

Merging the Black press with mainstream newspapers in  
post-apartheid South Africa:  
a phenomenological study of journalists at *Sowetan* newspaper  
between 2009 and 2012.

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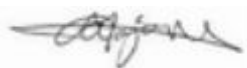
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### **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. J. ...', written over a light grey rectangular background.

Dated: 25 November 2015

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to William "Bra Willie" Bokala, the former news editor at *Sowetan*. Unfortunately I did not get to interview Bra Willie, an outstanding mentor, creative thinker and intellectual, for this thesis. Bra Willie seemed to be at work in the newsroom for about 16 hours every day, wholeheartedly committed to delivering the best quality news (not just getting the paper out). He led by example, encouraging us to serve the readers well. He inspired me and other journalists to realise that there was no story we couldn't cover, be it driving hundreds of kilometres to meet a whistleblower under a tree on the side of a highway, or rolling under a gap in a closed government marquee and crawling from table to table avoiding security officials to find a mayor who refused to provide even the most basic services to residents in her town, or finding a way into a Cape Town refugee camp that the city administration had closed to the media, in order to interview the displaced people stuck inside with no food. Bra Willie's history of reporting under terribly oppressive conditions during apartheid made him an inspirational news editor on these, and many other occasions.



## **Abstract**

This is a phenomenological study which aims to gain an in-depth understanding into the phenomenon of downsizing and convergence on a major Black daily newspaper: *Sowetan*. Critical race theory is the conceptual framework for this thesis. Critical race theory provides a justification for approaching this study abductively, and for searching for the point of view of Black journalists. The newsroom of *Sowetan* was converged with the newsrooms of other non-Black Times Media Group titles between 2009 and 2012. This study seeks to uncover how a Black newspaper, having had its newsroom converged with historically white, or non-Black newspapers, would maintain its intellectual heritage, underpinned by radical Black Consciousness, and consequently its ability to serve its predominantly Black readers. The Black Press globally has a tradition of covering stories not covered by the mainstream media and performing the advocacy function of reporting on and campaigning against racism. This study sought to discover if journalists working at *Sowetan* during the period under review believed that *Sowetan* would be able to continue its functions as a Black newspaper even after being converged with white titles, or if they believed that South Africa had entered a post-racial era where Black journalism was no longer necessary, and that convergence had appropriately positioned *Sowetan* as a ‘crossover’ newspaper. This study found that journalists on a formerly Black newspaper continued to value the idea of a Black press even after they were removed from it through redundancy or being transferred into the newly converged newsrooms. This study also found that *Sowetan* journalists were committed to working in service to Black readers, not only through their use of the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) when writing stories, or in spending most of their time in Black communities seeking out and covering news, but through their participation in *Sowetan* initiatives aimed at uplifting the Black community. This study also found that the *Sowetan* journalists and former journalists interviewed did not

embrace the idea of either the tabloid media or the mainstream media as being preferable as a work environment to the Black Press, even after losing their jobs at *Sowetan*.

**Key Words:**

*Sowetan*, Black Press, Critical race theory, Downsizing, Convergence, Centralised newsrooms, *Daily Sun*, Journalism, South Africa, Phenomenology.

## **CHAPTER 1:        INTRODUCTION**

This thesis was first conceptualised in 2009 when, while I was a journalist on *Sowetan*, I heard rumours of cost-cutting, downsizing, convergence and major changes to the newspaper. By 2011, most of the section editors, including the features editor, investigations editor, women's editor and education editor, were made redundant and some provincial news bureaux were closed down. Several of the news journalists resigned from the newspaper after rumours started that the reporter complement would also be reduced. This led me to develop an interest into researching how, in the face of these large scale cutbacks, the paper as the national flagship daily of the Black press would manage to hold on to that position and to its readership.

As *Sowetan*'s correspondent in Parliament's press gallery, I worked in a building full of journalists from other news corporations and we often discussed the sudden and similar announcements being made by their newspapers' management too. These announcements also included centralisation of newsrooms across titles and requests from their management for the journalists to take voluntary redundancies.

When I looked closely, I observed that a concurrent process of the move towards convergent newsrooms and the implementation of redundancy packages as part of the attempt to downsize the newsrooms (Nikunen, 2014) was unfolding. According to Saltzis and Dickinson (n.d.), convergence is achieved via the digitisation of various processes in the news production chain, as well as the integration of online with offline newsrooms. Convergence is a broad concept, theoretically, and includes aspects such as economic and ownership convergence, platform convergence, and technological

convergence which will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter. Based on anecdotal evidence obtained from other journalists, it seemed that the convergence underway at *Sowetan* was a country-wide phenomenon, based on the same global pattern.

The readers of *Sowetan* were at the forefront of my mind when I observed the convergence unfolding and decided to begin this research project. Having worked for 16 years as a spokesperson, advocacy officer and activist for non-profit organisations and trade unions, I had been deeply critical of the manner in which mainstream newspapers filtered out and marginalised news of relevance to the working class and poor, and the Black community in general. Beginning work at *Sowetan*, I found the newspaper to be a very liberating environment to work in. The editors in chief and section editors continually reminding journalists that we were at all times to “write for the readers” – Sowetans and the broader South African working class Black community, and not for the powerful, the politicians or corporate moguls. I would not be able to count the number of times I overheard or spoke directly to *Sowetan* editors about the importance of writing for the readers. A journalist who pitched a story of a strike at a small factory he or she had driven past on the way to work, or one who found a poor community setting up collective childcare projects despite living in desperate conditions in shacks (shanties) surrounded by pools of sewerage, would receive the same attention for their ideas at the morning planning meeting as one who announced that he or she would be covering a press conference to be held by the country’s President. While other newspapers were covering the mainly white opposition party’s latest press statement, *Sowetan* would be planning a feature on the increase in food prices, purely from the point of view of the Black community. Being part of Parliament’s press gallery, I worked in offices on the same floor as journalists

from other newspapers and was surprised to hear from them that there were political parties they were ‘not allowed’ to criticise and news that they were told to ignore. At *Sowetan*, journalists were asked to pitch any story on any topic and it would be judged on its merits. There was also a high level of internal debate within the editorial staff on many topics, ranging from ethical debates to debates on whether it was in the public interest to cover a politician’s sex scandal, or whether this was merely ‘interesting to the public’ and did not warrant attention. On many occasions, journalists were told by the editors to challenge the editors if they saw fit and to argue for what we believed in. Naturally, anti-racist approaches to reporting flourished at *Sowetan*. Racism in the world, in the stories we encountered and in the media was discussed openly and freely and in great depth.

For me, as a *Sowetan* journalist, *Sowetan* was more than a newspaper. It represented the continuation of the proud tradition of the Black press in South Africa and the world, the one medium in which Black, working class stories could reach a huge audience and virtually the only mainstream publication which featured stories opposing day to day racism in South Africa, including institutional racism. There were vast differences in the way that *Sowetan* journalists, as staffers on a Black newspaper, and journalists from the other mainstream newspapers owned by Avusa, went about their jobs, ranging from the use of the ‘Black angle’ (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) at *Sowetan* to complete disregard of the ‘Black angle’ on the other newspapers, to the framing of news involving Black people, to the way in which news was prioritised – with news about Black working class and poor people prioritised at *Sowetan* and often ignored on the other newspapers.

Given these differences, from my perspective as a *Sowetan* journalist in 2009, the announcement by management that *Sowetan's* newsroom would merge with other white newspapers owned by the Avusa newsgroup, seemed unworkable and unethical. Many *Sowetan* journalists decided to resist the idea, on the grounds that they did not want to abandon their community of readers and nor did they want to write “white news” where they would be constrained from reporting racism and where they would run the risk of their stories being edited and re-written to suit a white readership. I was one of the *Sowetan* journalists who opposed convergence of the corporation's newsrooms and who was dismayed at the redundancies or retrenchments imposed on *Sowetan* section editors, which followed almost immediately after convergence was announced. I felt the loss of the section editors very keenly, not only because I had forged good working relationships with them, but more importantly because I greatly admired their history in the anti-apartheid struggle, and their long standing commitment to serving Black readers. As a white journalist, I could not fully begin to comprehend the sense of loss experienced by the Black journalists who make up the participant group in this thesis. However, my experience as a *Sowetan* journalist through the period of convergence meant that I deeply empathised and identified with the views expressed by participants in the interviews.

The management of *Sowetan* communicated the aim of convergence as the transformation of the Black newspaper into a successful “cross-over” newspaper, appealing to both Black and white readers. However, many *Sowetan* journalists doubted the veracity of this claim, given that Avusa (as it was then known) was already downsizing *Sowetan* staff and had also decided in 2008 to set up a new national daily newspaper – *The Times* – aimed at middle-class families, which it hoped in time would become the biggest selling national daily newspaper in South Africa. However, *The*

*Times* struggled to attract readers, had low street sales (Naki, 2010) and was given away free to subscribers of *The Sunday Times*, Avusa's weekly newspaper. *Sowetan* journalists assumed that since a large amount of the corporation's capital was being poured into *The Times*, which had a full staff complement and very few readers, it was likely that Avusa intended to turn *The Times* into its only national daily newspaper and do away with *Sowetan* altogether. It was around this time that Avusa management decided to create a central pool of journalists who would write for all five of its titles, despite the titles' different identities. At that time, *Sowetan's* editor and section editor complement was made up of journalists who had started their careers on South African newspapers during apartheid, and who had been imprisoned for their writings by the apartheid regime. By the time the cost-cutting measures were initiated in 2009, Avusa management had labelled many of these editors "dinosaurs", and consequently, they were the first to lose their jobs when 11 editorial posts were made redundant (Naki, 2010).

As Minami (2007) found in her study of journalists' alienation at an Oregon, USA based newspaper, at *Sowetan* many beats were done away with - the features, investigations and education beats were the first to be eliminated, with political journalists being asked to write more investigative and feature articles, and news reporters taking on the education beat. By 2011, *Sowetan's* news bureaux in Mpumalanga and North West had been shut down. *Sowetan* journalists in the news bureaux in KwaZulu-Natal, Pretoria, and Parliament were transferred to new centralised 'Avusa media' newsrooms (Moodie, 2012) where they were placed under the control of editors from *The Times*. These journalists were instructed to write stories aimed at the middle-class readers of *The Times*, which would then be syndicated to Avusa's other newspapers – including *Sowetan*, with its vastly different audience.

Based on my experiences at *Sowetan*, a gap in the available information on convergence appeared: namely, what would happen to a Black newspaper, i.e. *Sowetan*, which was going through a convergence process by merging with a non-Black or mainstream or traditionally white newspaper? How would the Black newspaper maintain its intellectual heritage, underpinned by Black Consciousness, and consequently its ability to serve its predominantly Black readers by continuing to cover stories not covered by the mainstream media? How would it continue to perform its advocacy function of reporting on and even campaigning against racism if merged with titles that had no similar function of their own? And did the journalists who were being made redundant see these as important issues, or had they embraced the so-called “post-racial” or “crossover” mentality which cultivated a consensus view that regarded the Black press as no longer necessary in post-apartheid South Africa, because newspapers could be made to appeal to everyone, across races and classes? These were some of the questions that prompted this research.

The following chapter gives a brief history of *Sowetan*, an overview of the current South African media landscape, and finally sketches the convergence process as it unfolded on *Sowetan* between 2009 and 2012.

The literature review follows, divided into two sections: one focussed on convergence, and one focused on the Black press and Black news in mainstream media. The convergence chapter discusses how convergence on newspapers internationally encompasses downsizing and often deskilling, and how this has led to the rise of the multimedia journalist and the impact this has had on traditions of investigative and beat reporting. The quality of news output post convergence is also discussed.



The chapter on the Black press and Black news in mainstream media pays particular attention to how convergence impacts on news of specific interest to the Black community. The long struggle by Black journalists (including all indigenous journalists) worldwide for more indigenous media (whether government or privately funded) and for more diversity in mainly white newsrooms and the struggle against racism in the news and newsrooms is also investigated, as is the role of the Black press and indigenous media in combating racism, and the question of whether such a role is still necessary in a so-called “post-racial” society.

I have utilised critical race theory to review the available literature. Critical race theory examines “the relationship among race, racism, and power” with a view to transforming this relationship (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.2). Critical race theory is activist in approach: “it not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.3). Critical race theorists are “avowedly political” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.3) since the theory was developed purely to investigate the indefatigability of racism (Closson, 2010). Critical race theory has been described both as a “theoretical and/or interpretive framework as well as a movement (Closson, 2010, p. 264 citing Monaghan, 1993; West, 1995) as it borrows from critical theory, but only in so far as the subject at hand relates to racism. It is an appropriate theory to use when analysing racism in the media, the future of the Black press and the relevance of ‘colour blind’ newspapers to Black readers, particularly since it has also been described as a “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Closson, 2010, p. 265). Hence, the literature reviewed in this thesis has been circumscribed from the vast number of studies related to media

convergence in general, to those which link convergence with race in the media and the racial identity of newspapers.

