Star, 2001-05-19, p. 8.
The last years President Mbeki has been politically criticised internationally and nationally. During spring 2001 the national criticism sparked a debate about the role of the media in South Africa.
Perspectives
Mass media often play an important role in political change and national development. In the industrialised Western world the press emerged along with the rise of the middle class and the Industrial Revolution. It came in an era of quest for civil rights as freedom of speech and of the press.

The history of the media in southern Africa is different. Africa is relatively speaking a newly independent continent and the primary political concerns are still political independence and consolidation of economic and political structures.

In order to understand the role of the media it needs to be seen in it’s context. Therefore I here include a historical background, some general economic and social considerations and an ideological context.

Brief History of the Media in English-speaking Africa
The African Press emerged under colonialism in the former British colonies in West Africa for more than 170 years ago. During the following two centuries, it’s development closely followed that of the press in Europe and North America. During colonialism most of the existing press consisted in European-owned city newspapers or rural papers run by missionaries. The colonial powers introduced a rather authoritarian press concept and restricted the growth of an indigenous press. This situation contributed to the nationalistic polemics that were the other major influence in the shaping of the emergent African press.42

Nonetheless during the period of the independence movement, the press often led by nation-minded intellectuals played an important role in the national unity and development. There were great obstacles though such as insufficient financial resources, plurality of languages and continuing dependence of the formal colonial powers. The countries, in addition, had a high illiteracy rate and a very low media exposure among the majority of the people.43 This situation generally still persists.

Today’s press in English speaking Black Africa appears to have its roots in four different kinds of early newspapers: The official gazettes, the missionary press, privately owned newspapers and underground political anticolonial news sheets.44

Opinion differs among mass media scholars about the origins of the often harsh restrictions that have been imposed on the press in most African countries since independence. Some scholars claim that the tradition of persecution of journalists was inherited from the colonisers, while others say that the strong British spirit of civil liberty was what made the opposition voice in the African press possible in the British colonies.45

The case of South Africa is unique in the sense that it’s impossible to talk about the era after colonialism in the same way as in the other former colonial countries since the colonisers have become South Africans and is a part of the society and will always be. The struggle in today’s society is not liberation but unification and equality.

44 Ibid, p. 3.
Press Freedom and National Development

In 1991 the former Associated Press reporter and political columnist Gunilla L. Faringer wrote a work on press freedom in Africa at the University of Missouri-Colombia School of Journalism. She deeper studied the development journalism and focused on Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya although her conclusions are general for the press in the Third World. Although Faringer’s work is about the press and my focus is more general her findings are of great importance for my perspective. I here present part of her reasoning.

Faringer points out several important factors that should be kept in mind for an analysis of the press in Africa. First of all the African countries have never experienced real press freedom, neither during nor after colonialism. In addition many African countries have governmental ownership control of the press, often as a result of insufficient private investment capital.

Further she points out that constraints of the African press often result from the following circumstances:

- Tribal, linguistic and religious conflicts
- Shortage of newsprint and publishing facilities
- Strained economic conditions resulting in inadequate domestic training of journalists and investments in news media
- Inadequate financial resources resulting from insufficient advertising revenue
- Ideological pressure from advertisers, owners, and government
- Inadequately developed infrastructure such as telephones, telex, and means of distribution
- Foreign ownership of the press
- Dependency of international news agencies, even for regional coverage
- Illiteracy and high sales prices of newspapers
- Self-censorship as a result of government pressure

Many of those conditions determine the media in the industrialised countries as well. In South Africa with well developed former restrictedly white areas and poor former homelands it is hard to generalise on infrastructure, economic conditions, electricity and illiteracy simply because the differences between geographical areas and social classes are still huge.

The present state of underdevelopment of Black African countries, the politically volatile situation, and the need for national unity and development are the reasons frequently voiced by the leaders in Black Africa for the promotion of a "responsible press" and a "positive reporting".

Journalistic restraint for the sake of social tranquillity has also been sanctioned by the United Nations. A resolution passed with great majority in 1977 says:

The full realisation of civil and political rights without the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is impossible… progress…is dependent upon sound and effective national and international policies of economic and social development.

Faringer questions if it is possible to set up a timetable with regard to the press’s freedom to

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46 Ibid, p. XII
47 Ibid, p. 114
48 Ibid, p. 115.
criticise: "When in a country’s economic development does such criticism become acceptable? And who will make that determination?"  

Mass Media Philosophy among African Nationalists

Among the fundamental objectives of the African mass media after independence was their need to forge national and continental unity, encourage economic development, and further education. Commenting on this in a speech in 1968, President Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya stressed that there is an unusual need for newspapers in Africa to be both accurate and understanding.

In a communiqué from the Republic of Somalia the role of the media is clearly defined:

> It is the function of the nation’s communications media to weld the entire community into a single entity, a people of the same mind and possessed of the same determination to safeguard the national interest.

In 1986 at the twenty-first anniversary of the Kenya Press Club The President Daniel arap Moi stressed the need for co-operation between the press and the government:

> Despite the different perspectives of Government and the press, both parties share a common goal of improving the welfare of the society. Indeed, there should not arise any differences if the two parties engaged in constant consultation as, together, they seek to fulfil this basic objective.

A German scholar comment on the concept "constructive criticism" in 1962:

> These words ‘constructive criticism’ have become a catch phrase, a parrot-cry of politicians. They really want press and radio to concentrate on the positive, confidence-raising aspects of the news (...) and not to comment on abuses or shortcomings such as corruption and maladministration.

Peter Galliner, the former director of the International Press Institute, points out that the great weakness of the positive reporting argument is that underdeveloped countries – exactly in order to develop – need comprehensive information about their internal affairs as well as those of their neighbours and internationally, and this can only be achieved through a free flow of information.

Concepts of constructive criticism and development journalism have been used as a pretext for reduced freedom of the press and to outright censorship. Even concepts as truth and right are relative. Galliner claims:

> Press freedom in the Western sense, i.e. the existence of a diversity of newspapers, and therefore of political views, and the freedom to publish anything within broad

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49 Ibid, p. 115.
50 Ibid, p. 76 f.
limits, is irrelevant in a society which considers itself inherently and unarguably right.  

Journalists have contradicted the politicians and advocates of a nationalistic press. The Daily Nation in Kenya wrote in an editorial in September of 1963:

Constructive criticism means objective reporting and cold-blooded, unemotional outlook on events. As long as journalists are permitted to adhere to that principle, responsibility will be the key not only of the press but also of those politicians who, in the past, have attempted to use the newspapers for their own personal ambitions.  

In another editorial in the Daily News later in 1963:

Without tolerance free speech cannot survive.  
Without tolerance opinions cannot be propounded.  
Without tolerance the wealth of ideas which exists in the minds of progressive men and women cannot be turned into reality.  

Tolerance was a quality under pressure from conflicting goals. A former minister of information of Ghana said in 1962:

The African journalist is fully conscious of the responsibility that rests on the shoulders of Africa’s news journalists – that of keeping the people informed of the new developments in the country (...) projecting the African personality and contributing to the African liberation struggle and building of African unity. The new African journalist (...) lays emphasis on the positive things that go to help in building the new Africa.  

This definition of news is close to the concept of development journalism discussed in a later chapter.

Summary
The press in English-speaking Black Africa emerged under colonisation 170 years ago and is influenced by the press in Europe. The development is restricted by linguistic, ideological economic and political conditions. Among African Nationalists the objective of the press was defined as contributing to forge national unity and encourage economic and educational development.

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55 Ibid, p. 121f.  
57 Ibid, p. 83.  
58 Ibid, p. 83.
Earlier Research

It is hard to draw any clear line between theory of the media and theory of society. The media are ultimately dependent on society, although they have some scope for independent influence.

Denis McQuail distinguishes four kinds of media theory: social scientific, normative, operational and everyday theory. The normative is the most relevant for my study.

The normative theory is concerned with examining how the media ought to operate if certain social values are to be obtained. A good deal of research into mass media has been the result of attempts to apply norms of cultural and social performance. This kind of theory is important because it plays a part in shaping and legitimating media institutions. A society’s normative theories concerning its own media are usually to be found in laws, regulations, media policies, codes of ethics and the substance of public debate. 59

Media and Democracy

In The Media, Journalism and Democracy Margaret Scammell and Holli Semetko point out two important features of the vast bulk of media research on democracy. First, the central importance of media for democracy is taken for granted. A free press is both a symbol and guarantor of democracy. Second, the model of democracy, which media are supposed to serve, is also taken for granted. The classic liberal model, developed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, predominates above other models. 60

Denis McQuail calls this the dominant paradigm. The paradigm is both an outcome of and a guide to communication research. The underlying, rarely explained, view of society is essentially normative. It presumes a certain kind of "good society" which would be democratic, liberal, pluralistic and orderly. That means a peaceful, socially integrated, individualistic society with democratic political elections, competition between parties, free-market conditions and freedom of speech. This model happens to coincide with the western model of media theory. 61

Scammell and Semetko explain the domination by turning around the question and ask what democracy theory says about media. Liberal philosophy fought for the great principles that continue to underpin the democratic importance of media: Freedom of speech, the autonomy of civil society from the state and the sovereignty of the people. The classic arguments in favour of press freedom became the established wisdom when the philosophical debates concerning the liberty of the press took place as the Western world enshrined these principles.

The key assumptions are:
1. A free media is a manifestation of the principle of freedom of speech; this is intrinsically a good thing, both as defence against despotism and for the achievement of "truth" through unrestricted discussion.
2. A free press is required for protection of the autonomy of civil society from the potential despotic incursions of the state.

60 Scammell, Margaret and Semetko, Holli, The Media and democracy in The Media, Journalism, and Democracy, Aldershot, 2000, p. XII
3. A free press is necessary, via the representative principle, to provide information and enable free debate so that the public can form opinions and make choices among competitors for their votes.

The media’s duties to democracy flow clearly from these premises:
1. To act as a watchdog against the state
2. To supply accurate and sufficient information
3. To represent the people in the sense of adequately reflecting the spectrum of public opinion and political competition

The questions that dominate media investigation is whether media perform these tasks adequately and if not, why not. To answer those questions media inquiry often focus on:
1. Information: What is news? How is it selected, constructed, created, biased and so on?
2. Representation: Are the media truly representative of the society? Who are underrepresented in media representation of public opinion and why?
3. Media and the state: What in reality is the relationship – that of watchdog or lapdog? How does the state interfere and regulate ownership and content by, for example, censorship?

Scammell exposes weaknesses in democratic theory in respect to the media. She points out that it makes no sense to continue to judge the media as though there were no contest concerning democratic ideals and possibilities. The balance of the duties of the media varies across models of democracy.

It is rare in Western journalism theory to see democracy clearly set above freedom of speech, however this is what Robert Dahl does. He argues that journalists’ responsibility to democracy is prior to their duty of care of free speech. Individual right flow from democracy and are guaranteed by it. Therefore, responsible journalism should nurture the democratic consensus above all else. Scammell argues that this has been the practice in much post-war Western journalism, especially in public broadcasting systems.

Media and the State
In characterising the role of the media in relation to the state the metaphor of a dog is very useful. The watchdog and the lapdog metaphors have been widely used by researchers and in teaching. Three Professors Emeritus of the University of Minnesota also develop the role of the guard dog in their *A Guard dog Perspective on the Role of Media*.

Watchdog
The watchdog media is part of the traditional fourth estate role of independent powerful mass media. Such an idea of press surveillance has been basic to the ideology of popular and representative government. It springs from the idea of the press as "forum of the people" and "freedom-seeker-and-defender" and investigator as well as adversary of government. The essential perspective includes substantial autonomy for the media and their representation of the interest of the people.

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62 Scammell, Margaret and Semetko, Holli, The Media and democracy in The Media, Journalism, and Democracy, Aldershot, 2000, p. XII f.
63 Ibid, p. XIII.
64 Ibid, p. XLII.
65 Ibid, p. XLIII.
Guard dog
The guard dog conception takes into account the varying role of performances by mass media in reporting on major public issues. It suggests that media perform as a guard not for the community as a whole, but those particular groups who have the power and influence to create and control their own security systems. It rejects the idea of media being autonomous or apart from the system. It assumes that media reflects interests of the dominant groups and have neither the inclination nor the power to challenge those groups.67

The action of a guard dog is shaped according to the nature of the structure being served and who is defined as the threat. The guard dog media are conditioned to be suspicious of all potential intruders. In reporting political affairs, the tendency is to present a crisis in a framework that is consistent with official policy, or in local media according to the opinions of the local leadership.68

Lapdog
The Minnesota Professors’ description of the lapdog media is that the mass media is largely submissive to status quo political and economic authority. It is a total rejection of the fourth estate role. The media is regulated by the authority, lack independent power and are framing all issues according to the perspectives of the highest powers in the system.69

Lapdog is often used as depreciation, such as "that paper is nothing more than a lapdog". Ellis S. Krauss uses a more neutral definition in Democracy and the media. He writes that the lapdog allows the government to communicate with the public in order to mobilise its support for political authority, institutions and policies.70

Mass Media Theories
The differing perceptions of the nature of the role of media are rooted in divergent political philosophies and historical traditions and have been categorised by mass media researchers, often in similar ways.

Four Theories of the Press
A very influential categorisation includes the authoritarian, the libertarian, the social responsibility and the Soviet communist approaches. It originates from Four Theories of the Press described by the American authors Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in 1956.71 The book have been widely sold, used in teaching and discussed. Recently it has been subjected to extensive criticism because of the demise of the Soviet Communism theory and a lack of reflection of the coloration of the society on the media system.72

68 Ibid, p. 23.
69 Ibid, p. 26
According to the authoritarian theory, the state has the determining power in the society and the mass communication must support the government in power for the purpose of national advancement.

The libertarians see the press as a marketplace of ideas and argue that no government control should be needed, as free competition among news media will result in pluralism and will make for a self-righting process.

The social responsibility theory regard mass media as public services and it should therefore be committed to objectivity, truth and fairness. The people have the right to know and the media an obligation to inform.

The Soviet communist approach is not based in any political ideology since Marx spoke in favour of press freedom. It is derived from the history of the role of the press as propaganda instruments of the Communist party. Heavy control was imposed.

**World News Prism**

Several commentators have suggested that the four theories needs to be extended on the basis that each social system is likely to have its own press theory and that there is a need for a development theory. 73

In *World news Prism* William A. Hachten presents a categorisation including five political concepts of the press: the Authoritarian concept, the Western concept, the Communist concept, the Revolutionary concept and the Developmental (or Third World) concept.74

The authoritarian and communist concepts are very close to those concepts described in the Four Theories of the Press, and the Western one is similar to the libertarian concept.

Simply stated, the revolutionary concept is the idea of illegal and subversive mass communications utilising the media to overthrow a government. The revolutionary press is the press of people who believe that the government they live under does not serve their interest.

The developmental concept is a mixture of ideas, rhetoric, influences and grievances. There are aspects out of the communist concept and influences of Western social scientists that have posited a major role for mass communication in the process of nation building in newly independent countries. Implied in the concept is the view that individual rights of expression and other civil rights are irrelevant comparing with overwhelming problems of poverty, illiteracy and national conflicts. To face those problems the media and the government need to co-operate under the guidance of the government.

Gunilla Faringer has further developed the developmental concept and her findings will be presented in a separate chapter.

**Summary**

The media and the society depend on each other and there are different ideas of the roles they should play in relation to each other. Those ideas are rooted in political and ideological theories, among them are the libertarian concept and developmental media approach.

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73 Ibid, p. 155.
Theoretical framework

Development Journalism

Nationalist leaders as Kwame Nkumah in Ghana and Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya articulated the goals of the African-development journalism. These leaders saw the mass media as a revolutionary tool in the African liberation struggle. The media was assumed to function as extensions of governments in their objectives of social, economic and cultural development reconciling a new national identity and new self-identities. Most African governments intended to use the media as means to promote national integration, foster political stability and educate the people.75

The development concept has emerged in Third World countries and is a variation of the revolutionary press concept and the authoritarian or communist concept. The basic idea of the concept is that all mass media must be mobilised by the government for the task of nation building. That implies that the authorities themselves must provide adequate mass media if there are not enough resources in the private sector. There is no room for criticism as the alternative to the ruling government in the new and often unstable nations is chaos. Therefore, the concept also implies that that individual right of expression are to some extent irrelevant in relation to the overwhelming problems of poverty, disease, illiteracy and ethnic conflicts facing these countries.76

Many Western scholars, international organisations as UNESCO as well as national leaders have often supported the development goals set for the African mass media. Nevertheless journalists often remain critical. 77

The goals of development sometimes conflict with critical news reporting and the press in English-speaking Black Africa have repeatedly come under censorship pressure from the governments for its failure to report "positively" on the public affairs of the countries, although developmental journalism does not by definition promote censorship.

The approach of development journalism is often idealistic, regarding underdevelopment as a behaviour that can be corrected solely with information. In this way it disregards the global and political causes of underdevelopment in the Third World and focuses on shortcomings of individuals.78

Dennis L. Wilcox argues that the main emphasis for analysis of the media should be on how national leaders regard the role and functions of the press. If the mass media are viewed as an integral part of the national development, its role is defined in that cultural framework. Wilcox regards the idea of development journalism in Africa not as a matter of adherence to a particular ideology, but as based on practical considerations, such as economic survival and national entity.79

Over the years scholars have become less optimistic about the mass media’s potential to function as agent of modernisation, improvement of education and health as well as

76 Ibid, p. 90f.
77 Ibid. p. XI
78 Ibid. p. XI
79 Ibid, p 92.
prosperity. Mass media are often regarded as part of the ruling elite’s mechanism for maintaining status quo. Even so, Graham Mytton points out that even if the media may indeed be used as agencies of control, this does not mean that they are unable to promote social or political change.80

The UNESCO report Many Voices, One World (known as the McBride report) argues that a widening of the concept of news itself is necessary in order to create mass media relevant to audiences in developing nations. News should not only be reports of events, but placed in a broader context to create awareness and interest and also take into account entire processes. Information should be handled as a national resource and an educational tool. The report criticises the stress on departure from the normal and lack of attention to positive news.81

The concept of development journalism is promoted from two different perspectives, with partly different goals. One is the strongly ideological concept expressed by the African leaders with the goal of nation building and the spirit of a common future. The other approach, which is often voiced by mass media experts, focuses on the educational aspect such as increased literacy and improved living standard through instruction in, for example, agriculture and health.82

Advocates for development journalism rarely mention the main goal that was originally advocated for the press by the African leaders – to be a means for political and national integration – today. Very often, a cause-effect view is imposed on the Third World press by mass media scholars, who claim that the most important aspects of mass communications is to change the audience’s behaviour. Information on how to increase the maize production then becomes a task for the mass media. Different kinds of communication are often confused; instruction, propaganda and critical reporting are not clearly defined.83

Libertarian Media Approach
In the light of the dominant paradigm the only fully respected theory of the press in great parts of the world has been the theory of the press freedom. Everything else is a limitation, hopefully designed for the common good.84

The ideal of Western liberal journalism is a by-product of the Enlightenment and the liberal political tradition inspired by liberal thinkers, among them the English philosopher John Stuart Mill and the American President Thomas Jefferson. In this mainly Anglo-American tradition of thought freedom of the press was linked with the idea of freedom of the individual and with liberal political philosophy. These ideas were later worked into the notion of a "self-righting" mechanism by which the freely expressed truth surely will triumph over error when both are published freely. Another popular way of expressing the same idea is in terms of "the free market-place of ideas", first used in 1918 by an American judge. Although used metaphorically, this has had the effect of closely associating free press with the idea of literal

84 McQuail Denis, McQuail’s Mass Communication Theory, SAGE, London, 2000, p. 147.
The term means that there must be a diversity of views and news sources available – a marketplace of ideas from which the public can choose what it wishes to read and believe.\(^86\)

The role of the media as a watchdog of the government is one of the pillars of the liberal approach. It imposes a great responsibility on the journalist as an investigator.