Fourie (2010) points out that journalism research in South Africa lacks phenomenological depth and is largely based on “quantitative content analysis surveys and field research for audience analyses and for research about/in the profession...and a triangulation of methods for the analysis of the media’s political economy and its impact on journalism” (Fourie 2010, p. 157). This study aims to contribute to the growing body of qualitative journalism research analyses in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER 2:      BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 A brief history of *Sowetan***

In South Africa, the mainstream, non-Black media historically “either expressly promoted apartheid, or implicitly complied with it, and in both ways contributed to a climate of gross human rights violations”, according to the findings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Berger, 2001, p. 71). *Sowetan* was established as a Black readership newspaper in 1981, and grew to be the biggest circulation daily in South Africa in the 1990s. It was the successor newspaper to the *Post* and *The World*, both Black newspapers with very large readerships that were effectively closed down by the apartheid government which had refused to grant them registration status and warned their parent company, the Argus, that “they would be banned” (Switzer, 2000, p. 54 and Cowling, 2014). Their closures followed a landmark day in South African media history – ‘Black Wednesday’ on 19 October 1977 – where the apartheid government arrested “almost all” the Black Consciousness movement’s leaders, banned 17 Black Consciousness organisations, including the Union of Black Journalists and the Medupe Writers Organisation, and banned *The World* and *Weekend World* newspapers and arrested the paper’s joint editor, Percy Qoboza and the rest of the editorial staff (Azapo, 1999). Many of the journalists working on the *Post* and *The World* later took up jobs on *Sowetan*, including one of *Sowetan*’s most well-known editors, Aggrey Klaaste.

The Argus Group, which was a white company, owned *Sowetan* from 1981 to 1993.

The Argus group were “essentially liberals” (Switzer, 2000, p. 54). In Black Consciousness theory, the term "liberal" is problematised and according to the founding father of Black Consciousness, Stephen Bantu Biko, a liberal is a white "do-gooder"

(Stubbs, 1987, p. 20) who simultaneously seeks to join the "black man's struggle" (Stubbs, 1987, p. 20) while avoiding being held accountable for racism; sometimes even managing black organisations in a bid to show that he or she "always knew what was good for the blacks" (Stubbs, 1987, p. 19). Contrary to this, *Sowetan* was a Black-run newspaper which reported on the anti-apartheid movement from a Black point of view and devoted more coverage to the Black Consciousness movement than to the non-Black Consciousness liberation movements, the United Democratic Front and the Mass Democratic Movement (Switzer, 2000). According to Sesanti (2007), Black journalists set themselves apart from both the English and Afrikaans press, during apartheid, by linking their writing with the struggle for freedom. Sesanti has found that "Black journalists declared themselves 'black' first and 'journalist' second. They questioned reference to 'objectivity' by journalists who called freedom fighters 'terrorists'" (2007, p.130). This is the climate in which *Sowetan* was established. While strongly opposing apartheid policies, *Sowetan* "also engaged in and encouraged certain kinds of community endeavours, which it dubbed nation building" (Cowling, 2014, p. 325).

With Black journalists committed to Black Consciousness staffing the newspaper, *Sowetan* enabled black people to re-imagine an alternative Black public life that formed a counterweight to the apartheid representation of Black people (Cowling, 2014). *Sowetan* was later recognized as a newspaper which traditionally framed its stories within the African concept of "ubuntu" or humanity to others (Worthington, 2011) – an ethos that allowed *Sowetan* journalists to write, for example, the stories of rape survivors from the point of view of organisations who campaign against rape (Worthington, 2011).

Historically, journalism in South Africa was white-dominated. By the end of the 1970s, the number of Black South African journalists was estimated at more than 200, “up from just 10 counted in the 1946 census” (Charney, 1993, p. 7). Some Black journalists who began work in the 1970s had been involved with the Black Consciousness Movement at school or university. Charney (1993) adds that another politicising influence on black journalists at the time was that anti-apartheid movements who targeted black journalists for their propaganda efforts. Under Aggrey Klaaste’s editorship, *Sowetan* became the largest circulation newspaper in the country (Cowling, 2014) with a circulation of 200 000 by 1990. What surprised many was the fact that even when newspaper circulation was in decline right across the board in 1996, *Sowetan* increased its circulation still further, “becoming easily the biggest daily paper in the country with more than 207,000 copies on average sold daily,” according to Cowling (2014, p. 339). *Sowetan* remains the Black newspaper with the largest Black readership in the history of the Black press in South Africa.

The literature describes *Sowetan* as part of what is called the “captive press”. Cowling (2014, p.327) defines the “captive press” as that in which “owners placed political restrictions on their Black newspapers and the economic conditions of the period constrained the journalism that Black papers produced.” However, despite their newspaper being owned by whites, *Sowetan* journalists pursued a Black Consciousness agenda. Dubow (2014) has written that the white owners of *Sowetan* (the Argus group) “adopted a hands-off approach” and were “generally content to allow the newspaper to serve as the ‘voice’ of black opinion” (Dubow, 2014, p.250). Charney (1993) too, has found that what *Sowetan* wrote about, and how *Sowetan* journalists wrote about it, was influenced by the ideas and actions of the Black Consciousness Movement, rather than its white owners. In the case of the *City Press* newspaper (South Africa’s only Black

weekly newspaper), which was also owned by whites, Sesanti (2011) concluded that “the white ownership of the *City Press* did not impact on the editorial trajectory of the newspaper” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 237). However, this did not invalidate critiques of the manner in which mainstream media owners generally do influence the editorial content of the newspapers they own (Sesanti, 2011), mainly because the Black journalists working on the *City Press* “secured a charter guaranteeing editorial independence (Qoboza, 1992, p. 2 in Sesanti, 2011. P. 237) from their white owners, who in turn were also wary of interfering with the work of the Black journalists at City Press lest they be seen as “oppressors” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 237).

In 1993, *Sowetan* was bought by the Black owned New Africa Investments Limited (Nail) group. Nail sold *Sowetan* to Johnnic Communications in 2004. This company later renamed itself Avusa. In late 2012, Avusa changed its name to Times Media Group. Until 2001, the Black daily press in South Africa was dominated by *Sowetan*, which had a readership of two million at its peak, featured serious political news and aimed to promote Black Consciousness. But in that year, rival news corporations launched downmarket tabloid newspapers courting Black, working-class readers. The readership of these tabloids – often featuring lurid stories about five year old drug addicts, superstition and zombies, love triangles and pet-eating rural villagers - grew rapidly and ate into *Sowetan*'s circulation figures (Wasserman, 2010). The emergence of the tabloid “as the most influential subgenre of journalism of the twentieth century” has transformed post-apartheid newspapers in South Africa (Conboy, 2010, p. 113). According to Wasserman (2010), *Sowetan* and *City Press* (the black weekly, Sunday newspaper) were “primarily aimed at a middle class black readership” while the new tabloids targeted the “poor and working class” as a lucrative, and previously “untapped” market (Wasserman, 2010, p. 23).

When the first tabloids were introduced in 2001, *Sowetan's* circulation figures dropped dramatically – down to fewer than 140,000 readers today (Wasserman, 2010). At that time, *Sowetan* had a strong black identity, having had its origins as an anti-apartheid newspaper based in South Africa's biggest Black township, Soweto. With six daily editions and eight news bureaux across the country – many based in townships instead of formerly white town centres – *Sowetan* was well-placed to cover the news of the Black majority, who were underrepresented in the mainly white-owned media. *Sowetan* had traditionally always focussed on “human rights” articles (Stent, 2007, p.5) rather than sensational stories, and had even taken what proved to be a disastrous decision in the early 2000's to become more upmarket and target a market with a higher living standards measure (Naki, 2010). Before this decision, *Sowetan* had historically targeted the same readers as these new tabloids (Wasserman, 2008). The decision to ‘go upmarket’ “alienated its township readers” (Naki, 2010) and by the time *Sowetan* decided to return to its original readership “it was too late because the [*Daily*] *Sun* had already dominated the rather neglected lowest end readership” (Naki, 2010). Hence, the commercial success of these tabloid newspapers targeting poorer Black readers was blamed for huge circulation losses at *Sowetan* and provides the backdrop for the convergence which was to follow from 2009 onwards.

The historical role of *Sowetan* in South Africa must also be seen in the context of Black journalism across the continent of Africa. In Africa, Black journalism has been defined broadly as that which aims to bring about “social change” (Skjerdal, 2012, p. 640). Black journalism had its roots in the anti-colonial, independence struggles across the continent within which liberation movement newspapers played a prominent role. African newspapers developed their own cultural news practices on liberation newspapers during the colonial period – predominantly that of being “very radical

newspapers that constantly engaged the colonial administration during the struggle for independence” (Seaga Shaw, 2009, p. 494). The first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, was a journalist who defined journalism as “a vehicle for national unity and a tool for breaking with the colonial past” (Alhassan, 2005; Asante, 1996; Bond, 1997, in Skjerdal, 2012, p. 641). It was taken for granted that during the liberation struggles, liberation movement-aligned newspapers reported the news purely from the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786). Hence, a growing body of scholarship has been devoted to discussing the “manifest inapplicability” (Seaga Shaw, 2009, p. 491) of Western or mainstream journalism models in Africa.

Additionally, in countries such as Uganda, for example, Black owned newspapers proliferated during the 1950s, which was also the height of indigenous resistance to the British colonial regime (Mwesige, 2004, in Seaga Shaw, 2009). This shows that Africa has a tradition of independent journalism and a culture of producing newspapers that aim to provide an alternative view of social and political reality. This history is characterised by creation of “very radical newspapers that constantly engaged the colonial administration during the struggle for independence” (Seaga Shaw, 2009, p. 494). Since this thesis investigates a South African newspaper---the *Sowetan*, a history of the *Sowetan* is explored to illustrate how the ideas of the Black Press manifested themselves in African journalism.

## **2.2 Convergence as a feature of the current South African media landscape**

The post-apartheid South African print media landscape is today dominated by four media corporations – News 24, Independent Newspapers, *Caxton* and CTP Publishers and Printers Limited, and Times Media Group. By 2010, these corporations had engaged in cost cutting measures, including downsizing, the implementation of different



kinds of redundancies (voluntary and forced), and the centralisation first of sub-editing functions and then of newsrooms.

Independent Newspapers set the pace, first centralising its sub-editing functions and then creating a central political news bureau for its 10 different titles. This was later referred to as “piranha management”, (Duncan, 2011, p. 350), because of the speed at which the corporation’s management reduced the number of journalists working there. Media 24 soon followed, centralising its newsrooms, and firing senior journalists in the process (Duncan, 2011, p. 357). Media 24 published weekly and daily English and Afrikaans titles with very different identities. Its two Sunday newspapers were one “Distinctly African” newspaper (*City Press*) targeting Black community, and another Afrikaans title (*Rapport*) targeting mainly white readers. Today, many articles from *Rapport* are simply translated for *City Press* and vice versa. In their “convergence continuum”, Dailey, Demo and Spillman define this practice as “cloning” - where different outlets within a news corporation use another partner’s story with virtually no editing, no repackaging and no discussion at all at the news-gathering stage (Dailey et al. 2005, p. 153).

Convergence, and particularly the centralisation of those newsrooms which traditionally provided news for completely different audiences, needs to be examined with the context of apartheid and the historical roles of different South African newspapers in mind. Following the end of apartheid in 1994, Black and white journalists on mainstream newspapers were instructed to embrace post-racialism and deliver the same mainstream news outputs. By the year 2000, senior Black journalists had rejected this and called on Black journalists generally to campaign for a new way of reporting “that brings dignity to the way Black people are covered” in the media (Tsedu, 2000, p. 77). This was because the South African media was felt to be marginalising Black stories

under the guise of having become post-racial. Harper has criticised the concept of crossover music saying that it often “renders racial identity irrelevant” or if crossover music primarily identifies with Blackness, it is only allowed into the mainstream music scene through the “benevolence” of the white dominated establishment (Harper, 1989, p. 118). Similarly, the notion of post-apartheid South Africa as a “rainbow nation” where race was irrelevant, only served to sideline Black news, as a study of tabloid journalists attested - that Black news remained marginalised by mainstream newspapers long after the end of apartheid (Wasserman, 2009).

South Africa was colonised for over 300 years, and because the 1994 handover of power to the Black majority happened by means of a negotiated settlement, the non-indigenous or white citizens still own the vast majority of the land, minerals and economy. South Africa is a clear example of a country where mainstream and fourth world news values have collided. During apartheid the South African press was largely split along racial lines. Newspapers catering for white readers, with the exception of a few, generally supported the apartheid regime (Tsedu, 2000), while for the Black press, “anything that embarrassed the apartheid regime was a must carry story” (Tsedu, 2000, p. 76). White newspapers were historically divided into two camps – the English language and Afrikaans language press. South African academics (Tomaselli et al 1989) pointed out at the time that, being financed by mine owners, the white English language newspapers “provided a limited critique on human rights infringements, without questioning the capitalist underpinnings of the system” (Tomaselli et al 1989 in Wasserman, 2010, p. 21) which meant that these newspapers could continue to function in the same way in a post-apartheid system that had not experienced any structural changes to the economy. Afrikaans papers, on the other hand, had to re-brand themselves - moving away from a pure focus on Afrikaners as the chosen race (or Afrikaner nationalism) and towards an image of the Afrikaans language (not race) as

one that had “adapted to changing circumstances” and leave “behind the baggage of apartheid” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 22).