The fact that the liberal approach is founded on the Western society makes it problematic to implement in other parts of the world. Wilcox and Aboaba reflects:

> It is based on the historical evolution of democratic concepts in Western Europe which were caused by universal literacy and the weakening of traditional monarchies. The basic foundation is a financially independent press, which can operate as a watchdog on government. The theory is an ideal in Africa because there is still massive illiteracy and lack of private capital to support an independent press.\(^87\)

> Those who subscribe to the press being the ‘fourth estate’ believe that (...) it is (...) the duty of the press to deflate the arrogant, exposure the corrupt and defend the liberties of the individual. The basic assumptions here are that 1) the press itself is a highly esteemed institution, 2) its members are selfless, devoted upright members of the society seeking only the good of their society, 3) the press is a voice of the people and 4) the only stumbling-block in the press’ way is the performance of its noble duty is the government.\(^88\)

### Summary

The goals of the developmental journalism are to contribute to political and national unity and to function as an agent to modernisation. Today there are conflicting opinions about the media’s potential to fulfil those goals. The libertarian media approach stresses the role of the media as a watchdog of the state and as a marketplace of ideas. That is the dominant paradigm in great part of the world.

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\(^{85}\) Ibid, p. 147.


Method

Qualitative Approach
The aim of this work is to identify and analyse different views of the role of the media in South Africa. This is best done by a qualitative, interpretative approach. Therefore the study is based on in-depth interviews and written material.

I’ve been aware of the difficulties of objectivity using in-depth interviews as the main tool. But since the aim of the study is to contribute to a better understanding of different without valuing the opinions, I have had no difficulty.

My method of selection is strategical: journalists who have written articles about the issue and researchers involved in related projects was the first I contacted. I found this method very useful considering the aim to identify different opinions, not to try to give a representative overview. Advises from my mentors and interviewed researchers with great experience of South Africa have also been guiding me as a newcomer in the country.

Mode of Procedure
Since it was my first visit to South Africa I contacted some journalists with great experience of the country before I went there. They supported me with information, comments and recommendations during my study. Those are:

- Annika Forsberg, free-lance journalist living in Cape Town
- Marika Griehsel, television journalist working for the Swedish public television in Africa
- Susanna Lööf, journalist living in Johannesburg working for Associated Press
- Roland Stanbridge, South African journalist and lector of journalism at the University of Stockholm

As I came to Durban and my field supervisor I started by reading the papers, further study literature on the topic and talk to students and lecturers at the Culture and Media Department at University of Natal.

The second phase was contacting people to interview. I was easier than I expected to get access to people and I soon realised that I had to leave Durban to get a wider perspective. Of my eight weeks in South Africa I spent one week in the countryside, two weeks in Cape Town and one week in Johannesburg.

The womaniser story (see Background) started two days before I arrived to the country and the advertisement (see Background) was published when I had been there for a month. In other worlds, the debate went on as I was doing my interviews. They have all been structured similarly with freedom of expression, access to information, acceptance of criticism and opinions on the role of the media as main topics. Those are all wide questions and I used statements and articles as a point of departure. The presidents first column in ANC Today, quotes from the speech by Essop Pahad at the meeting with Independent Newspapers (see The Governments Position) and later the advertisement have been used to concretise the discussions. All the interviews have been done separately but sometimes I’ve been confronting the interviewees with statements made during earlier interviews. Everyone I met have been very outspoken and it was not difficult to find different opinions on my topic.
Sources

Literature
The books I’ve been using is a wide range of theoretical literature on mass communication and society, media and democracy and the South African media as well as the South African society. I’ve made an effort not to just apply western theory on the South African reality and my main sources have been Gunilla Faringer’s collection on African perspectives in *Press Freedom in Africa* and South African academical publications.

Both ANC and the government have very informative web pages and extensive digital archives that gave me the official view of the party and the government. Web pages of universities, newspapers, organisations and companies have also been important sources

The articles I’ve quoted come from different newspapers; some dailies, some tabloids and some weeklies. As there is no true national newspapers in South Africa and it’s sometimes hard to find specific papers the articles simply come from the papers that I’ve been able to get hold of. I’m aware of the scientific problems that poses, but that is simply the reality in a developing country and since I have no intention to picture all opinions it shouldn’t effect the result of my work.

Interviews by date
- Karthy Govender, Professor in Law and Human Rights Commissioner, University of Natal, Durban, 01-04-24.
- Peter Davis, Editor of the *Sunday Tribune*, Independent Newspaper House, Durban, 01-04-25.
- David Stanley, News Editor at *East Coast Radio* (private radio station), the home of David Stanley, Durban, 01-04-26.
- David McGregor, countryside freelancer and head of *Livewire.com*, Port Alfred Backpackers, Port Alfred, 01-05-02.
- Rod Amner, Lecturer in Journalism and part of Development Media Agency, Rhodes University, Grahams Town, 01-05-02.
- Lynette Steenveld, Senior Lecturer and Head of Transition Studies at the Media Department, Rhodes University, Grahams Town, 01-05-03.
- Roger Friedman, freelancer and former *Cape Times* journalist, Bar Deli, Cape Town, 01-05-07.
- Zane Ibrahim, Directive Manager at *Bush Radio* (community radio outside Cape Town), Bush Radio, Riverside, 01-05-09.
- Muegsein Williams, Editor of *Cape Times*, Independent Newspaper House, Cape Town, 01-05-09.
- Sipho Seepe, mathematican and political commentator at the *Mail & Guardian*, Hyatt Hotel, Johannesburg, 01-05-17.
- Charlene Smith, freelancer specialised in health and politics, home of Charlene Smith, Johannesburg, 01-05-21.
- Sara Crowe, freelancer and former SABC Television journalist, Nino’s Café, Johannesburg, 01-05-21.
- Steyn Speed, sub editor of *ANC Today*, the ANC Building, Johannesburg, 01-05-22.
- Jeanette Minnie, Freedom of Expression Consultant, the Municipality of Stockholm, 01-06-27.
Summary
This study is qualitative and uses in-depth interviews as the most important method. I’ve followed the debate in the press about the role of the media in South Africa and interviewed media workers, politicians and researchers about their opinions on the topic.
Findings

Following the Womaniser story there was a debate in the press about criticism of those in power that culminated in the advertisement in the *Sunday Times*. The advertisement sparked discussion on the role of the media. Here I present some of the opinions articulated in the press.

Voices from the Press

Console Tleane is a researcher and a freelance journalist. In the *Mail & Guardian* she takes a second look at the womaniser-story in the light of the call by the Western Cape African National Congress for legislation to restrict media criticism of the country’s highest office. She compares the situation in South Africa with the one in the US where the White House have their own correspondents and asks *What does presidential press corps mean for SA?:*

The most critical question that Union Buildings correspondents have to answer is: are they in the profession to help oil the state communications machinery or are they in the profession to tell the truth as it is? The role of the journalists should be to report the truth as it is and spark debate. Nothing more, nothing less.

This answer the challenge often made to journalists: that they must assist to shape democracy. But this view should also be challenged. Democracy comes about and is consolidated when ordinary citizens and other sectors of society, like intellectuals, are allowed to occupy spaces of debate without any fear. The media acts as an agency to express this engagement…

Dare we say it is the government that should ensure that spaces for expression are not closed? And our eyes will be on it when democracy is threatened, and not on the media. 89

In the *Sowetan* a member of the ANC national executive, Dumisani Makhaye, expressed his personal perception of the womaniser-story:

In his famous article of 1959, *Shifting Sands of Illusion*, Nelson Mandela exposed the treacherous nature of white liberalism in South Africa. That characterisation is even more relevant today.

In brief, white liberalism loves a black person when he is down and hates him when he is up.

The apologists of white liberalism refer to Du Preez as a veteran journalist. They stoop so low as to defend gutter journalism and deny the right of its victims to respond.