The re-branding by the Afrikaans media also allowed them to use their new image as a modernised culture to shroud the connection between post-apartheid racism and “the persistence of racist attitudes carried over from the apartheid past (in which it had been complicit)” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 22). The Afrikaans press has also been involved in “relativising, trivialising and reversing racism” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 27) – in other words, attributing racism to Blacks instead of whites and portraying Afrikaners as victims. *Die Volksblad* newspaper for example, describes racism as “not only a white disease”, and states that racism occurs in both the “human and animal kingdom” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 27). Responding to a major human rights abuse case where several white students had forced Black female university campus cleaners to drink the white students’ urine, *Rapport* newspaper complained that a “big brouhaha” had broken out in the media because the perpetrators were white while, when “blacks” allegedly perpetrated racism, this was “airbrushed out” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 28). It was thus very surprising when the white Afrikaans *Rapport* newspaper began sharing translated content with the *Black City Press* newspaper. This is particularly so in view of the fact that South Africa is currently the most unequal country in the world, and that inequality is highly racialised. Black South Africans are currently in direct control of only nine percent of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, and in indirect control of another 12% through “pension funds, life insurance, unit trusts and exchange traded funds” (Seggie, 2012) and less than 28% of all top management positions, according to the 2013 Employment Equity Commission report (EEC report, 2013) published by the South African department of labour.

While there is no official segregation in the post-apartheid society, the majority of the population does not live integrated lives. Despite this, there have been ongoing complaints since apartheid ended that affirmative action amounts to “reverse racism” against whites and should be stopped (almost before it gets started). There have also been wide-ranging complaints about land restitution even though South Africa’s negotiated settlement binds the dispossessed to a “willing buyer willing seller” framework where land that was confiscated under apartheid from its indigenous owners cannot be returned unless the post-apartheid state buys it back from its colonial owner. The notion of “reverse racism” against whites, which has been given wide coverage in the mainstream media, is pervasive in South Africa and has led to resistance in the media both to calls for diversity and to Black journalists forming their own association. For example, in 2008, the South African Human Rights Commission found that the re-launch meeting of the Forum for Black Journalists had acted unconstitutionally in barring non-Black journalists from its meeting. After a white journalist tried to gain entry to the meeting and was rebuffed, she complained that she had been the victim of racism by the Black journalists, which was upheld by the commission (Sesanti, 2008). Her complaint was backed by the South African National Editors Forum (Sanef). However, Black journalists pointed out that the reason for the forum’s existence was to escape from the racism (Sesanti, 2011, p. 43) its members had encountered in Sanef, and to create a space for Black journalists “to determine their redress options on the basis of the independence of thought and action” (Sesanti, 2008).

It was not only Black journalists who had concerns about racism in the South African media. Post-apartheid, the role of the media in fostering racism, or in failing to eliminate racism within its ranks, was investigated by South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) following complaints made by the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa (Berger, 2001).

In their submission to the SAHRC, Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa claimed that the “media remains largely in white hands in terms of ownership and accordingly white males by and large continue to control opinion on all current issues, whether of a political, social, economic or educational nature” (SAHRC Interim Report, 1999, p. 13).

Today, the South African media is primarily seen as a post-racial space which functions as “a watchdog over the democratic state” with freedom of the press seen as “indivisible from and subject to the same rights and duties as that of the individual” (Sanef 2008b; cf. BCCSA 2008 in Wasserman, 2010, p. 21). In other words, the media in South Africa is based on a typical Western model.

### **2.3 Convergence and Black South African newspapers**

By 2012, the Black press in South Africa seemed to be under threat. Independent Newspapers and Media 24 had chosen to cater for the majority of Black readers through tabloid newspapers – in Media 24’s case, these were the English language daily “*The Daily Sun*”, Afrikaans language daily “*Die Son*” (the sun in Afrikaans) and Sunday tabloid “*Sunday Sun*”; while Independent Newspapers published “*The Daily Voice*” as its national tabloid. Avusa (now Times Media Group), had failed to start its own tabloid during the early 2000s. Media 24 was also trying to reposition its serious weekly Black newspaper, *City Press* as a cross-over paper attractive to black and white readers, in order to woo readers away from the dominant Sunday newspaper, *The Sunday Times*. The motto of *City Press*, “Distinctly African”, had evoked an aura of pan-Africanism and Black Consciousness since it was introduced on the paper in 2004.

At that time, then *City Press* editor Mathatha Tsedu announced the new motto in an editorial as an “unambiguous assertion of our Africanness” (Tsedu, 3 October 2004 in Gongo, 2007, p. 6). The newspaper would cover issues that would elevate the African identity, Tsedu promised (Gongo, 2007). According to Sesanti (2011), the motto was very political in the sense that it was “informed by indigenous African values in contact with other values” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 235), and also because the *City Press* journalists had defined a “political role for themselves” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 235) as those who would write the news through a lens reflecting “the reality of our lives as Africans” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 235). The motto declared that the paper would be the antithesis to newspapers that demonised African culture while lauding Western practices (Sesanti, 2011).

Yet by 2010, Media 24 had decided to ditch the African identity of the paper in favour of “cross-over appeal” on the basis that readers were “not as racially boxed” as some suggested. The *City Press* editor even suggested in an interview with an industry blog that many Black South African readers were probably like Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey who had “transcended race” but were still “quite black” in their identities (Moodie, 2010). Ideas of post-racialism, biracial fusion, race transcendence and how these are often used to expunge Black Consciousness have been explored earlier in this thesis. It has been suggested that US president Barack Obama, for example, cultivates a “race-neutral” or “race transcendent leadership” (Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008, p.740) in order to appear “racially ambiguous” and hence, appeal to whites. Part of attempting to transcend race, however, involves president Obama deliberately overlooking the institutional racism that ensures the ongoing oppression of African-Americans (Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008), along with recognising “white resentment” towards the demands for justice and equality being made by African Americans (Sinclair-Chapman & Price, 2008, p.740).

Similarly, in order for white readers to begin finding a Black weekly newspaper (*City Press*) more appealing than the traditionally white weekly newspapers, in 2012 Media 24 executives said that *City Press* was “not a ‘black’ newspaper” at all and that “marketing efforts” would be needed to remove this idea from readers’ minds since the paper was busy transforming into “*the* agenda-setting newspaper in the country” – the subtext clearly being that a Black newspaper could not take up this role (Moodie, 2012, retrieved 8 August 2012). One of the reasons for this was that the other weekly newspaper in the Media 24 stable was *Rapport*, a conservative Afrikaans language newspaper, and, as in the case of Times Media Group (Avusa), Media 24 management had decided to merge the newsrooms. It would have been impossible for *City Press* to maintain its position as the flagship Black weekly while sharing content written for a largely white, conservative readership (Moodie, 2010). A revisionist view of the “Distinctly African” motto, seeking to expunge the Black identity of *City Press* was promoted by the new *City Press* editor, who claimed that Tsedu had told her that the “Distinctly African” was only ever “meant to be continental; not the South African race definition” (Moodie, 2011). However, this is again contradicted by Sesanti’s research, in which Tsedu stated that the “Distinctly African” motto also meant that *City Press* would “be the voice of the voiceless, of the poor and the powerless” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 34), categories which in South Africa are made up of the Black working class and unemployed.

Yet while the Media 24 and Times Media Group (Avusa) news corporations were making efforts to sap and dampen the Blackness and seriousness of their respective Black newspapers (*City Press* and *Sowetan*), there was clearly a market for a serious Black newspaper because in 2012, Independent Newspapers set up a new Black edition for one of their newspapers – *The Star Africa*. This newspaper was described by its editor, Makhudu Sefara, as “unapologetically Black” (Moodie, 2012) and one which

would “chronicle Black life” in the true style of the Black Press. *The Star Africa*, while being tabloid in format like *Sowetan* was, also like *Sowetan*, “not tabloid in the traditional sense” (Moodie, 2012) *The Star Africa*, again like *Sowetan*, would not be reporting on “tokoloshes” (evil spirits found in Zulu myths, who can be summoned by malicious people to wreak havoc on others) as the tabloids often did. “We're aimed at people who read and who take time to think about issues” said Sefara (Moodie, 2012).

In addition, *Sowetan's* adoption of the approach of being a “campaigning newspaper” (Lynch, 2013, p. 113) where journalists challenge authority on behalf of individual readers and tell the tale afterwards, has proved popular with readers and has lately been adopted by the tabloid newspapers. According to Lynch, *Sowetan* “projects into the public sphere the experiences and perspectives of those on the wrong end of inequalities in South African society” (Lynch, 2013, p. 113). The danger of new cross-over papers which perform no such campaigning or advocacy journalism function, is that they undermine the historical attempts by Black newspapers to tell Black stories and do “little to inform, much less improve, the conditions of Black people” (Curry, 2013). Apart from the arguments raised above, there is a documented lack of media diversity in the country. All newspaper corporations are majority white-owned.

During two days of parliamentary hearings into media diversity in 2011, the chief executive officers of the newspaper corporations revealed that only 4.4% of women held “top media jobs” (Majavu, 2011), and that Black ownership of the top four news corporations amounted to only 14%. Although “Black editors made up 65% of all editors in the country” (Majavu, 2011), less than 29% of newspaper boards were made up of Black people, and in some cases, less than 18%.



Print Media South Africa's (PMSA) president, Hoosain Karjieker, said at the hearings that:

Management of the print media industry is not sufficiently diverse to be completely representative. There are no significant numbers of women in top management and on the boards of the four largest media houses. The actual percentage is low at 4.4%. (Hoosain Karjieker in Majavu, 2011).

In conclusion, this chapter has described how post-apartheid media development in South Africa has depoliticised news outlets that were historically associated with radical Black politics. A number of factors have facilitated this process of depoliticisation. The political notion of the 'new South Africa' being a 'rainbow nation' has given impetus to the idea of crossover media, while a growing working class and poor Black population who remain situated far from the cities in the townships to which they were forcibly removed by the apartheid government has provided a growing market for lowbrow tabloid newspapers that arguably caricature many aspects of Black life and township life. During this period, these tabloid newspapers, aimed solely at Black readers, have grown dramatically in circulation, leading to a drop in sales for Black newspapers such as *Sowetan*, which continued to uphold the traditions of the Black press, rather than the tabloid press. In post-apartheid South Africa, the country's biggest daily newspaper is a tabloid-the *Daily Sun* (Jordaan, 2012), while from the early 2000's, *Sowetan's* circulation dropped by more than 20 per cent (Cowling, 2014). Based on this analysis, this thesis argues that the Black press in South Africa is being 'depoliticised' and made to abandon its Black identity, and investigates how this was experienced by journalists from the Black press - specifically, *Sowetan* newspaper.

## **CHAPTER 3:      LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This literature review has been divided into two sections. The first focuses on convergence and the second on Black news in mainstream media. The literature reviewed for the section on convergence found that convergence is often accompanied by downsizing and deskilling, including the elimination of traditional specialist beats and centralisation of newsdesks and sub-editing functions across different newspaper titles. According to the literature, these features of convergence on newspapers have resulted in newspapers losing or doing away with experienced senior journalists and specialised content tailored to specific communities or interest groups. The new 24 hour news cycle has led to decreased news quality as journalists have less time to produce work. In some cases, newspapers have outsourced some of their editorial functions to central bureaux situated in different cities or countries, which has led to concerns that important local knowledge will be lost. There has also been cultural resistance to convergence by print journalists, with at least one news corporation having been forced by this to deconverge. Given these findings from the literature reviewed, it was logical to investigate whether a Black newspaper, owned by a media corporation that also owned other non-Black newspaper titles, would be able to maintain its intellectual heritage, underpinned by radical Black Consciousness, once converged with non-Black, mainstream newspapers.

The literature reviewed for the section on Black news in the mainstream media showed that Black news is marginalised by the mainstream press for a number of reasons. These include a documented lack of diversity in newsrooms, the mainstream media's

minimisation of acts of individual racism and complete failure to report on institutional racism, and the mainstream media's failure to use the "Black angle" (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) when reporting the news. This is compounded in Africa where mainstream reportage normally portrays the continent as disease ridden and plagued by famine and incompetent or brutal governments, among others. The relevance of cross-over news and its appeal to Black readers is also examined, since convergence on *Sowetan* meant the merger of Black and non-Black news. Related to this is an exploration of the "Black angle" in print journalism and the historical role globally of the Black and indigenous media in advocacy or crusading journalism in service to the Black community. Hence, the literature explores the question of whether convergence in the South African media enables the media to continue playing its historical role of defending the socio-economic interests of the white citizens and corporations who were served by most forms of media during apartheid.