Freedom of speech becomes the freedom to trade insults without to victim being able to respond. But if he does, he is deemed to be paranoid…

They (Du Preez and his "fellow travellers in gutter journalism", my comment) identify themselves by their special hatred of black leadership behind the guise of freedom of the press. 90

Two weeks after the advertisement the *Sunday Independent* analyses the debate at the leader page:

It is, of course, a debate about whether this society will do more then pay lip-service to the freedom of expression enshrined in our constitution. But it is also a debate about what the emerging South African nation will regard as legitimate

criticism – and when the media will close ranks with the government and other institutions in society in the face of external criticism as, for instance, the media in France do. Potential candidates for national consensus are the fight against HIV/AIDS, the fight against poverty, the fight against racism and the socio-economic legacy of apartheid, and the need to nurture democracy and consolidate our racial, cultural and ethnic diversity… If the media could, as an institution, reach some informal consensus on these issues they could help create a meaningful dialogue between the media and the state and forestall the racial exclusivity implied in the signatories’ statement… Ideally, the media should be the government’s most consistent critics at home but should be ambassadors for the country abroad. Neither white nor black media can achieve that. Only a truly South African press will do. 91

Mathatha Tsedu is the deputy editor of The Star and chairman of South African National Editors Forum (Sanef). He has a column called Black Eye in Cape Times where he writes:

As black people we should stop basing our hopes and aspirations on the benevolence of a community whose interests, in the main, are inimical to our own understanding of life… the correction of black portrayal in the media, whether it is President Thabo Mbeki or women in clinic who are used as visuals for Aids stories without consultation, will come about only when black people own their own media in a critical mass. That way, the black ethos of reporting, whatever that may be – but which includes respect for our cultural values – will merge. Until that happens, more people will find even more reasons to buy space in newspapers in order to complain about them… we should focus on the real remedy. And that is not begging to be understood, but having the means to propagate your reality. 92

The journalist Max du Preez declares that the United States is a functional democracy because of its diversity of media and then compares the media debate of today with some statements from the apartheid days in his Press bashing all too familiar at the Opinion page in The Star:

Let me just say when I listen to Minister Essop Pahad, ANC spokesperson Smuts Ngonyama and the 11 pro-Mbeki advertisers, I hear Eschel Rhoodie, head of the department of information during the reign of prime minister John Vorster (in the 1970s, my comment) (…) ‘It was not a critical press, but hostile and negative, trying everything in its power to push the white nation as rapidly as possible into the melting pot of political integration’ (…) words that could as easily have come from the mouths of our present government. 93

In his column Behind the Grape Curtain in the Cape Times journalist Sandile Dikeni writes about the role of the media:

It is (…) my opinion that we tend to sloganspeer press freedom. Relative to many other nations, the press freedom in the new democracy enjoys unprecedented freedom. It is therefore a blatant lie that current criticism (from the state and anywhere else) of the current media is comparable to those of the apartheid regime (…)

92 Tsedu, Mathatha, Ownership is power, Cape Times, 01-05-14, p. 8.
I hope that the currant media for its own sake is different from that of an apartheid state. I also hope that our media can achieve a state of critical self-appraisal about its role as a fourth estate in a South African context.

And he continues commenting the advertisement:

It is probably true that one will not be able to find evidence of a plot against Mbeki and other blacks by the media, because there is no such thing. But that is irrelevant. What is relevant is whether we as media have created an aesthetic that automatically exonerates us from the expected accusations from what I call our natural ‘constrains’.

The Journalist Phylicia Oppelt in a comment in Sunday Times writes:

In the end, though, like the President’s 11 defendants, we – the people who voted for him – also want him to govern fairly, compassionately and decisively. But we don’t need to sing in one sycophantic chorus. We can be individually critical in our oneness, as the motto on our new coat of arms – unity in diversity – suggests. This country belongs to all the voices – however unpalatable they may sometimes be – who speak in it.

In the Mail & Guardian mathematican and political commentator Sipho Seepe in his column No blows barred analyses the argument in the advertisement under the title The Pitfalls of Racial Reasoning:

It is unfortunate that the eleven black signatories of the advert in the Sunday Times preferred to attribute Mbeki’s unimpressive record as a president to rightwing conspiracy in the media. While the signatories argue that the media is on campaign to discredit blacks in powerful positions, the very same signatories present the blacks as helpless victims of the triumphant white media (…) An incisive role places agency and possibility of change within the black people in which they are subjects of their own history.

An examination of the political context, the timing and the silences in the advert reveals a combination of political mischief, dishonesty, and intellectual naiveté. Furthermore, we should not discount the signatories’ economic self-interest.

He goes on writing that the harshest criticism on economic, political and moral fronts have come from black people themselves. He himself is one of those. He closes the column by arguing that: ‘Moral and logical reasoning is required if we are to liberate ourselves from the racial guilt of opposing morally dubious black leadership.’ And then finally a quote from Cornel West’s The Pitfalls of Racial Reasoning: ‘Instead of a closing-ranks mentality, a prophetic framework encourages a coalition strategy that solicits genuine solidarity with those deeply committed to anti-racist struggle.’

Summary

The debate in the press reveals the close link between politics and opinion on the media. Console Tleane stresses the responsibilities of the government while many of the journalists

94 Dikeni, Sandile, Behind the Grape Curtains, Cape Times, 01-05-09, p. 8.
95 Oppelt, Phylicia, A diverse country speaks with many voices, Sunday Times, 01-05-20, p. 16.
interviewed later in this study put great responsibilities in the hand of the individual journalist.

The politician Dumisani Makhaya uses the occasion to express his opinion on liberalism and ads a black and white perspective to it. In Sweden the national papers have worked together and published articles on nazism in line with the government’s effort to fight racism. With that in mind the opinion expressed at the leader page of the Sunday Independent about a national consensus on issues like HIV/AIDS and the fight against racism and poverty may not seem that typical to a developing country in transition. Nevertheless his ideas are very close to those articulated by the government.

The column *Black Eye* really expresses a black man’s perspective. Mathatha Tsedu connects characteristics to skin colour in a not very thoughtful way. But in the case of South Africa it shows the connection between history, way of life and perspective of society. Max du Preez and Sandile Dikeni also writes about the historical heritage. Du Preez focuses on the practice and Dikeni on the legislation. The similarities between the rhetoric of the apartheid regime and the ANC politicians are striking, but the importance of the freedom of expression can’t be denied.

The reminder by Phyllis Oppelt about the support Mbeki has from the voters and the point that you can be critical and supportive is healthy not only for the signatories of the advert.

**The position of the Government**

Already in 1999 at the ANC’s national congress there where discussions about the media and their relationship to the government:

> On the media front, after five years of democracy little has changed in the media environment. The ANC is still faced with a primarily hostile press corps as media is still primarily owned and controlled by antagonistic forces with minority interests. The result has been a continuous onslaught of negative reporting on ANC and the ANC-led government.97

In July 2000 when President Mbeki was in Sweden to talk to young socialists at a meeting in Malmö he expressed dissatisfaction with the mass media:

> They have all the press freedom they can wish, but they are criticising everything. They never write about the positive. The journalists got caught in the perception that the press have to be the opponents of the government. It’s still there since the apartheid era.98 (my translation)

In January 2001 the ANC released ANC Today. It’s the party’s on line publication where the president has his own column. It’s published every Friday and it generally expresses the party’s official opinions. It’s led by the head of Presidency Smut Ngonyama and is written by sub editors from the ANC headquarter. Most of the texts are not signed.

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In the President’s first column he writes:99

It is of critical importance that the ANC develops its own vehicles to communicate news, information and views to as many people as possible, at home and abroad. (…) We are faced with the virtually unique situation that, among the democracies, the overwhelmingly dominant tendency in South African politics, represented by the ANC, has no representation whatsoever in the mass media. We therefore have to contend with the situation that what masquerades as "public opinion", as reflected in the bulk of our media, is in fact minority opinion informed by the historic social and political position occupied by this minority. (…) ANC Today will make an important contribution towards filling the void of the voicelessness of millions of people, that is a direct legacy of more than three hundred years of colonialism and apartheid. (…)

ANC Today must be a combatant for the truth, for the liberation of the minds of our people, for the eradication of the colonial and apartheid legacy, for democracy, non-racism, non-sexism, prosperity and progress. The struggle continues! Victory is certain!

At World Press Freedom Day in May 2001 ANC Today published texts about the media and racism, media diversity and the critical media. A statement by the president focused on representation and diversity:

The concept of press freedom is a universal one and simple in its essence. It amounts to no more and no less than the elementary right of all people to have unfettered access to the means of truly expressing their opinions and conversely having access to media that fully reflect their life experience and their aspirations. Press freedom therefore is not the exclusive right of the press or the media generally. It is an inherent right of all people everywhere. As such it is entrenched in South Africa's constitution; and our people's elected representatives and society as a whole consider it their obligation to nurture freedom of the media and freedom of expression: to ensure that journalists are able to do their work without let or hindrance, fear of favour, and that citizens have access to information they need continually to change their lives for the better. Nor can any of us remain content while press freedom in its fullest sense remains in practice something enjoyed mainly by an elite - urban rather than rural, rich rather than poor, industrialised rather than developing. 100

In a column called Viewpoint under the title South Africa needs a truly critical media Smuts Ngonyama, an ANC National Executive Committee member and Head of the Presidency at ANC headquarters, gives his analysis of the role of the media in South Africa:

To the owners of media institutions, their managers and sales people, the primary role of their publications, stations or web-sites is to maximise profit. To politicians, social commentators and citizens, the role of the media is to inform, engage, entertain, champion the rights of citizens, deepen democracy and provide a

voice to the diversity of voices in society. To journalists and editors it is perhaps a combination of both.

Yet one aspect of the media's role which has proven difficult to effectively debate, not surprisingly given the country's history, is the relationship between the media and government and the ruling party.

Some people view this as a simple choice for the media: either be a watchdog keeping a beady eye on the ruling party or a lapdog which happily swallows anything the ANC might dish up. Neither dog is particularly desirable.

What South Africa needs is a truly critical media.

A truly critical media is not one which opposes the government at every turn. It is not a media automatically inclined to distrust government, or which will seize any opportunity to portray the ruling party or government in a negative light.