## **3.2 Convergence in newspapers globally**

### **3.2.1 Defining convergence**

Media convergence has been defined as that whereby different forms of media are integrated, digitised, merged, brought into collaborative partnerships, and made to share content, and where corporations converge (Huang et al. 2006; Lawson-Borders, 2006; Grant & Wilkinson, 2009; Quinn & Filak, 2005; Brooks et al. 2004; Deuze, 2004; Gordon, 2002; Jenkins, 2006; Menon, 2006 in Ekwo, 2012, p. 1). Media corporations pursue convergence due in large part to the enlargement of profits via the concentration of media companies (Dal Yong, 2013). The rapid growth of the internet sector has resulted in media convergence in terms of news dissemination, as well as

technologically and corporately. Converging different titles and different forms of media within a corporation appears currently to be part of most media corporations' growth paths. Bigger media corporations have "increased power, and ultimately a greater share of profits and larger profits from the world information and entertainment markets" (Dal Yong, 2013, p. 20).

In the main, media convergence is "categorized in three major areas: the flow of content across multiple media platforms; the cooperation between multiple media industries; and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experience they want" (Dal Yong, 2013, p. 6). Naturally, this drive towards bigger media corporations has meant that a few multinational corporations have bought up large numbers of media companies, and merged with each other in a bid to increase their share of the mainstream media market (Dal Yong, 2013). According to Saltzis and Dickinson (n.d.), the processes of media convergence appear to be irreversible. When convergence was first mooted, the newspaper journalists it would affect were told that the new multimedia newsrooms would facilitate innovative ways of working in which journalists from different platforms would work together, breaking and updating stories around the clock for the print newspapers and the web (Tameling & Broersma, 2013). In theory, multimedia news corporations would have the ability to "continuously target diverse audiences through different platforms with complementary and non-repetitious information" resulting in enhanced journalism for their readers (Tameling & Broersma, 2013, p. 20).

A defining feature of a convergent news corporation is one where the lines between the different types of media are blurred (Pool, 1983, cited in Dupagne & Garrison, 2006). Saltzis and Dickinson (n.d.) write that at a structural level, the relationship between

different media is characterized by increasing cooperation, compatibility and connectivity. The convergent newsroom produces news not only for its print editions, but for a number of different platforms, and in a number of different formats, for example an online newspaper and often a separate iPad/tablet edition, online photo slideshows, podcasts, audio and video stories, all accompanied by constantly breaking news and updates in the form of tweets, blogs, and Facebook updates from the newspapers' journalists. These "formerly distinct" newsrooms must break news 24 hours per day (Deuze, 2004, p. 140). A convergence continuum developed by Dailey, Demo & Spillman (2005) and widely cited in many studies into media convergence, details the different types of "co-operation" that take place between the different news outlets owned by one corporation. These range from "cross-promotion" (advertising each other's titles or products) to "full convergence", in which the different news outlets work together in conceptualising stories and in packaging these for multiple platforms (Dailey et al. 2005, p. 153). "Full convergence" in this continuum aims to have changing teams of journalists from the different news outlets coming together to maximise their specific talents and produce the best news package for the different platforms.

Deuze (2004) points out, however, that the concept of a convergence continuum ignores the fact that convergence does not necessarily have to be a linear process. As far as Deuze (2004) is concerned, the continuum theory can be undermined by the fact that convergence sometimes leaves some parts of the organisation untouched or fails completely. According to Deuze, it is also far from certain that "consensus among stakeholders and media practitioners involved on what convergence means to them and their work or involvement in the company" (Deuze, 2004, p. 140) can correctly be assumed by the continuum. According to Marjoribanks (2003, p. 61), not only has

digitisation of the newsroom through the convergence process enabled owners and managers to re-establish control over the production process, but has also brought with it the possibility of deskilling “or even removing altogether many of the traditional crafts associated with the print production process.” The convergence process has meant that at many newspapers, journalists are responsible for the proofreading and layout of their own stories, whereas this was once a specialised production task (Marjoribanks, 2003). However, Saltzis and Dickinson (n.d.) question whether deskilling should be better understood as “multiskilling”, pointing out that in print journalism, multi-skilling refers to the ability of a journalist to write for both the newspaper and the website.

### **3.2.2 Convergence, downsizing, redundancies, and financialisation**

As has been the case in so many factories internationally, journalists were soon to find that “technology enters the workplace not just as a neutral tool but also as a socially tainted tool which seeks to strengthen managerial control of the workplace” (Hlatshwayo, 2013, p. 27). Marjoribanks (2003) argues that technology enables owners and managers to re-establish control over the production process. Increased managerial control also came in the form of downsizing. In fact, convergence has come to be associated in journalists’ minds with what Minami (2007, p. 14) terms the “downsizing newsroom” – a forlorn and constantly shrinking physical and psychological space where fewer journalists are expected to cover an ever increasing number of beats for several different news platforms. In her study of “The U.S. Times” (a pseudonym for an American newspaper), Minami uncovered one journalist who, after a round of downsizing, was then given four beats to cover at once – public utilities, minorities, religion and district reporting (Minami, 2007, p. 11). Journalists had to do more work

following downsizing, writing stories at a speed they estimated to be three times faster than before in order to cope with the increased workload (Minami, 2007, p. 11).

In Australia, journalists at Australia's News Limited have estimated that 500 will lose their jobs (O'Donnell et al. 2012) by the end of 2015. Many American newspapers have already completed their downsizing processes. An example is the *San Jose Mercury News* in San Francisco, which was sold in April 2007 by the Knight Ridder media corporation to MediaNews Group. More than 12 journalists were immediately made redundant with another 15 journalists resigning soon afterwards. This represented a loss of 22 percent of the *San Jose Mercury News*' journalist complement in one year (Fahri, 2007, p. 1). Downsizing on newspapers represented the manifestation of the idiom "out with the old, in with the new". In this case, the new developments included the introduction of small or even tiny online newsrooms which operated separately from newspapers' print edition newsrooms. These new small online newsrooms were initially tasked with uploading the print stories produced by the print edition staff to the web overnight and later with "re-packaging" and superficially updating the print stories throughout the day (Deuze, 1999; Boczkowski, 2004 in Aviles and Carvajal, 2008, p. 223). Some of these early online newsrooms functioned mainly as internet based archives for newspapers, but today many news corporations claim that these are genuine newsrooms like the newsrooms that produce the print edition of the newspapers, even though the online newsroom often employs only a few technical personnel to physically update the news sites with the output of the journalists from the print edition. Franklin (2012) argues that it is important to acknowledge that some newspapers have adapted editorially and financially to accommodate innovations in media technologies and changing market requirements. He uses the case of *The Washington Post* to illustrate his argument, writing that the newsroom there has been radically overhauled so that its primary task is to secure a growing number of readers for the online newspaper

(Franklin, 2012). This entailed the redundancies of over 300 staff members, with “more than a thousand” staff being reduced down to “less than 640 people” (Franklin, 2012, p. 666) once the newspaper merged its print and online operations. The goal of generating traffic for the website is of such paramount importance that the decision to keep or eliminate blogs is based purely on whether or not a particular blog meets traffic targets (Franklin, 2012) and not on whether it is of public interest. It is perhaps unsurprising that in the converged media era, where journalist complements have been downsized, that a major newspaper like *The Washington Post* would shift its focus to generating a large number of visitors to its website, even if it has to feature only the news and opinions of those who attract the most readers (Franklin, 2012).

Financialisation of the media has also been found to be a feature of downzising. Convergence often follows financialisation of the media - where stock market listed companies, private equity firms or corporations with no experience in running media companies either buy shares in media companies or take over the media companies completely (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013). The new owners of media companies are often unwilling to take on the companies’ debts and so jobs are slashed to cut costs. In New Zealand, the fact that financialisation has coincided with the digitalisation of the media and the loss of income from print adverts, means that the new owners of media companies have seen opportunities for “lucrative restructuring” – but only if they become extremely involved in day to day “operational decisions” at the media companies (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013, p. 203). This has entailed, among other things, hiring executives from banks and corporate finance institutions who have no previous experience in any media-related role, let alone that of editing or publishing a newspaper (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013). “Financialisation” therefore leads to “a loss of journalistic expertise and a thinning of news content” since the aim of the new owner is to generate



as much profit as possible before finding a new company to generate profit from (p. 204). This occurs at “the expense of journalists’ livelihoods, media content diversity and public debate on issues of national importance” (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013, p. 204).

### **3.2.3 Convergence and cultural change**

There are different cultures found in print and online newsrooms, with newspaper journalists traditionally considered to have higher status than their online counterparts “partly because the newspaper was still considered to be the core product and the website merely a lighter, less significant medium” (Saltzis & Dickinson n.d, p.8). In her research in Finnish newsrooms, Nikunen (2014) found that the concurrent processes of the move towards convergent newsrooms and the introduction of early retirement packages to downsize the newsroom made age the defining factor for professional journalistic identity. This is because the convergent newsroom “emphasized speed, technological skills and youth as characteristics that were needed to compete in the changing and increasingly convergent media markets” (Nikunen, 2014, p. 868). Consequently, according to Nikunen (2014), the older journalists in the convergent newsroom struggled to hold on to their professional values and notions of expertise in the convergent newsroom, which represented a cultural clash for them. Moreover, a convergent newsroom cultivates a culture of a ‘general journalist’ with no particular expertise in one field – a journalist who is able to move from one subject area to another, “to adapt and to hold a broad base of skills” (Nikunen, 2014, p. 876). From the perspective of the owners and managers, the ‘general journalist’ offers flexibility and means decreased costs. Extra pay for specialised knowledge becomes unnecessary (Nikunen, 2014). For specialised journalists, however, becoming ‘general journalists’ translates into having less time to devote to following their area of specialisation, and

into demands to adapt to the increasing daily rhythm of ‘the new’ news production (Nikunen, 2014).

Therefore, many print journalists have been reluctant to embrace a redefinition of their roles to incorporate tasks formerly performed separately. This cultural resistance stemmed from print journalists viewing themselves as having a strong tradition of research, investigative reporting and the cultivation of sources dating back hundreds of years (Tameling & Broersma, 2013). The relatively new online newsrooms are seen, on the other hand, as having been set up mainly to ‘repackage’ or ‘repurpose’ existing stories for the digital medium. Tameling and Broersma (2013) found that many print journalists have resented the online newsrooms even being described as ‘newsrooms’ because the staff working there rarely produced articles, and instead were tasked to “(re-) produce as many news stories as fast as possible” (Tameling & Broersma, 2013, p. 25). One online newsroom was tasked to produce 200 news updates daily, and at least 100 news updates over the weekend (de Persgroep, 2011, p. 25 in Tameling & Broersma, 2013).

Cultural resistance by print journalists is also rooted in a sense of loyalty to the print newspapers and readers, with Tameling and Broersma (2013) finding that journalists covertly refused to provide breaking news to their online newsrooms, instead saving it for their own newspapers’ print editions. At the Dutch newspaper *de Volksrant* newspaper, cultural resistance was so great that the news corporation’s management had to de-converge the newspaper (Tameling & Broersma, 2013) and re-locate the online newsroom to another city after the former print journalists put up “cultural resistance” to being made to “develop a multimedia mindset” (Tameling & Broersma, 2013, p. 26), arguing that they were writers. After de-converging the newsroom as a result of this resistance, management settled on an interesting compromise which could serve as a

useful example to other news corporations – the complete separation of the print edition journalists from the online journalists, tasking the print journalists with a “focus on quality journalism” and the online journalists with reproducing “as many news stories as fast as possible” (Tameling & Broersma, 2013, p. 25). It was accepted that the print journalists would remain as an experienced complement of writers while the online journalists could be new entrants to the job market with technical, website updating skills.

Similar cultural resistance has been found in Australia, where an unnamed editor said that journalists would need to be “herded like cats” (O’Donnell et al. 2012, p. 20) towards an understanding that they should place as much importance on filing stories for their newspaper’s websites as they did on stories for the print edition. Shoemaker (1996) has pointed out though that this resistance is futile in the main, because journalists can attempt to take a stand or uphold their “individual values” but corporations “win out” because they have the power to “hire and fire” (Shoemaker, 1996 in Dailey et al. 2005, p. 164).

The literature has identified that part of the problem, for print journalists, is that the ‘online first’ policies of converged newsrooms (Franklin, 2008) conflict with their additional task of needing to produce original news for the pages of the print editions of their newspapers the following day. Since a news website can be updated around the clock, whereas a paper newspaper is only printed between once and several times a day, it is compelling for newspaper managers globally to insist that breaking news of great importance be handed over to the news website so that it can beat its competitors.

Franklin (2008) has found that this often happens to the detriment of the print edition – if a “newspaper’s website might cannibalise and publish the paper’s major news story of the day as much as three to four hours ahead of the print edition’s evening publication”

this leaves the newspaper without a strong story for its front page the next day (Franklin, 2008, p. 311).