A truly critical media is one committed to ensuring its coverage is informative and fair. It strives to provide coverage that paints a picture of events or issues that as accurately as possible reflect reality.

A 'critical' media is a media which thinks. It is a media which interrogates each and every issue, which weighs up the facts, which reflects on the various perspectives, which acknowledges its own inherent prejudices and predispositions, and which then presents the issue in a way which most closely conveys the real situation.

Too often, media in South Africa mistakes criticism with being critical. Too often, the media accepts at face value supposed instances of corruption, incompetence, political bad faith, etc, when in fact a critical look at the issues would have indicated otherwise.\(^{101}\)

He goes on arguing that the media also needs to reflect on the diversity of views and interests within society itself, and that it must be recognised that the racial, gender and class divisions in society have ensured that the life experiences of the people have in many ways been shaped by the particular race, gender or class they come from.

In February 2001 the government met with the International Advisory Board of Independent Newspaper in Cape Town. Essop Pahad, the minister charged with responsibility for the Governments communication, articulated some concerns about the media:

Government and media are, in reality, two different sides of the same coin, both fighters in the public interest. They stand apart, but there is no reason why they should not work constructively together in the national interest, while showing due respect for one another’s independence.

(...) The media are free to report, comment and criticise as they wish. But the corollary of this is that the Government, in a free society, cannot be expected to remain silent when it is criticised. And no one should for a moment interpret our responses as implying any threat to the continued freedom and independence of the media

(...) There will be strong criticism of the media if it is felt that some of them are indulging in systematic hostility of a personal nature directed against our leaders

(...) We want to have, indeed to encourage, trenchant criticism, and journalistic digging – which can only help the public interest and keep the Government on its toes. That is good for any government. But there is a point when criticism assumes the role of the philippic, bitter invective.

Moreover there is a strong case to argue that constructive involvement in beating the massive challenges we face in South Africa extends way beyond the media. It requires the willing commitment of leadership and other institutions in society that can vastly influence events by playing either a negative role or a positive one. 

(…)

My plea is for balance, comprehensiveness and reason, not sycophancy and blandness. The media of other democratic countries seem, in general, to get the mix right, where there is a very wide spectrum of comment available to the public, the sharpest criticism and yet a broad national consensus on fundamental important issues. Let us rather try that as a nation, and win.  

In an interview with Steyn Speed, sub editor of ANC Today, he further developed some of the positions of the government:

Freedom of expression:
No laws constrain the South Africans to express themselves, but if each and every citizen doesn’t have the means to express themselves as they want you might not be able to talk of freedom of expression. It’s a question of diversity and of languages.

Section 205:
There is a debate going on in the ANC about this. We don’t have a clear position. On one hand we have to empower the criminal justice system. We need evidence and testimonies. On the other hand, when you call journalists to testify that were involved in an information collection action you restrain their possibility to collect information. We need to define the circumstances and try to find some solution in-between.

Critique of the government:
There is a lack of balance in the media. Not all perspectives get covered. It happens that the ANC wants to respond to critique articulated by the Democratic Alliance and we are not getting published. The media in South Africa is not representing the people yet. It is generally out of sync with the public opinion.

Advertisement in the Sunday Times:
Well, there might be a problem of words. I wouldn’t say conspiracy, perhaps a conspiracy of circumstances. There are clearly people in different areas that find in there interest to undermine the President. This advertisement takes place in a special context. The media isn’t representative. The journalists are not experienced or skilled. They go for easy targets. Being used are not the right words either. But if you report on dirt you are more valuable – that’s the culture in the papers. And the more you read about the negative about Mbeki, you are more likely to believe it.

The role of the media:
The role of the media consists of two elements. The role of the media in any society is to reflect the society and to inform as comprehensive as possible. That’s an important part of the democratic process. Citizens need to have access to a broad range of information and opinions. The second role is more difficult to define. It’s an advocacy role. Journalists should promote basic principles that the people have

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agreed upon, like democracy and human rights. It’s important to create national consensus on the basic values in the constitution. 103

Summary
ANC and the government are not satisfied with the representation in the media and that is expressed as often as they get the possibility. They want to have their own party press but don’t have the money it would cost. An on-line publication is their solution, but ANC Today can’t possibly reach the poor majority of the South Africans.

The opinions always stressed by ruling politicians are that the government and the media should work together on important issues, that the media criticise too much and unfairly and that the media is not representing the opinions of the people because the poor majority doesn’t have the means to express themselves.

Positions of the Interviewees
In the following I present a selection of opinions expressed by the interviewees. It’s their own words but their full answers are not always presented. The quotes are journalistically worked up.

Freedom of Expression

Teresa: Do you think you have true freedom of expression in South Africa today?

Jeanette Minnie: We have an excellent legal protection and the media is still outspoken, but people are scared to speak. They think twice. We must be careful not to take freedom for granted. We depend on people being brave again. If not in time there will be consequences. In many African countries the people were so grateful after being liberated that they didn’t criticise and then they lost their right to criticise.

Roger Friedman: Yes, we have Freedom of Expression. (And he turns to his friend the photographer Benny Gool.) Don’t we Benny?

Charlene Smith: No, but more today than in he past. We don’t have the same level of censorship nor the same level of self-censorship. We have a greater capacity today, but we are on a slippery slope and need to start to hold on not to lose ground. I see an increasing self-censorship. And we have still some laws from the apartheid era that the new government are using aggressively and increasingly - section 205 is one example.
Teresa: What can you do not to fall further down the slope?
Charlene Smith: It's up to the journalists to do their job. We have to keep our integrity, telling both sides of the story. We shouldn't be intimidated by the government or the business. We should criticise. We are not doing enough of it. There are elections for the ANC next year, and they are creating a climate where people who disagree are a disloyal, an unpatriotic or a problem. We are leaning towards fascism. We've been there!

David McGregor: We live in a society where you can actually test the parameters of our constitution. If it's a strong enough story you must take the chance and

103 Interview with Steyn Speed, sub editor of ANC Today, the ANC Building, Johannesburg, 01-05-22.
publish it. And if it comes to a trial... well it comes down to what’s right and what’s wrong. I have a story where I'm getting sued by wealthy businessmen for writing stories about them. But you just got to take the chance. We're a society in transformation. There are many things being done that are testing the new constitution.

To a large degree you can comment on everything you want. There is far more freedom now. With those new freedoms that are available to us as journalists and people who write for publication one has got the opportunity now to test particular issues of Freedom of expression. The barriers of laws are less in terms of what you can and can't, but we got to test because if we don't we'll never know what we can and can't do.

Peter Davis: When it comes to Freedom of Expression the government doesn't really believe in it, as it is in many other countries. Essop Pahad wants to cooperate with the media in the sense that they are working together.
The press is still feeling its way to freedom. We didn't know what to do with it. The censorship book was the bible. Now we are getting a feeling of our freedom.

Sara Crowe: When black journalists speak out people from the government call them and question them. They are submitted to direct pressure. Ask Mathatha Tsedu about that! (Chairman of Sanef) To white journalists the pressure is more indirect – against the papers. But it’s still a very open debate and no real threats. But these are still signs; we have to be careful so the restrictions don’t go too far. According to the laws we have Freedom of Expression, but when journalists get calls from the government I don't think you can say that we have true Freedom of Expression. And when leaders are using patriotism as arguments it's becoming dangerous. I think journalists are self-censoring.

Sipho Seepe: Given the price that people have paid, it becomes important to guard democracy very carefully, especially in a time of transition. And what the government is trying to say is - guys don't criticise us, we are still trying. But if you don't cement and if you don't consolidate democracy at an early stage you'll lose it. And Africa has many good examples of revolutionary leaders who fought and got rid of colonial regimes but then moved to oppress their own people. Mbeki wants to surround himself with people who do not disagree with him. And we actually see it; people don't disagree with him, they actually repeat what he says. So that is the new democracy in South Africa. I don't call it democracy, I call it democrazy. I think we have freedom and that’s how it’s being threatened. And when you threaten the freedom is when you start saying that people are unpatriotic, when you start argue that people are racist without even giving proof, when you're saying that there is a racial conspiracy without even giving examples of that conspiracy. So what this advert does is to try to give a mention to the president that it's not only you as government who has a problem with the media it is also us, but then when they write it they do it as they speak on the behalf of the blacks. So such a strategy can be very dangerous.

David Stanley: It's a big change. The Freedom of Expression is almost normalised. But we are still learning democracy and we are still preaching democracy.

Access to Information

Teresa: Do you have access to information in South Africa today?

Karthi Govender: Many of the exceptions are necessary to prevent abuse of the right and they are similar to exceptions in the legislation in any other countries, but
that there also are some that are too wide. I’m concerned that disclosure will become the exception rather than the norm.

To be able to get the information you will have to demonstrate why, which won't be difficult for a journalist. Newspapers are the ones who will gain most of this law. If someone doesn’t want to give out the information you'll have to go to court.

The newspapers have the capacity to do so. A big problem to solve is the fees. You will probably have to pay if you want more than 40 pages. That means that only those who have money will have the right to know.

What worries me is that there is not enough training of the staff. It will take a long time before this really will work in practice.

David McGregor: There are big words about transparency but to a large degree transparency is not really there. You can be transparent in things you want to be transparent in and in other things you can just close the doors.

David Stanley: I'm now covering a story and have been trying to get a clear statement from the government for two weeks, and it seems impossible. Now you can comment on everything, but it can be difficult to get some information. Mbeki is a very unapproachable president. I have the impression that he is hiding.

Roger Friedman: Access to information can always be better in every government I think. That's politics. But I think that all the scandals show us that we have access to information.

Rod Amner: I personally think it’s a tragedy that the ANC is so paranoid with controlling information. I mean - we’re in a democracy now.

Sipho Seepe: Yes we have access to information, but we also live in the global world where some of the newspapers are in the Internet. The only way you can stop them is to ban them, so I don't think even if the government wants to stop the Access to Information they will succeed because the Internet knows no bans, you know.

Positive and Negative News

Teresa: The government is complaining about too much criticism. Do they have a problem with critique?

Muegsein Williams: No, the ANC have no problem with critique. The fact that the reporting is so negative is not true. In 1996 80 percent was positive. The president is criticised on some specific issues as the AIDS. People tend to forget the positive. When a politician asks for balance he asks for more favourable cover of the party. I take that with a piece of salt. If they are asking us to forsake the role of watchdog – to have a critical look at power – they are badly mistaken.

Zane Ibrahim: The criticism has been over the top. It’s sad. The criticism has been unfounded. It’s embarrassing for me as a journalist.

Teresa: So why is Mbeki so criticised? He is criticised by blacks as well.

Zane Ibrahim: Why? It’s racism. Blacks are used. They don’t think enough. I’m criticising him, but I’m not attacking him. He respects me. It mustn’t be to hurt anybody. Someone here is mean.

David McGregor: There have been some change in the way of services; there have been some changes but not much. Especially here where I live life is still as
hard as it was previously. And that’s what the media tends to portray... they are not really looking for the good news stories; they are looking for the negative stories. It's the same in every newsroom in SA and in the world. We live in a society where people have a fascination of the negative and people tend to rather hit someone in the head with a hammer then clap them on the back and praise their work. It's an occasion 22, almost a double-edged sword, where on the one hand you don't want to be a mouthpiece for anybody. You got to find a balance and I think that's where the shortcomings are, that there is no real balance in reporting. There are bad things and that's being covered. But you could write a lot about the good things being done.

David Stanley: ANC have had difficulties getting their messages across. Their reaction to criticism is often irrational, but you must also consider that most of them are not talking in their one language.

Peter Davis: Mbeki has generally not a good relationship with the media. It is tense. Both perceptions of the other are wrong. We live in a young and tender democracy, which as yet has not become inured to the slings and arrows of robust criticism and debate. Respect for authority is a big issue in Africa. It is bred deeply in tribal law and usage. The new elite is not yet used to criticism and takes much of it personally - which is not intended. No government likes to be criticised and no matter that they protest differently, all governments would like some control of the press. I only hope this reaction (the ad.) is not the start of a slow move to eat away our newly found freedom of speech.

Roger Friedman: Now media can afford to be critical. Now we can write about corruption, we couldn't do that before. When it comes to corruption I'm sure it was far worse before, but people don't know about that.

Sara Crowe: Mbeki feels threatened by people who speak out. Some people say that white South Africans don’t have the right to do it. In that way the media can’t say what they want until it’s owned by blacks. As the atmosphere is now it’s not suitable for a free journalist to speak out. I’m originally from Ireland. Each time I open my mouth I’m told to shut up by black journalists and intellectuals because I’m white and not South African. It’s impossible to avoid the race issue.

Sipho Seepe: Because Mbeki has consolidated power to his office very few people are willing to challenge him within the ANC. So what happens is that the people who are in the media, they challenge his ideas. So it appears that the media is against him, when in fact the media is not against him.

Teresa: How would you characterise the relation between the government and the media?

Sipho Seepe: Right now it's hostile. The Sanef is trying by own means to bridge the gap but what the government, what Mbeki wants is to have people who sing praises to him.

Teresa: For how long have it been hostile?

Sipho Seepe: Well, actually during Mandela’s time there was no hostility.

Lynette Steenveld: There is a socio-cultural problem in SA, wish is not specific of this country and it is that we are not able to be critical and accept criticism and line with differences. It's hard to not see criticism as racism. They can't see where the criticism comes from. I think this government have a problem with critique. It gives the impression of being very defensive. The 80's were a very fruitful period with lots of discussion and lots of criticism. You can see a Stalinist element in the ANC. East European
governments supported it. You need to be very clear of the different traditions within the ANC and Stalinism is one of them. You can see Stalinist responses: the party before everything.

The Advertisement

**Teresa:** What was your reaction to the advertisement in the *Sunday Times*?

**Charlene Smith:** They are talking shit. White people in SA are people who have chosen to stay and remain in this country. Journalists have a pathetic salary, a huge demand and we live in a difficult society. We love this country and we believe in the democratic process. They are creating a them-and-us-situation. People should not be divided by race. It's crap. If there is a need people should be divided by socio-economic measures or gender. I'm not against the publication of the ad. Everyone is entitled to buy an ad, but I'm not sure what their purpose was. I wonder if they really paid themselves. I doubt that it was placed without the knowledge of Mbeki. As long as the blacks are using whites as the barometer, blacks will not be good enough. But do they want to be as whites? This ad distracted everyone from the arms deal scandal in the same way the plot did.

**Zane Ibrahim:** I’d put my name on this if I were asked to.

**Sipho Seepe:** Well I was not surprised by the ad. Because in South Africa we still have to address the issue of race. It would be too ambitious for us to think that people who have been oppressed along the racial line for 300 years, that we can actually make progress that quickly. So South Africa is still a racially polarised society and that is one thing that one must recognise, but it’s one thing to recognise the problem and another thing to exploit the problem for racial sympathy. The struggle against apartheid was based on the struggle against racism, against sexism and against any form of discrimination. So it’s not good when we, as black people, begin to use the issue of race as an excuse to our own failures. So my reaction to the ad was that it was a mischief and also an insult to black people in general. An insult to black people mainly because it betrays the struggle but also an insult in the sense that it indicates that those who wrote the advert have no understanding of democracy. Their understanding is that just because you are black you have to support a black president. So for me it’s unhistorical because black people committed the greatest tragedies in the continent. So the fact that somebody is black does not mean that somebody is fit to govern. And what the ad has actually done is to divert attention from the failures of the president. And it also shows the lack of the scholarship of those people who wrote the advert. To question someone's ideas doesn’t mean that I don't like him - he becomes irrelevant. The so-called attack on Mbeki is because he has ideas that are problematic, and that needs to be challenged. When we have someone who has created an atmosphere where the only voice that meets us is his, obviously the challenge will no longer be on the ANC, it will no longer be on the ministers, it will be on the person in the centre. So one must understand the advert in that context. But as I said, where the advert becomes an insult to black people is to assume that black people because they are black they must have one opinion - an opinion that drives from the blackness. And it is also an insult to many black people who have differed with Mbeki like the COSATU, which is largely a big union, largely black that has probably close to two million black people who have been harshly critical with Mbeki.
Muegsein Williams: We have a tough debate in this country and that gives bloody noses. The signatories are worried about their investment interests. The media will never be popular and that’s not our job.

The Role of the Media

Teresa: What ought the role of the media be in South Africa today?

Charlene Smith: The contemporary history of South African journalism is that all journalists come from repression, censorship and arrests. I don't know how many times I've been arrested. And then you had three types of journalists:
1. Those who chose to accept and support what was happening
2. Those who tried to pretend that nothing happened and reported as if it wasn’t
3. Those who chose to defy apartheid and the restrictions.
And the situation has not changed. They are merging very strongly again, and that's 'cause apartheid is still so clear. The government is creating them. The history of conflict is there still. The third type is a very activist journalist. And to us a lot of what is happening now makes the warning bells ring. There are police raiding newsrooms, attacks from the president and from the ministers. The most dangerous journalist now is the one who are left-wing and who were left-wing under apartheid. You had to make up your mind, because if you reported you had to be ready to go to jail.
And we are journalists living in Africa. We watch what is happening in the other countries. We wouldn't let it happen here.

David McGregor: I've met people that have been through immense hardship and people say -hey can you help us out with a little something, and I don't have a lot of things in my pocket so I say to people that I maybe can help by writing a story. Maybe the help that I can give them is to give them a voice as individuals.

David Stanley: Some reporting is still polarising the nation in white and black. I think you should just tell what's happening and then let the people decide. You have to ask yourself what is best for the society: to ignore things that are wrong or to expose it? It's like if you go to the doctor with an injured arm. Should the doctor take measures or not?

Lynette Steenveld: In terms of Freedom of Expression I think the failure is generally on the journalist’s side. I was at a conference with 30 journalists of mixed backgrounds. There someone asked why you never see the president with his wife. Well, someone else said that he doesn't like her and never wanted to marry her, that he is having mistresses and that it's well known. And so there they discussed how they can talk about it, in what context they are allowed to talk about it, and if they could ask about it as black journalists. Some said that Mbeki is black and generally on their side, and asked if you don't have to be loyal... For a white journalist who is more socially removed from that it's much easier to ask those questions and feel far more comfortable. But does that mean that black journalists shouldn't ask that? You should ask why you would want to ask that question, and that's a journalistic question and has nothing to do with white and black. But the blacks think that if they ask that question they'd be like "whitey" and they don't want to be "whitey". But they want to be a critical journalist...

Peter Davis: There is a tension between the government and the media. But I don't think they should live in harmony. Our mission is to try the agendas so the readers can make decisions - to show different opinions.
I suggest that the media is doing its job: That of being a watchdog for the country, criticising all three levels of government where it sees wrong as it did in the past under the apartheid regime, despite all the laws against such criticism.

**Muegsein Williams:** The media should play the role as in any democracy. It’s not different because our democracy is new – we don’t have that responsibility. Our role is to follow the constitution and be professional. It’s unjournalistic to write a story of the presidents private life based on a statement made by a journalist in the radio. We must watch people in power. We have a lot of poor people, and they can’t do that. We have to support them.