### **3.2.4 Convergence and declining news quality**

With fewer journalists being required to write more articles and do the added work of producing news for the new multi-media platforms that now accompany print, downsizing in newsrooms results in a “downward pressure on the quality of news” (Duncan, 2011, p. 361). The new 24 hour news cycle and the onus on producing news for multiple platforms has diminished the time that journalists have to “research, report, and even think about their work” (Klinenberg, 2005, p. 55 in Tameling & Broersma, 2013, p.22). According to Deuze (2004, p. 146), a ‘fully converged reporter’ is expected to make decisions on what kinds of platform to utilize when practicing his or her craft, “and in the case of multimedia productions ideal-typically has to be able to oversee story ‘packages’ rather than repurposing single stories in multiple formats.” Nikunen’s (2014) research participants expressed the view that this convergence workplace culture does not lead to an accumulation of journalistic expertise. Further, Nikunen’s (2014) respondents pointed out that working in a convergent newsroom meant they were left with no time to either follow news in particular areas of interest, meaning that the journalists were left with “fewer tools to critically evaluate the information they got from various sources” (Nikunen, 2014, p. 877).

In Australia, the 2012 *Independent Inquiry into the Media and Media Regulation* concluded that in the current global climate of cost-cutting and downsizing, there were concerns “about the ability of newspapers to maintain a substantial commitment of resources to investigative and public interest journalism” (Finkelstein, 2012, p. 330).

It is developments such as these that have caused academics such as McChesney (2012, p.682) to state that “journalism is in freefall collapse in the United States, and, to varying degrees, elsewhere”. According to Buchanan (2013), “the paper city has been razed, the press gang gutted” (p 15). Quality has been ditched in favour of “economic efficiency” (Buchanan, 2013, p. 60) and newspapers in Western countries are said to be “so damaged now that stories of their loss have entered popular culture” (Buchanan, 2013, p. 17). In Germany, a new noun has even come into being – *zeitungssterben* – or ‘newspaper death’ (Buchanan, 2013, p 18). This is echoed in New Zealand where the “the recolonisation and desiccation of the New Zealand mediascape” is currently underway as a result of the financialisation of the media and the cost-cutting measures that have followed (Hope & Myllylahti, 2013, p. 205).

Nikunen (2014) refers to these changes in journalism as ‘the crisis in journalism’. Even though other media companies have also felt the impact of the crisis, newspapers have been affected most since “the advent of new technology, online publishing and convergence continue to pose challenges around how to create sustainable business models in the new media environment” (Nikunen 2014, p. 869). The quality of multimedia news has been questioned with the multimedia journalist said to be doomed to “mediocrity” through being made to perform too many technical tasks simultaneously (Dailey et al. 2005, p. 159). Indeed, the laptop, which once made it easier for journalists to take notes during press conferences or long court sessions, has already been replaced by the iPhone or Blackberry which allows editors to command journalists not only to take notes at press conferences, but to write and file stories during press conferences, and Tweet an account of proceedings along with photographs and video clips while the event is still taking place. Just a few years ago, it was envisaged that the miniature workstation could enable a journalist at the scene of a serious vehicle collision, for

example, to both write and file a short story and also shoot and file a photograph at the scene for the online news site. But now, these miniature workstations include also video cameras and audio recorders and come with the added workload for journalists to record audio and video during events, edit and upload a version of this during the same event while simultaneously tweeting, and attempt at the same time to get in-depth and exclusive comment from the protagonists in the story for use in a longer article in the next day's print edition.

As previously outlined in this chapter, there is a debate over whether “multi-skilling” is better described as “de-skilling”. Multi-skilling in newsrooms raises significant concerns about declining quality in news output because of increased workloads, increased pressure and the “de-skilling” of journalists (Saltzis & Dickinson n.d.). As Dunlop (2013) points out, editors and journalists cannot just aim to generate content that meets “the bottom line of a corporation” (Dunlop, 2013, p. 6) but must meet “civic criteria” (Dunlop, 2013, p. 6) too by reporting on public interest issues and generally acting as the “watchdog” that they claim to be.

In summary, there are numerous studies which indicate that convergence, often brought about by financialisation of the media, has become synonymous with downsizing in newsrooms. That the downsizing occurs at the same time as the media corporations move towards an increased output of news across new and multiple platforms, means that journalists ultimately become multi-skilled or de-skilled in the main, unless their cultural resistance to convergence is so great that the media corporation de-converges the newsroom and separates print from online reporting. There is a debate about whether journalists in converged newsrooms are best described as ‘multi-skilled’ or ‘de-skilled’. Former print journalists who successfully master the transition to multi-media

reporting, therefore becoming multi-skilled, can become de-skilled in the techniques of traditional journalism such as investigating, interviewing, researching and writing simply because they no longer have the time at work to practice those skills.

Of concern to those studying this field is that both the multi-skilling and de-skilling that accompany convergence lead to a decrease in the quality of news output. Convergence has also been criticised for the manner in which it steers newspapers towards an increased drive towards profits, and away from a concentration on serving readers through reporting in the public interest.

### **3.2.5 Convergence, centralisation of newsrooms and the impact on public journalism**

Horizontal convergence involves “branded content exploited over different media platforms” (Soderlund et al. 2005, p.104) – for example, where a news corporation that owns a number of different newspapers serving different target markets removes the journalists from the oversight of their individual newspaper editors and places them all in a centralised news bureau where they are tasked to produce articles suitable for use across all the different titles. Deuze (2004) has stated that globally, all news corporations are currently striving “for at least some form of cross-media cooperation or synergy between formerly separated staffers, newsrooms, and departments” (Deuze, 2004, p. 142). Other academic studies into horizontal convergence or centralising of news functions within a corporation show that the output of unique local news has clearly been diminished by convergence, since downsizing has meant that there were fewer journalists to generate unique stories, which were often replaced by re-packaged news with a national or global focus. The case of the *San Jose Mercury News* described on page 34 of this thesis is illustrative. In the case of this newspaper, its owner, the MediaNews Group decided to fully centralise “editorial functions” across the

corporation (Fahri, 2007, p. 4) resulting in “homogenised news” being used by all the different newspapers in the corporation, no matter who their target readers were (Fahri, 2007, p. 5). Sub-editing of newspapers has also been centralised, and this has a similarly detrimental effect on the quality of news output. In 2012, Fairfax Media in Australia carried out a horizontal transnational convergence of sub-editing functions which involved making 66 sub-editors from nine community newspapers in Australia redundant and transferring their editing work to a centralised sub-editing bureau based in New Zealand (Warren, 2012). The Australian journalists union, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, objected on the grounds that only sub-editors living in Newcastle and Wollongong would have the depth and breadth of knowledge necessary to edit stories about those communities.

It is important to note that the loss of identity may be a gradual or ongoing phenomenon, in addition to a sudden change, because the process of convergence in the print media entails continual downsizing. In May 2015, for example, Fairfax Media announced their intention to downsize their South East New South Wales division of Australian Community Media, with 24 redundancies of editorial staff, or 46% of the total staff complement, planned on the community newspapers, *Illawarra Mercury*, *The Wollongong Advertiser*, *Lake Times* and *Kiama Independent*. Photographers were to be made redundant and journalists would henceforth need to take photographs as well. This was the third round of redundancies at the *Illawarra Mercury* in three years. According to Paul Murphy, chief executive officer of the Australian journalists’ union, MEAA:

We have already seen a community outcry at the cuts Fairfax has made to newsrooms in communities in Victoria and NSW SW, and communities airing their serious concerns about local voices, local issues, local news being lost.

When you lose journalists in rural and regional Australia, quality journalism is



undermined. Media organisations offer up homogenised filler where there is less local and therefore less relevant news. When iconic and historic mastheads like the *Illawarra Mercury*, celebrating its 160 anniversary this year, and the *Lake Times* and *Kiama Independent* lose reporters and photographers there is a direct loss of local news reporting because there are fewer staff on the ground involved in newsgathering and the vital role of scrutinising the powerful and holding them to account. We know that the *Illawarra Mercury* has played a crucial role in exposing corruption in matters that have subsequently been before the Independent Commission Against Corruption – what will happen to vital public interest journalism when editorial staff numbers are slashed to the bone? (Paul Murphy, 2015)

Newspapers potentially suffer a loss of identity once they discontinue long standing practices of having their own journalists writing for their readers. The use of “homogenised news” (Fahri, 2007) written by journalists from other titles, represents a shift away from individual news values.

### **3.2.6 Convergence in South Africa**

According to Wasserman (2008), the South African media market has been ‘playing catch up’ with international trends in newspaper convergence, and has begun convergence processes in an attempt to stop declining circulation figures. Berger (2004) argues that consistent with the global trends, the media in Southern Africa (the Southern-most region of the continent comprising South Africa and neighbouring Namibia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana) has been moving slowly towards mergers, partnerships and multi-platform publishing. The first South African newspaper to have a presence on the internet was the *Mail and Guardian (M&G)*, a weekly newspaper.

*The M&G online* was launched in early 1994, and by 2010 was one of the country's top three biggest news sites (Bosch, 2010). Another South African weekly that went online around the same time was the *Financial Mail* (Bosch, 2010) with these then followed by a wave of online publishing between 1995 and 2000. Stand alone online news enterprises such as the websites iAfrica and Woza were also introduced in this period. By the year 2000, South Africa had about 16 daily news websites. Johnnic Publishing (which changed its name to Avusa Publishing Limited in 2007), for instance, aimed to transform its operations such that journalists' work would feed a digital database that in turn would sustain both print and web platforms. To this end, Johnnic Publishing merged content from *Business Day*, *Financial Mail* and the *Sunday Times*' business section into an online product called Net-Assets. But soon after, Net-Assets was turned into a separate web operation unit with its own journalistic staff. The reason behind this development was resistance on the part of the print editors and journalists to integrate with the web operation, a cultural resistance which has been discussed on page 30 of this thesis. Following this, financial news from Johnnic's print newspapers was uploaded online onto a new venture, I-Net Bridge, a web operation launched in alliance with US company Bridge, which subsequently collapsed (Berger 2004). Meanwhile, "the *Financial Mail* and *Business Day* and *Sunday Times* 'feeder' platforms operated their own independent web sites".

Hence, what began as a technological convergence "rapidly evolved into organisational divergence, duplication and dispersal" (Berger, 2004, p. 64). A similar evolution occurred with other South African media organisations. For example, Naspers merged its various publications' content into an online website called Media24, and employed a large number of journalistic staff to run the web operation (Berger, 2004). Similarly, Independent Newspapers collected stories from its publications around South Africa

and “added a heavy dose of newsagency content, and produced the content-rich news-site IOL.co.za.” (Berger, 2004, p. 65). However, the weakness in all of these online projects was that none of these media convergence ventures offered “true multi-media offerings, where text-photographs-audio-graphics-video are fused into (interactive) messages in which the sum is greater than the parts” (Berger, 2004, p. 65).

Consequently, many of these business ventures failed, “primarily because initially newspapers merely transferred content online with text-heavy sites, and advertisers did not recognise the value of Internet audiences” (Bosch, 2010. P. 266). The outcome was that the South African web news industry saw a radical downsizing in 2011, and the news sites re-united with the parent platforms (Berger, 2004). Redundancies became the “order of the day at I-Net Bridge, Media24, and IOL” (Berger, 2004, p. 65).

Media companies in South Africa then began to use web publication to build the brand of the parent platform, the newspapers. The websites were regarded as ‘value-adds’ (rather than forms of media which could stand alone). This meant that initially, there were no “multi-platform newsrooms” (Berger, 2004, p. 66) with the online operations functioning solely to promote the newspapers. However, newspapers later began to implement full horizontal convergence. *Die Burger*, an Afrikaans daily newspaper based in Cape Town, and the *Sunday Times*, a weekly newspaper based in Johannesburg (Verweij, 2009) were the subjects of a study into how convergence had “transformed” these newsrooms. *Die Burger* is part of the Media 24 news corporation and its journalists write in Afrikaans for the print daily edition, as well as in English for the 24 hour online edition and for the English language *City Press* online edition. The *Sunday Times* is the biggest weekly newspaper in circulation in South Africa and in 2007 started its own new online edition which was produced together with a new daily, *The Times* (Verweij, 2009). Initially *The Times* was available only to subscribers, but from 2009, went on sale in addition to being given away free to subscribers of *Sunday Times*.

After convergence, *Sunday Times* journalists were not entirely removed from their tasks of writing for the weekly edition, although they were also asked to write daily articles for *The Times*. The newsrooms of other Times Media Group newspapers such as *Sowetan* were eventually merged with the newsrooms at *The Times*.

According to Verweij (2009), *The Times* represented a model of an effectively converged newsroom, starting with the way the newsroom was re-configured. Verweij (2009) quotes Carly Ritz, then multimedia editor at *The Times* explaining that the open plan newsroom was inspired by convergence, with the editors and multimedia editors placed at the centre of the newsroom in the editors' hub. The purpose of placing editors of the print edition with the more technical editors of the website was, according to Ritz, so that "with a breaking news story we can get everything together quickly" (Verweij, 2009, p. 78). *Die Burger* adopted a similar newsroom layout. Willem Pretorius, a senior assistant editor at *Die Burger*, explains that the modus operandi at the newspaper is that "internet is first, and print follows" (Verweij, 2009, p. 80). The strategy at *Die Burger* is to "always break a story" online first, and then follow with the analysis in print (Verweij, 2009). On the basis of analysing the physical re-orientation of the newsrooms, Verweij concluded that convergence "transforms the newsroom into a less hierarchical, network organization, with greater autonomy for the production units (multi-media teams)" (Verweij, 2009, p. 86). Contrary to many studies which have linked convergence to downsizing, with subsequently overworked journalists who struggle to produce content for a number of different platforms and a decline in the quality of news, Verweij concluded that "converged newsrooms offer more opportunities to the public to be informed and involved in a story, at the same time offering the reporter and editor more integrated tools to tell the story" (Verweij, 2009, p. 86).