**Roger Friedman:** The role of the media should be to report evenly and with context, the context is very important. It should face the whole journey and analyse and explain. You must have the past in mind. We have a large educational responsibility. But it's also a managing responsibility. You learn in journalism schools that editorial and management in papers are separate, but they are not anymore. Editors are just dolls.

**Sipho Seepe:** The relationship between the government and the media will always be one contestant because it is a contention of ideas. And the media by definition also is a watchdog of government and by definition it is also a mirror of society. And government by definition and in practice tend to want to control the ideas. Marx said the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas. So the government want to control the ideas that ultimately prevail in a country. And the governments tend to want to use as much power as they want, so there will always be this tensions, but it's how you balance the tensions. In a new democracy it's very easy to subvert the role of the media. And in Africa what in many countries tend to happen is that the governments have banned media and only allow those that are singing praises or they also come up with their own state media, the one that will always give the perspective of the state.

**Teresa:** Do you think that the media is reflecting the society in South Africa today?

**Sipho Seepe:** Definitely, it reflects the tensions that are in the society and the successes and the failures of the government. But unfortunately this government is failing.

**The Different Media Approaches**

**Teresa:** Academics analyse the role of the media in terms of developmental or patriotic reporting and liberal reporting. What do you think of the different approaches?

**Jeanette Minnie:** I don't like patriotic reporting. It’s a dangerous concept. It often means support of a leader. If you critique you are named unpatriotic or disloyal, which can mean that you lose contacts or even the end of your career.

**Zane Ibrahim:** There shouldn’t be patriotic journalism. Just report the facts. It’s as simple as that. Present an unbiased representation of the facts.

**Charlene Smith:** Patriotic reporting is bullshit!! Countries that fall in to patriotic journalism are those with nationalism and Nazism. That's when the Freedom of Expression is threatened. That's journalism of descent. We have to investigate what is happening in the society. Everyone has the right to life and to dignity, but in this country people do not have clean water. But then the government buy a jumbo jet
for the president, and he already has one! How can he do that? We are acting like if we were Sweden, but we are not. Patriotic journalism should be to go out of the office and report about the people.

Teresa: And what about developmental journalism?

Charlene Smith: That's completely different to me. That is to look at the essential, to look at what is being done and see what will work. Developmentalist reporting is to say that there is a need in this community, to report what they are articulating in the communities, not what a consultant in the city say.

Rod Amner: We have been in a honeymoon period. In the face of huge developmental problems a lot of journalists supported the government in their effort to create unity. It’s been a feature of most postcolonial countries. A lot of journalists got caught up in the postcolonial euphoria. The problem is that the honeymoon relationship just crashed. Hopefully the government will become less party patriotic and see patriotism in a broader perspective. I think you can be a watchdog and in the same time try to contribute to a positive social change. Some people think that you can’t have those two things, but I think they are wrong.

David McGregor: It all comes down to you as an individual. We come from a society where people were trained from the very young age to subscribe to a certain ideal... as a kid you had to run around in brown clothes playing army. So what I say is that you are modelled through the way that you have lived your life from a very young age, if you have lived in a ghetto or if you come from other family circumstances and neighbourhood circumstances.

Sara Crowe: Media is the fourth pillar of a democracy. The media can't be patriotic. Perhaps when it comes to sport and tourism it doesn’t matter. The first five years the media was not criticising very much. In a way you must give it time, but not too much time. Then you get too close to patriotism like in other African countries. When it gets too established you don’t dare to comment on certain issues. To not get there the most important is to keep up the struggle. And for the whites it is important not to feel scared of oppression.

Roger Friedman: To call someone liberal in South Africa is not nice. The liberals where those who where sitting in the lap of the old government even if they where not in it... We all have developmentalist responsibilities. Those who are not categorising themselves as developmentalists are on the edge of racism. We are living in a post revolution reality and depending so on patriotism.

David Stanley: You can see the tensions within the newsroom as well. I wouldn't for example think a community meeting would be interesting, but my black colleague might. Now we’re there again. What we always end up taking about in this country is race. We should stop doing that and focus on class instead.

Peter Davis: There is a tension between people with different conceptions of the press. The separation is probably still along racial lines. Black African newspapers or editors even within our group are not comfortable with whites. They don't think we see the changes in the society, but I don't agree. They have a different focus, poverty for example. I think we again are feeling our way. Of course there is still racism in the society. It will take a generation or two to remove that. Deep in me there is racism, even though I've been fighting it all my life as a newsman. Now we will try to initialise a township supplement and we hope that it slowly becomes the main supplement and the other will then be the second supplement. We will give it some 5-8 years and hope that the news English readership has grown during that time. We will still aim at the middle class.
**Teresa:** Is it a goal in itself to in the future be able to publish one paper that everybody can read?

**Peter Davis:** You see, there is little integration between races. They have different interests that are also connected to class. Just imagine an entertainment section: they live in different social environments - goes to different restaurants, different clubs. Some cultural habits even scare other races. At the end of the day I hope that we will grow together and that we will have one product. But I don't think we can realise it now.

**Summary**

The interviewees all agree on the importance of the legislation on freedom of expression put some of them argue it’s not implemented or developed in practice yet. Many of them say it’s the journalists job to assure their right to criticise and to consolidate democracy.

The laws on access to information are in fact not implemented yet as the answers from the journalists shows. It’s not easy to get information on controversial issues. That might be politics, as Roger Friedman says.

To criticise the government is a balance the journalists and the society is trying to find. The relationship between the media and the government is tense and Mbeki have been widely criticised during the last years. In this sensitive phase of the development of true freedom of expression criticism of the government is seen as racism and criticism of journalist as censorship. The relationship will never be harmonic but the debate will probably be calmer in the future.

The advertisement and the reaction to it points out the historical burden and that the them-and-us-situation is still strong.

In terms of the media the opinion differ between the interviewees. Some see the contribution to the transition as their biggest challenge while others argue that the role of the media is the same in every society. That line separates the liberal media approach from the developmentalist approach. Most of the interviewees expresses opinions derived from both influences.

To a direct question about the liberal and the developmentalist approaches most of the interviewees reacted negatively on the concept patriotic reporting but expressed developmental concern. They are also clearly influenced by the liberal ideals of the press. Nevertheless they prioritise differently and as David McGregor says: “It all comes down to who you are as an individual.”
Discussion

**Tensions, Priorities and Influences**

The first point I can make about the debate during the spring of 2001 is that there is a tension between the media and the government. The contest about democratic ideals and possibilities that Scammell pointed out in *The Media, Journalism and Democracy* is clearly exposed.

Nevertheless the gap between the two institutions is not as huge as it may seem. There is one important unifying fact. Everybody is very happy with and proud of the constitution and agree on that there is a good legal protection for freedom of expression and that this protection should not be restricted. The common starting-point is yet interpreted in different ways. Some argue that the country is in a process of learning democracy and freedom of expression while others stress the importance to consolidate it.

The contesting democratic ideals are related to the perceptions of the role of the media in the society. The result of my interviews and the analysis of the debate in the press shows that there are clear influences from both the developmental media approach and the libertarian media theory.

The government focuses on the people, the society and its development in the first hand. According to the government the media should first of all reflect the opinions of the society. Since the majority of the ANC voters are from the lower social classes, a more representative media would probably be more ANC positive.

**The Opinion of the Government**

In the first issue of ANC Today Mbeki closes the column by emphasising the role the party’s journal have to play in the nation-building process as the liberation of the minds of our people, for the eradication of the colonial and apartheid legacy, for democracy, prosperity and progress.

Smut Ngonyama’s analysis of the media in the society shows the tension between the government and the media. He hints that the media is not capable to be truly critical, that it doesn’t reflect on the diversity of views in the society and that ANC won’t hesitate to criticise the media. He stresses that the role of the media to a politician is to inform, engage and deepen democracy.

The influence from African nationals is most clear in Essop Pahad’s speech at the Advisory Board Meeting with the biggest newspaper group, Independent Newspapers. He talks about the common goal for the government and the media. He invites the media group to work constructively together with the government in the national interest. He points out that there is a choice between playing a positive or a negative role. His plea is for balance: "beating the massive challenges we face in South Africa extends way beyond the media". He also talks about the systematic hostility against the leaders of the country. Steyn Speed defines what he calls the advocacy role of the media as to promote basic principles like democracy and human rights.

The call for legislation on criticism of the President must be seen as a wish of a few, but is still a sign of an attitude towards basic human rights.
The Opinions of Media Workers

The liberal influences are most clearly expressed in researcher Console Tleane’s *What does presidential corps mean for SA?*. She argues that "the role of the journalist should be to report the truth as it is and spark debate. Nothing more, nothing less." And she challenges the view that journalists should assist to shape democracy.

David Stanley argues in a similar way as he says that the journalist should just tell what’s happening and let the people decide. Zane Ibrahim, who would sign the advertisement if he was asked, says that it’s as simple as just to report the facts. Sipho Seepe argues that the media by definition is a watchdog of the government, but also a mirror of society. Peter Davis also uses the watch dog metaphor to define the role of the media, and later says he has been fighting racism his whole life. Sara Crowe draw the conclusion that the media can’t be patriotic since it is the forth pillar of democracy.