However, Verweij's conclusion can be critiqued from the perspective that it foregrounds the physical arrangement of the newsroom and new "workflow systems" (Verweij, 2009, p. 81), without taking into account the perspectives of the journalists working there. Although the study is about "making convergence work", very few journalists are interviewed. The opinions of editors and management on the two newspapers are quoted at length, with some unflattering statements about journalists going unchallenged, such as this comment by Die Burger's then multimedia:

They are supposed to take initiative. It is one of the difficulties that we still encounter. I think journalists are inherently lazy people [smiles] trying to get them to think about how to deliver their story, like 'what can I add to it?' for example, is still difficult (Verweij, 2009, p. 82)

Quinn and Filak (2005) too ignore the implications convergence has for journalists, and focus instead on strategies that journalists should use if they want to become successful in the converged newsrooms. Quinn and Filak (2005) argue that, principally, journalists need to undergo a cultural transformation to embrace the techniques of convergence that they have supposedly rejected. They argue that journalists should accept that they now have far more deadlines than before, that print is a limited medium, that they may have to "move from newsgathering to news processing as a primary job responsibility" (Quinn & Filak, 2005, p. 210) and put an end to the " 'us versus them' blood feud" mentality (Quinn & Filak, 2005, p. 210).

### **3.2.7 Convergence in African media**

In Africa, mobile phones are the platform of choice for newspapers since the mobile phone industry is growing at "three times the rate of the internet" (Akoh & Ahiabenu II,

2012, p. 350). With a population of 1.2 billion people, by 2011 there were more mobile phone connections in Africa (a total of 620 million) than in Latin America, “making it the second largest mobile market in the world after Asia Pacific, according to a GSMA report” (Rubadiri, 2012). According to Akoh and Ahiabenu II (2012) by 2011, Africa’s internet penetration reached 11.4 per cent, and is projected to grow further. By 2009, the Ethiopian News Agency (ENA), the oldest news wire service in Africa, had declared its desire to become a full multimedia agency, and declared that “convergence is a key to the success of traditional media” (Sihao, 2009). With their need for information from home, the African diaspora is also seen to be driving “the creation of content and a growth in the market for the consumption of online news as evidenced by the number of newspapers with online editions” (Akoh & Ahiabenu II, 2012, p. 349). For example, “all major national dailies in Nigeria have an online presence on social networking sites and operate functioning websites where online versions of their newspapers are published” (Akinfemisoye, 2014, p.64).

This literature review sought to explore whether media convergence in Africa facilitated the growth of a local Black press that was positioned to report in the public interest and play the advocacy role that will be detailed later in this thesis. It was not possible to establish this conclusively. Some research studies suggest that the growth of social media in Africa provided citizens across the continent with more opportunities for “political mobilisation, advocacy, and citizen participation in the national political discourse” Moyo (2009, p.551), while Rubadiri (2012) found that the growth of social media provided news media with the potential to increase their readerships (Rubadiri, 2012). Linking the growth of converged media to the potential for more freedom of expression and information in Nigeria, Ekwo found an “unstoppable demand for accountability in both the new and old media...there is a relentless agitation for transparency and good governance among Nigerians including those in the diaspora” (p.

128). According to Moyo (2009, p. 562) “it is clear that emerging forms of citizen journalism provide practical critique of institutionalised and routinised forms of journalism and suggest radical ways of doing journalism.” Akinfemisoye (2014, p. 64) too, writes that new media in Africa has been said to “play major roles in the democratisation projects of many countries despite the issue of limited access”. It appears that these conclusions have been reached because media convergence has “increased citizens’ participation in the media sphere” (Fosu and Ufuoma, 2013, pg 2).

Fosu and Ufuoma point out that once newspapers and radio stations were converged with online news operations, this made news more accessible to citizens via free digital media platforms – especially to people who had previously not had the funds to buy newspapers – and also allowed people to “give vent” easily online in the form of comments and text message responses to news stories (Fosu and Ufuoma, 2013, pg 5). They concluded that convergence had “overturned the hitherto mostly one-dimensional flow from top to down” (of news) (Fosu and Ufuoma, 2013, pg 5). However, Alzouma (2005 in Ekwo, 2012, pg 45) is sceptical that the digitised media and new information and communication technologies in general can enhance democracy as they “cannot leapfrog beyond the ordinary development problems Africans are faced with (Alzouma, 2005, pg 351 in Ekwo, 2012, pg 45). Ekwo too used as a point of departure the assumption that new digital media would enhance freedom of expression, and the collection and distribution of news (Ekwo, 2012, pg 1), and that “convergence journalism ...essentially performs a dual function in the public sphere: accelerator of media democratization and incubator for robust democratic governance” (Ekwo, 2012, p. 7). Ekwo argued that ordinary people would gain a “new influence” (2012, p. 8) in the converged media which would be “translated into political energy thereby precipitating a new political culture where power truly belongs to the people” (Ekwo, 2012, p. 8). However, he acknowledged that it was still uncertain whether the Nigerian

media would be able to balance the converged media's drive for greater profits with the need for professional journalism (as opposed to cut-price journalism, assumedly) to take priority. Ekwo also pointed out that powerful political figures in the country may start "tapping into the gains of media convergence to turn it to their own selfish motive of manipulating the unsuspecting members of the public" (Ekwo, 2012, p. 131) citing the phenomenon of "at least four former state governors" who had set up converged media companies.

None of the studies on converged media in Africa investigated whether historically Black newspapers had changed their identity politics following their convergence with more mainstream, historically white newspapers, and whether this resulted in the stories of ordinary poor and working class Africans (who are predominantly Black) becoming more or less marginal and unseen than before. It could be because in South Africa, white ownership of the media is far more pronounced than in other countries. However, Ekwo's study (2012) in particular, points to the fact that while converged digital media has facilitated new opportunities for readers to freely express their opinions in online newspapers' comments sections, there are also former politicians who have started their own converged media companies in order to pursue political agendas, thus undermining any democratic gains brought about by the converged media (Ekwo, 2012, p. 131).

### **3.2.8 Conclusion**

This is the first research project to explore the nature of the changes to the identities of South African newspapers following newsroom centralisation within corporations, or into what happens when indigenous newspapers are bought by news corporations and their editorial functions later merged with mainstream titles that have traditionally



catered for a mainly white audience. The existing research into convergence in the South African media includes chronological studies into how print newspapers and their parent corporations have set up online newsrooms and then attempted to merge these. The scholarship also analysed how the physical arrangement of converged newsrooms facilitates the successful transition of former print journalists into multi-skilled journalism. It probes how limited access to broadband internet has hampered the growth of converged newspapers, with the majority of citizens in the unequal country (poor and working class) choosing to take up readership of less expensive, newly created tabloid newspapers instead of online newspapers.

This section reveals the following gaps in the existing research:

- a) There is no research into the impact of centralisation of newsrooms on diversity in newsrooms, and
- b) There is no research into how stories about racism are covered by newsrooms which become less and less diverse, particularly in South Africa where newsrooms from historically Black and white newspapers have recently been merged.
- c) There is little recent scholarship on the extent of media convergence in Africa, with most research tending to scrutinise individual cases of convergence within media corporations. This literature review suggests that there is scope for further research, particularly a study into the extent of media convergence across the continent, whether this has been accompanied by downsizing and de-skilling as it has on other newspapers globally, what the potential consequences could be

for the quality of news output, and how convergence facilitates or does not facilitate the growth of Black advocacy journalism.

### **3.3 Black news in mainstream media**

#### **3.3.1 Diversity in mainstream newsrooms globally**

Globally, it has been a 200 year struggle for Black journalists to achieve diversity in those mainstream newsrooms that began their existence with all-white journalist staff complements. For example, when Martin Luther King jr was assassinated in 1968, *The Washington Post* had to send the newspaper's couriers to cover the story as they were the only African-Americans on the staff at that time (Alvear, 2001), even though they were not journalists. By 1978, newsrooms in America still did not represent the diversity of the communities they were serving. The American Society of Newspaper Editors set diversity goals - by the year 2000, all American newspapers should have employed the same percentage of journalists of colour in the newsroom as there were people of colour living in the community (Alvear, 2001 and Mellinger, 2013). By 1998, when it became clear that the goals would not be met, the society extended the deadline by another 25 years to 2025 (Alvear, 2001). In her study of the American Society of Newspaper Editors' diversity initiative between 1978 and 2000, Mellinger points out that by 2005, in the USA, 37% of all daily newspapers employed zero journalists of colour, and just 13% employed journalists of colour relative to the levels of people of colour in the community (Mellinger, 2013, p. 168). By 2010, the situation was even worse and the number of journalists of colour in newsrooms was 18% less than it was in 2000 (Mellinger, 2013).

The benefits of diversity in the newsroom have been the subject of much research. A qualitative study into the practices of African American and Hispanic journalists in the USA (Roach et al. 2006) concluded that there is immense value in having diversified

newsrooms, even when indigenous journalists do not see themselves as advocates for diversity issues:

Diversifying the newsroom is not merely a symbolic gesture, nor is it simply a matter of providing employment opportunities for minority journalists. Rather, diverse newsrooms have the potential to transform the stereotypical, two-dimensional portrayals of minority communities into more accurate, multi-layered depictions. A critical mass of minority journalists committed to that goal, however, is necessary to bring about that transformation. (Roach et al. 2006, p. 255)

They further point out that even when indigenous journalists are not able to be open advocates for their communities because of the constraints of the mainstream newsroom values, many still practice “stealth advocacy” (Roach et al. 2006, p. 251) where they work “behind the scenes” to educate white journalists about Black issues and break down negative perceptions.

### **3.3.2 Racism in the media and negative portrayals of Black people in the media**

Ongoing studies conclude that a variety of negative representations of Black people continue to dominate the media and entertainment sphere (Byng, 2013). Analysing the representation of African-American women in the media, Byng (2013) found mainly negative stereotypes applied to African-American women – those of “Gold Diggers, Modern Jezebels, Baby Mamas, Uneducated Sisters, Ratchet Women, Angry Black Women, Mean Black Girls, Unhealthy Black Women, and Black Barbies”, (Byng, 2013). Positive representations of African-American women as “Young Phenoms, Real

Beauties, Individualists, Community Heroines, Girls Next Door and Modern Matriarchs” were less prevalent, with the study concluding that Black women were depicted in a negative way twice as often as they were depicted positively. The scarcity of “multi-dimensional” diverse images in the media was found to be the cause of this stereotyping. However, the promotion of deliberately negative stereotypes of Black athletes is also prevalent. A study into racism in sports journalism (Farrington et al. 2012) found that reportage of sports events from a “white ethnocentric perspective” (p.54) was “part of a tradition of racially inflected discourse” against the positive portrayal of Black sportspeople. The same study warned that “once stereotypes are formulated and publicised within the media and society, they remain increasingly difficult to remove from popular culture and public consciousness” (p. 115). For example, the media re-introduced “longstanding colonial stereotypes referring to black intellectual inferiority” (p. 19), to cover up the exclusion of Black sportspeople from executive sports administration positions. In the media, not only were old colonial stereotypes being given life but “new components within racist terminology” (p. 79) were constantly emerging in mainstream reportage, to the extent that “negative cultural stereotyping” of Pakistani bowlers as aberrant, belligerent, and eruptive people was found to be uniform in 2010 (Farrington et al. 2012, p. 104).

The mainstream media often also promotes individual Black people as out of the ordinary “role models” (Farrington et al. 2012, p. 81), unlike the rest of the Black community. Reporting by the British mainstream media on Black cricketer Amir Khan followed this model, with Khan being portrayed as the “ ‘desirable’ face of British Islam”, who filled “a lacuna in communities that are believed to lack positive role models” (p. 81). This is known as “benign” (p. 115) rather than overt stereotyping. Benign stereotyping, negative cultural stereotyping and the marginalisation of Black

news has also been documented in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. In South Africa, Wasserman (2009) found that news from Black and working class communities was largely ignored, and “events occurring in the affluent areas of the city, where the (still mostly white) middle and upper classes live ... favoured in the reportage above those happening in poorer areas” (Wasserman, 2009, p. 30). By 2009, this had become so insidious that white South African journalists covering news in affluent suburbs often refused to believe the stories they read in tabloid newspapers targeted at Black readers, leading Black tabloid journalists to conclude that white journalists had led “racially determined, sheltered lives” (Wasserman, 2009, p. 30).

Black or indigenous people and people of colour are likely to be further marginalised through the media’s minimisation of the existence of racism, and its preference to reflect the “myth” that society is completely integrated (Campbell, 1995, p. 8). The mainstream media does not generally cover “institutional racism” at all (Gandy & Zhan, 2005, p. 83) and favours the notion that racism today is not systemic but perpetrated only by troubled individuals. According to Clawson, Strine and Waltenburg (2003), the mainstream media uses myth-maintenance strategies to avoid covering stories of institutional racism, for example, describing the US Supreme court as the “apolitical guardian of the Constitution” and ignoring “the role that race plays in judicial decision making (Clawson et al. 2003, p. 796).

### **3.3.3 Mainstream media and its portrayal of Africa**

Africa is depicted as inferior and conflict-ridden (Bunce, 2010). Mandani argues that when it comes to international mainstream media, there are no Africa specialists (2009). “As a rule African tragedies happen in isolation and silence, under the cover of night.

This was true of the Angolan war, which ended in 2002, and it remains true of the continuing wars in Eastern Congo. When corporate media does focus on Africa, it seeks the dramatic, which is why media silence on Africa is often punctuated by high drama and why the reportage on Africa wars is more superficial than in-depth”, Mamdani wrote (2009, p.19). The digitisation of media means that Africans are increasingly exposed to offshore mainstream media reports on the continent, which are found on satellite television and the internet. According to Bunce (2010, p. 515), “such reports have traditionally been produced by white journalists in the field, writing for a distant audience ‘back home’”. In global journalism, countries in Africa are usually the entry points into international news desks for novice Western journalists. Western journalists treat Africa as a learning laboratory where inexperienced journalists are able to make mistakes and gain experience (Mamdani, 2009). With 54 distinct countries on the continent, there is clearly a compelling argument to be made for a local, independent Black press in Africa that is resourced well enough to provide actual news to counter the negative stereotypes of Africa released by international news agencies.

### **3.3.4 The Black Press and the “Black Angle”**

I wish I could write a poem  
record the beginning of dawn  
the opening of a flower  
at the approach of a bee  
describe a bird’s first flight  
then I look at people  
maimed, shackled, jailed  
the knowing is now clear  
I will never be able to write  
a poem about dawn, a bird or a bee

*(James Matthews, the grandfather of Black South African poetry, who was banned and jailed by the apartheid regime for his poems).*

The "Black angle" (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) has been defined as one which emphasises how the issue being reported affects Black people, and which counters racist and negative stereotypes of Black people (Wolseley, 1990, in Walhuter, p. 786). Poet James Matthews refers above to the inescapable necessity of using the "Black angle" (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) when writing about issues affecting Black people. The "Black Angle" is used exclusively by the Black Press. The term "Black Press" was coined in the United States (US) to describe America's first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, launched in 1827, and the large number of Black newspapers that followed. At the time, and for much more than a century afterwards, the newsrooms of mainstream newspapers were almost completely white. The new Black newspapers served to campaign against slavery, build unified Black opposition to racism, and acted as an antidote to the mainstream (white) media which was supportive of slavery (Gorski, 2013).

The newspapers were published in the North and covertly couriered to enslaved Blacks in the South, who were working in cotton plantations and elsewhere. Black newspapers either employed or were owned by America's leading Black intellectuals, including Ida B. Wells-Barnett who later went on to found the first Black rights organisation in the country – the Afro American League (Curry, 2013). Using "crusading journalism" (Nelson Jr 1999) the Black Press played a key role in campaigning against lynching, slavery and later Jim Crow, and also advocated for self-organised armed resistance if necessary to protect Black lives (Curry, 2013). Journalists on Black newspapers wrote about the indignities of Black life and focused on the Black struggle. The Black Press is also credited with having helped construct the "modern African American identity" (Nelson Jr, 1999) of African Americans as successful, urban professionals and intellectuals. Black newspapers like the Chicago Defender were instrumental in mobilising hundreds of thousands of African Americans to leave their lives in the South



as former slaves and share croppers and set up new lives in cities in the North (Nelson Jr, 1999).

The Black Press also opposes the representation of indigenous people in Western, mainstream newspapers as “a series of problems, objects, and victims (Gilroy, 1987 cited in Barker, 2012, p. 271). According to Evans (2011), it is “the Black Press that most eloquently extols their (Black peoples’) achievements” and Black newspapers in the USA are consequently the “most trusted source of information for black consumers” (Evans, 2011). The value and relevance of the Black Press is also found in its advocacy journalism style of reporting - Black newspapers do not just cover events but analyse the implications that these events have for the Black community.

Various academics and writers have argued that the Black press remains relevant today. The Black press, sometimes also termed the minority press, the ethnic press or indigenous media, today functions to counter the bias against people of colour that is inherent in the mainstream press; to use advocacy journalism to promote the campaigns or struggles of people of colour; and to report news from the Black point of view (Nishikawa et al. 2009). Notwithstanding the role that indigenous or Black journalists can play in mainstream or white dominated newsrooms as bulwarks against racism, studies have also shown that this does not negate the importance of reportage from the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) since Black journalists, or journalists of colour in the mainstream “face a great deal of pressure” (Nishikawa et al. 2009, p. 244) not to practice any form of advocacy journalism because of the prevailing view in mainstream newspapers that the traditional crusading practices of the Black press are detrimental to the goal of objectivity in the media, or even unprofessional (Nishikawa et al. 2009). Hence, the Black press functions as a “corrective force” or an antidote to the

“incidental (and often negative)” coverage of Black issues by the mainstream media (Wolseley, 1990, p. 201 in Clawson & Waltenburg, 2008, p. 70).

In their study of mainstream versus Black press framing of Supreme Court decisions, Clawson, Strine and Waltenburg (2003) found that the Black press focussed more on the implications of the ruling for Black people, which were negative, while the mainstream press zeroed in on the technical details of the ruling itself. Black newspapers’ coverage also differed in that they cited pro-affirmative action comment from a much wider variety of people than the mainstream media, who used only a “narrow range” of pro-affirmative action sources (Clawson et al. 2003, p.791). In the United Kingdom, a case study of the *African Voice* newspaper found that this newspaper covered stories that had been “ignored or marginalized by the mainstream press” (Ogunyemi, 2007, p. 639). The Black Press has also traditionally challenged the “institutionalized racism” (Gorski, 2013) found in “job discrimination, racial profiling and voter discrimination” (Gorski, 2013).

In other countries, there is a similar endorsement of the need for a Black press. The New Zealand mainstream media bestows “authority” on white New Zealanders while sidelining Māori, depicting Māori negatively, and propping up “existing xenophobic attitudes towards Māori people” (Taira, 2006, p. 4). Taira argues that the New Zealand mainstream media perpetuates the British colonisation of the indigenous Māori people through continuing to promote Pākehā (non- Māori) points of view and portray Māori people as “the Other” whose culture and language are of lesser importance. (Taira, 2006, page i). The mainstream media has even created an unflattering “separate identity” (p. 22) for Māori by framing stories about Māori communities in the context of

“poor achievement in education, poor health, high crime rates, mental health, prison populations, unemployment and so on” (Stuart, 2003, p. 50 in Taira, 2006, p. 22).

Māori would never be properly served by the mainstream media alone but would also need “to control and produce their own media content” (Taira, 2006, p. 5). Henry (2012) too implicitly makes the case for a Black press in New Zealand in her study into “emancipatory Māori entrepreneurship in screen production” which explores the challenges faced by Māori screen production professionals working within white dominated mainstream media. Henry uncovers why those Māori professionals left the mainstream media, began working for themselves and successfully lobbied for the establishment of Māori Television. Working in the mainstream media meant “constantly justifying being Māori”, and putting up continual opposition against non-Māori who impeded “the progress of Māori in film and TV” (Henry, 2012, p. 203).

The Black Press generally follows the tradition of thematic framing, which has included dedicating space to the voices of “‘alternative social actors’ (such as) the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised and indeed the ordinary manual labourer, woman, youth and child” (Traber, 1985, p. 2; cited in Atton, 2002, p. 16 in Ogunyemi, 2007). Different journalism models including advocacy journalism, crusading journalism, and emancipatory journalism have offered support to the practice of thematic news framing. Advocacy journalism aims to “promote perspectives that are typically under or misrepresented in the media” (Waisbord, 2009, p. 371). Emancipatory journalism is extremely relevant to Black America today, and by extension to the indigenous or Black press worldwide, because it debunks the notion of mainstream objectivity or “neutrality” as “fraudulent” (Ball, 2005, p. 28). It cannot be plausible for Western, mainstream media to argue that even though they are controlled by profit seeking cartels, they constitute a free press (Ball, 2005). Hence the idea of press freedom which

benefits everyone is clearly a “myth” which only seeks to detract public attention from “important questions about how journalism can contribute to participatory democracy, security, peace, and other humanistic values” (Shah, 1996, p.143 cited in Ball, 2005, p. 28). Emancipatory journalism calls for “any notion of neutrality be discarded in favour of reporting that brings explanation of oppressive forces to grass root levels and encourages (if not demands) that journalists be directly linked to movements for social, political and economic change” (Ball, 2005, p. 29).

The growing depth and breadth of research into the different journalism models clarifies that the mainstream media model, or Western model, cannot be the only appropriate model for journalism. The Black press utilises models of advocacy, emancipatory and public journalism. It is also clear from the research discussed that racism continues to remain a feature of the mainstream media and that the Black press forms a counterpoint to the negative portrayal of the Black community by the media.

### **3.3.5 The appeal of cross-over newspapers to Black readers**

This thesis questions the dominant post-apartheid discourse that seems to be driving the “cross-over” marketing mantra which underpins the convergence project in the post-apartheid South African media. The concept of “crossover” appeal is often associated with marketing strategies used in the music industry to attract disparate listening audiences (Brackett, 2012). According to Kim & Ha (2010, p. 34), the term ‘crossover’ is used “to explain ‘something that cannot easily be defined as one style’, including the combination of two things such as ‘fusion food’ or ‘fusion music’ and phenomenal merges such as ‘past and future’ and ‘male and female’.” The term can also refer, in the South African media context, to news that appeals to readers of all races, in the same way as “crossover” music is said to have “appeal across racial boundaries” (Harper,

1989, p. 102), or is said to bring the races together in “biracial fusion” (Harper, 1989, p. 117).

This thesis would argue that ideas of “biracial fusion”, “crossover appeal” and the transcending of race flow from the myth that because overt institutional racism in the form apartheid (in South Africa), segregation and Jim Crow (in America) and colonisation (Australia, New Zealand and most of the rest of the world), has ended, the world has become a ‘post-racial’ place. American scholars have questioned the meaning of the suggestion that Black people should “transcend” race, asking if that means white people should seek to transcend whiteness, what Black people become when they transcend their race and whether the subtext is that ending Blackness means ending the problem of Blackness (Washington, 2010). According to Crenshaw (2002), “colorblind discourse is the virtual lunch counter, the rationalisation for racial power in which few are served and many are denied (p.26).

### **3.3.6 Conclusion**

The literature reviewed has shown that Black news is marginalised by the mainstream media, which also fails to adequately cover both individual acts of racism and institutional racism. Therefore, it was appropriate to investigate whether, with Black news already being marginal globally, the journalists on a Black newspaper would be able to manage convergence in such a way that they either continued, against the odds, to write Black news or whether they would abandon the traditional crusading role of journalists on Black newspapers in favour of writing cross-over news. The literature suggests that cross-over news does away with the notion of racial identity and hence marginalises Black news altogether. Therefore this thesis set out to apply some of the debate around “crossover” entertainment to the print media and to solicit the opinions of

the journalists who worked at *Sowetan* during and after convergence. I wanted to uncover whether the journalists felt they were integral to the birth of a new phenomenon where Black news crossed over and developed mass appeal among non-Black readers, or whether, like Harper, they saw convergence at *Sowetan* as a way of negating the importance of Black news to Black readers.

## **CHAPTER 4:            METHODODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter deliberates upon how qualitative research sheds light on the manner in which a sample of journalists navigated the convergence of their specialised newspaper with other more general and mainstream newspapers. The theory upon which the conceptual framework of my thesis rests is critical race theory as detailed in chapter one. Critical race theory provides a justification for approaching this study abductively, and for searching for the point of view of Black journalists. I have adopted a phenomenological paradigm to support this because critical interpretivist qualitative methodology has been used when researchers seek both to understand a phenomenon and at the same time, overturn pre-existing ideas about that phenomenon (Patton and Bondi, 2015). I utilised the Abductive research strategy to investigate each research question and provide “justifications for these choices” (Blaikie, 2010, p.13). By foregrounding the “social world as it is experienced by its members”, the Abductive research strategy allows researchers to “discover and describe this ‘insider’ view, not to impose an ‘outsider’ view on it” (Blaikie, 2010, p.89). Finally, this chapter also consists of a section giving background information on *Sowetan*’s position in the South African newspaper market, its competitors and a chronological overview of convergence as it unfolded.