Developmental influences are found not only in the government’s statements. David McGregor says you have to find the balance in the reporting and that there are a lot of good things being done by the government that are not covered. He goes on stating that his role as a journalist is to try to give the poor people a voice. Roger Friedman argue that you must have the past in mind when you report and that the educational responsibility is large. In the *Sunday Independent* editorial you find argument for the media to find an informal consensus about the fight against poverty and racism. Lynette Steenveld tells us the story of black journalists discussion the problem of wanting to be loyal to blacks and at the same time a critical journalist. Muegsein Williams is putting the role of watching people in power at the same level of importance as supporting the poor people. He also mention the need for professionalism, which indicate influences from the social responsibility theory. Charlene Smith really dislikes the concept patriotic reporting, but stresses the need to go out from the office and report the needs that are being articulated in the communities.

New Categories of Media Workers in New Realities

The sharpest distinctions between the different persons are their focus and their priorities. Sometimes they answer very differently on the same questions. In the same way as theorists as Robert Dahl and the Americans who wrote Four Theories of the Press differ in prioritising the roles of the media the politicians, researchers and media workers focus on different missions. Some put the representation first, others the investigating role and a third one the educational task. David McGregor who is the only one working in the countryside and Roger Friedman who seems to be the one most politically engaged are the ones clearly distinguishing themselves.

It is not easy to find media workers that can be categorised as pure liberals and the patriots linked to the ANC seem to be few. I see a third category: those who try to combine the approaches. They are influenced by the history of the country, realistic about the difficulties of the present and engaged in the future. They deal with the development of the society and see freedom of expression and the right to criticise as important bricks in the building of the new country. They try to find their own way – they are creating a South African role of the media and perhaps learning South African freedom of expression.

Great Challenges for the Future

The people of South Africa still live in different worlds and have different perceptions of the realities in everyday life. The race issue is impossible to avoid. Not surprisingly the debate often uses a black and white rhetoric, but more importantly my study shows that the tensions
are not clearly along racial lines. Some of the harshest critique of the government comes from black commentators who are writing for so-called white papers. It seems to me that people assume that there are differences along the racial lines even when there are not.

Rod Amner specifically points out that in his opinion it is possible to unite tough criticism with a positive contribution to the society. Mandela argued in an interview in the *Mail & Guardian* in March that critics can be patriots and that critique can be made in the spirit of concern and pride of the country.¹⁰⁴ Whether the government will find its way to combine the two approaches instead of reinforcing the them-and-us-situation will only time show. What gives me hope for the future is that the debate is so lively and the tradition to fight and not give up is strong. As far as I can see, people are not afraid to speak out.

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Williams, Muegsein, Editor of Cape Times, Independent Newspaper House, Cape Town, 01-05-09.
Table 1: Profile of Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Readers Profile</th>
<th>Political Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Times Media Limited</td>
<td>Business Day</td>
<td>38,989</td>
<td>Gauteng-based, white, high income</td>
<td>Liberal, free-market; limited government, white editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
<td>458,964</td>
<td>National, lower middle income</td>
<td>Liberal, free-market; limited government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evening Post**</td>
<td>18,874</td>
<td>Eastern Cape, white/black</td>
<td>Liberal, free-market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Newspapers</td>
<td>Sunday Independent</td>
<td>34,705</td>
<td>Gauteng, educated, white and black</td>
<td>Progressive Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>156,358</td>
<td>Gauteng-based, mainly white, suburban</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cape Times</td>
<td>51,334</td>
<td>Cape Town, urban, white middle class</td>
<td>Left-Liberal, black editor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cape Argus</td>
<td>82,142</td>
<td>Cape Town, urban-suburban</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>40,904</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal, white readership</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/ New Africa Investments</td>
<td>Sowetan</td>
<td>211,178</td>
<td>Gauteng-based, national black readership, townships</td>
<td>Populist left, black consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;G Media</td>
<td>Mail and Guardian</td>
<td>32,510</td>
<td>National, educated, mostly white</td>
<td>Social democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasionale Pers</td>
<td>Die Burger</td>
<td>102,691</td>
<td>Western Cape, Afrikaans-speaking whites</td>
<td>Politically conservative, center-right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build</td>
<td>110,331</td>
<td>Gauteng-based, Afrikaans-speaking whites</td>
<td>Centrist, Liberal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City Press***</td>
<td>114,909</td>
<td>Gauteng-based, national, black</td>
<td>Populist, black consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naspers/Perskor</td>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>392,085</td>
<td>National readership, white</td>
<td>Populist, white right-wing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perskor/Kagiso</td>
<td>Citizen</td>
<td>134,264</td>
<td>Gauteng-based, black/white</td>
<td>Conservative editorial tone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Following Box, it Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape newspaper, is part-owned by IML.
*** At the time of this writing, City Press is 49% owned by Naspers and 51% owned by Dynaero Investments, a black empowerment group.
The Media vs. President T.M Mbeki

There is a very perceptible and increasingly strident campaign against Black people in powerful positions whether in government, business or in the labour movement. There are constant efforts in the media to portray the country and its leaders in the most negative manner possible.

But the media does not act alone. It seems to us it provides a platform for a coalition of right-wing forces made up of white so-called liberal politicians, mostly leftovers from the apartheid era, certain so-called independent or research organisations run by whites and a few members of the white business community. Separately from them, there are a few Black commentators who unwittingly contribute to this campaign.

While the rightwing forces target and powerful Black person who is committed to creating a more equal society, their campaign has in the last two years focused on President Thabo Mbeki. So vicious, so underhand and so sustained have the attacks on him been that even fair-minded patriotic whites have started asking serious questions about the motive behind these attacks.

Not during the worst days of apartheid, or even when the revelations of the Truth Commission showed the full horror of the human rights abuses committed under the political leadership of a succession of apartheid rulers, including PW. Botha and FW. De Klerk, have apartheid politicians been singled out for such contempt, such open hatred, such unfair reporting as has the President.

We believe that the President is singled out because he represents the determination of this government to firmly dismantle the remnants of the edifice of apartheid. Not only has he in a very articulated manner defined this society and the imperatives for change but he has introduced through various documented ways, a comprehensive practical governmental programme to implement the necessary changes.

This represents a treat to those who have unjustly benefited from apartheid and continue to do so.

We, the undersigned have decided that we can no longer remain silent about this campaign which has the characteristics of the disinformation campaigns the apartheid security forces used to subject activists to. The media in any country is a mirror through which society sees itself and through which the world sees that society. It is extremely disturbing that the shaping of the image of this country is in the hands of a very small minority, entirely hostile to our democracy.

Even as they benefit from the principles underlying the new constitution such as freedom of speech, separation of powers, accountability and the reintegration of this country into the rest of the world economically, they use the language of democracy to subvert democracy.

They of course deny this, demanding the right to criticise equally with their Black counterparts.
They do not realise that the right to criticise is accompanied by a responsibility to be fair and to recognise the landmarks and achievements of the government and Black people in the way Black journalists and commentators do. In the absence of such a balance, no amount of self-righteous claims of the public interest, transparency and press freedom will conceal their real motives.

It is our view that the media campaign against the Black-run government does not reflect the views of all whites.

Big white business may not always agree with everything government does but in our individual dealings with them it has become clear that even they feel that the hostility towards the government and the pessimism that characterises reporting in this country is extremely damaging to the economic interest of the country.

To the rest of the world and investors it portrays our country as a place not to do business with.

Yet the ruling party with President Thabo Mbeki at the helm won an even bigger majority in the general elections of 1999 than in 1994. In 1994 the party won 63%. In 1999 it won 66.7% of the vote.

It is clear that he has the confidence of the majority of people in this country.

To question his continued leadership only two years into his 5-year term is to seek to subvert the will of the majority.

In spite of the economic legacy of apartheid President Mbeki’s government has accomplished much that must be acknowledged: by December 2000 over one million houses were constructed and 1,3 million housing subsidies were allocated; some 400 000 homes were electrified and over 120 clinics built in the same year. In the financial year 1999 to 2000, 412 000 new telephone lines were installed.

South Africa now enjoys a foreign trade surplus and the consumer inflation rate is 7,8 per cent compared to 15,3 per cent in 1991.

We love our country.

As business people and professionals we have faith in the potential of this country to be a well managed, technologically advanced truly equal society where the dignity and well being of everyone is assured.

In our individual capacities we contribute and will continue to contribute to this goal.

The miracle that everyone talked about may unravel if we do not stem the rightwing tide to dismantle our new democracy so soon after its birth. It is precisely for this reason that we have decided to take this step.

We have full confidence in our President. He is intelligent, circumspect and passionate about the condition of our people and our future.
We respect his leadership qualities.

Yet he is human and therefore will sometimes behave as such. Where he stumbles we will hold out a hand. Where he errs, we will criticise and caution, sometimes publicly and sometimes privately, always however from a deep love for our country and people. Under his leadership we have the best government this country has ever had.

He deserves acknowledgement and support.

We call on our white compatriots to pledge their loyalty to our country and government. It is important they make their discomfort known publicly and not only privately. The preservation and defence of our democracy is an issue every South African should be concerned about.

We call on Black people who are all too aware of the real motive behind the apartheid-style disinformation campaign not to remain silent or complain privately as they do now.

To President Mbeki, we say: do not be distracted by the current campaign against you. The eradication of the twin scourges of poverty and racism and the restoration of the dignity of Black people should remain your compass.

Therefore Mr. President go ahead and govern: govern fairly; govern with compassion but govern decisively!

Ashley Mabogoane, Jabu Mabuza, Pearl Mashabela, Prof. Sam Mokgokong, Kgomo Moto Moroka, Don Ncube, Ndaba Ntsele, Chrisitne Qunta, Mfundi Vundla, Peter Vundla, Sindi Zilwa.

This space has been paid for by the signatories.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{106} Advertisement in the \textit{Sunday Times}, 2001-05-06.