### **4.2 Research questions and purposes**

This thesis uses qualitative research to uncover answers to the questions that centre around the merging of *Sowetan*’s newsroom with the newsrooms of other Times Media Group titles, and the consequent transferral of some *Sowetan* journalists to newly

centralized newsroom under the supervision of editors from *The Times*. The project has both descriptive and explanatory purposes (Blaikie, 2010, p.243) and seeks to answer the research questions:

1) In what ways did *Sowetan* journalists navigate the convergence of their specialised newspaper with other newspapers more generally serving a mainstream readership, and how did they emerge as participants in a new *Sowetan* that took the form of a crossover multimedia product?

2) What effects did *Sowetan* journalists believe convergence had on the paper's identity and role within South African society?

These questions emerged from a review of the literature which found that convergence is often accompanied by downsizing and deskilling, including the elimination of traditional specialist beats and centralisation of news desks and sub-editing functions across different newspaper titles. According to the literature, these features of convergence on newspapers have resulted in newspapers losing or doing away with experienced senior journalists and specialised content tailored to specific communities or interest groups. Therefore, it was logical to investigate whether a Black newspaper, owned by a media corporation that also owned other non-Black newspaper titles, would be able to maintain its intellectual heritage, underpinned by radical Black Consciousness, once converged with non-Black, mainstream newspapers.

The literature showed that Black news in general is marginalised by the mainstream press because there is a lack of diversity in newsrooms, because the mainstream media minimises acts of individual racism and fails to report on institutional racism, and



because the mainstream press does not use the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) when reporting the news. This is compounded in Africa where mainstream reportage normally portrays the continent as disease ridden and plagued by famine and incompetent or brutal governments, among others. Therefore, it was appropriate to investigate whether, with Black news already being marginal globally, the journalists on a Black newspaper would be able to manage convergence in such a way that they either continued, against the odds, to write Black news or whether they would abandon the traditional crusading role of journalists on Black newspapers in favour of writing crossover news, which, as the literature has established, does away with the notion of racial identity and hence marginalises Black news altogether.

From the data collected by this study, no claims about either the content of the newspaper post-convergence or its efficacy in serving its readership can be made. This study only aims to research the convergence process as experienced by *Sowetan* journalists. Therefore, a methodological decision to use qualitative interviews with *Sowetan* journalists and former journalists instead of a content analysis of the newspaper, was taken.

### **4.3 Research Design**

This is a qualitative research project. Rosaline Barbour (2008) explains that qualitative research answers very different questions from those addressed by quantitative research. For instance, qualitative methods do not aim to answer questions such as ‘How many?’, or ‘What are the causes?’ (Barbour, 2008). Qualitative research methods can, however, make visible mechanisms which link particular variables, by exploring the experiences and looking at the accounts provided by those involved (Barbour, 2008). Qualitative research de-mystifies by studying the social context and by providing detailed accounts

of experience (Barbour, 2008), and also “excels at illuminating *process*, whether this is organizational change or individual decision-making, since it allows us to examine how changes affect daily procedures and interactions. This may lead to us uncovering unintended as well as intended consequences of new arrangements” (Barbour, 2008, p.16).

Critical race theory rests upon the theoretical or philosophical assumption that white privilege needs to be challenged (Curry, 2009), “a critical ‘race’ consciousness” developed (Hylton, 2008, p.1) and hence that phenomena related either to Blackness, racism or both would need to be elucidated by Black participants. According to Milner IV, “one tenet of critical race theory is the postulation that race and racism are endemic, pervasive, widespread, and ingrained in society and thus in education...race and racism are so ingrained in the fabric (Ladson-Billings, 1998) of society that they become normalised” (Milner IV, 2007, p. 390). Thus, critical race theory is useful in any investigation into changes to the Black Press or any Black media, particularly when those changes are not driven by Black stakeholders in the organisation, since critical race theory allows for the "narratives and counter narratives" of indigenous people, Black people, or people of colour to be "captured by the researcher, experienced by the research participants and told by people of colour" (Milner IV, 2007, p. 391).

The Abductive research strategy used in this study is “appropriate only in the social sciences” (Blaikie, 2007, p.56) as it posits that the “social world” (Blaikie, 2010, p. 19) can only be uncovered by listening to peoples’ stories about the world. Research that uses the Abductive strategy advocates the immersion of the researcher in the world of the research participants in order for the researcher to “discover the motives and meanings that accompany social activities” (Blaikie, 2010, p. 19). Following this immersion, the researcher is well positioned to firstly “describe the activities and

meanings” (Blaikie, 2010, p.92) of the social actors’ world and then differentiate the narratives of the social actors, into different “categories and concepts that can form the basis of an understanding of the problem at hand” (Blaikie, 2010, p.89). According to Blaikie, “the social scientist cannot begin to describe any social activity without knowing what the social actors know, either what they can report or what they tacitly assume, while engaging in social activity” (Blaikie, 2010, p.90).

The Abductive research strategy is intrinsic in interpretivism, an idea that disregards notions of dispassion and detachment and focuses instead “on understanding lived experience from the points of view of those who hold it” (Ormston et al. 2003, p. 13). Interpretivism dictates that all reality is socially constructed and that the task of researchers is therefore to interpret the realities of participants which have themselves already been “pre-interpreted” by the participants, resulting in meanings that have gone through a number of alterations over time. Interpretivism is therefore “dialogic” in that it allows the researcher to listen to the communicated narratives of the research participants and then interpret those narratives in order to explain why people think, do and act in certain ways. The Abductive logic of enquiry and interpretivism sit well with critical race theory, phenomenology, qualitative research methods and semi-structured interviews because all of these approaches involve listening to the stories participants tell of their own lives, and “describing the meaning” the participants have attached to certain phenomena (Ormston et al. 2003, p. 13).

In studies into racism and anti-racism, critical qualitative methodology has been used when researchers seek both to understand a phenomenon and at overturn pre-existing ideas about that phenomenon (Patton and Bondi, 2015). This is achieved by acknowledging that such studies “represent two strands of interpretation, the

participants' interpretation of their experiences, and our [the researchers'] interpretation (using a critical race lens) of what participants shared" (Patton and Bondi, 2015, p. 494). In addition, existing research suggests that white researchers conducting research "with and about people and communities of colour" (Milner IV, 2007, p. 388) must reject the practice in which they "detach themselves from the research process, particularly when they reject their racialised and cultural positionality in the research process" (Milner IV, 2007, p. 388). Therefore, marrying critical race theory, which acknowledges that academia has "given privileged status to dominant white voices, beliefs, ideologies and views over the voices of people of colour" (Gordon, 1990; Tillman, 2002 in Milner IV, 2007, p. 389), with an interpretivist approach, is the suitable methodology for a study of this kind.

I disregarded the possibility of doing quantitative research from the outset, not only because it lacks the capacity to record important parts of the "human experience and perception" (Cech, 2011, p. 51), but because people working for an organisation that is undergoing change inevitably have fluctuating comprehensions and insights into what is happening, and therefore studying the different refinements of what those people see as the reality is more useful than seeking out pieces of knowledge, or "objective data" (Cech, 2011, p. 51). Qualitative research is not only often "the best way" to get information from people, but can even be "the only way" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 260).

#### **4.4 Research paradigm**

For this thesis, phenomenology was chosen not only because it is a popular way of exploring a group experience from the subjects' point of view, but because it can be

combined with other methodologies such as storytelling to allow subjects to voice their opinions freely and at great length. Phenomenology is defined as “the study of the structures of experience, or consciousness” (Smith, 2013). It explores the lived experiences of human beings within their environments (Smith, 2013). According to Miller and Salkind (2002), a phenomenological study aims to describe the meaning for several individuals of the lived experiences surrounding a phenomenon.

Phenomenologists search for the essential or the central underlying meaning of the experience (Miller & Salkind, 2002). As a qualitative research paradigm,

phenomenology is particularly useful in that it primarily aims “at identifying the essential components of phenomena or experiences which make them unique or distinguishable from others” in order to become aware of “what essential components make a given phenomenon special (or unique)” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p.8).

Central phenomenological ideas including the ‘philosophical attitude’ and the notion of ‘bracketing’ or ‘epoche’ were applied to the research method used in this study in the following ways:

- a) The “philosophical attitude” – an epistemological aspect of phenomenology  
Also known as the transcendental attitude, this contrasts with the “natural attitude” which can be described in plain language as routine thinking. Orleans (2001) has described the natural attitude in simple language as the “ordinary” manner in which people take part in life, accepting things like “language” and “culture” as natural aspects of life which must be grasped by all who live in the world; without thinking deeply why this is so (Orleans, 2001.) Since “the epistemology of phenomenology focuses on revealing meaning rather than on arguing a point or developing abstract theory” (Flood, 2010, p. 27) using the philosophical attitude in qualitative research empowers researchers to operate

as critical thinkers (Husserl, 1999), whereas employing the natural attitude mitigates against deep reflection and analysis into a phenomenon. The phenomenological researcher, having adopted the non-judgmental philosophical attitude, is prevented from “drown(ing) out” the subjects voices (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 191). Phenomenological research involves the uncovering of the “experiences and perceptions of individuals” (Lester, 2009) In this study, the philosophical attitude was used to foreground the voices of the participants so that a vivid picture of the phenomenon being researched, and the context it occurs in, could be painted by the researcher (Groenewald, 2004).

b) ‘Bracketing’ or ‘epoche’ – a methodological stipulation of phenomenology

The interaction between researcher and participant inherent in qualitative research involves the “transmission of assumptions, values, interests, emotions and theories” (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81) or the transmission of “preconceptions” from the participant to the researcher. These “preconceptions” impact on the way the researcher continues to collect data, and in how he or she interprets it and puts forward the findings (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The impact of preconceptions on data analysis and collection needs to be highlighted in qualitative research lest the impression be given that the researcher is merely a neutral receptacle for a stream of data that is then simply regurgitated in a shortened or more organised form. The phenomenological method of ‘bracketing’ entails curbing preconceptions in order to allow researchers to investigate the meanings of individual experiences and for “reflection with a vengeance”, or to draw out further insights into the phenomenon (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 190). According to Tufford and Newman (2010), bracketing is also a

useful tool for researchers who are aware that they might be harbouring preconceptions about a subject that they have not been able to fully articulate to themselves, and which otherwise might influence the research. However, using bracketing to pursue “objectivity” can be “impractical” and “occasionally misguided” (Lowes & Prowse, 2001, p. 471 and 472), because bracketing is often used in itself to promote the claim that rigorous scholarship has been undertaken. Bracketing should not be announced in a study in an such an “amorphous” way (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 81) but should be described in detail so that anyone reading the research is very clear about which preconceptions it was or was not possible for the researcher to curb, how the researcher went about doing this, and whether, in the reader’s view, the researcher has only allowed those claimed preconceptions to influence the research (Beech, 1999 in Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 82).

Lowes and Prowse (2001) even contend that the phenomenological interview is always a “purposeful data-generating activity” entirely defined by the researcher’s own views, and that it therefore is unnecessary and impossible for the researcher to pretend that his or her own views can be set aside entirely - as bracketing requires. Heideggerian phenomenology indeed does not allow for the notion that researchers can suspend our preconceptions (McWilliam, 2010) but is of the view that even the researcher's presence shapes the lived experience that is being investigated (McWilliam, 2010).

Phenomenological understanding is necessarily intersubjective, because it emerges from “the everyday life world where practices and meanings shared between humans become intermingled and merged” (McWilliam, 2010). Heidegger suggests that we cannot investigate an experience without this investigation being tempered by our own experiences and history, and thus, the data generating interviews are “co-created” by researcher and participant (Lowes & Prowse, 2001, p. 474) in line with the interview

being “a genuine human encounter” (Lowes & Prowse, 2001, p. 474). Researchers often only investigate a topic because of their pre-existing fervour for the subject (Lowes & Prowse, 2001), as I did with this thesis. Some phenomenologists strive for objectivity and attempt to suspend their own beliefs, but realise only when analysing transcripts of their interviews with participants that they were not able to bracket their own beliefs anyway (Lowes & Prowse, 2001, p. 475). I find Tufford and Newman’s (2010) suggestion that researchers be “explicit” about what form of bracketing they are using to be very useful.

#### **4.5 Critical race theory and phenomenology**

I decided to apply phenomenological research methods to this study that utilises critical race theory because it has proved to be a successful combination when used by other researchers to illuminate issues around experiences of race and racism. Mutitu (2010) found that phenomenological research is useful when “formal” research methods are likely to be inadequate in prompting people to share experiences related to race and racism, and also when “simply sharing their narratives” is a better way for participants to recount their “lived experiences” (Mutitu, 2010, p. 67). For this thesis, phenomenology was chosen as a research paradigm because phenomenology generally provides the chance to “formally validate and affirm” (McLane-Davison, 2010, p. 133) lived experiences because “phenomenologists assert that truth and understanding evolve through a person’s lived experiences” (McLane-Davison, 2010, p. 127).

Other phenomenological studies have used the critical race theory framework to study white privilege, the link between race and embodiment, and the connection between race and academic achievement. Phenomenological studies grounded in critical race theory



can adequately explore sites of “racial meaning” (Lee, 2014, p.8). Harper (2009) used critical race theory as a theoretical framework for a phenomenological study into “actively engaged Black male college achievers” (Harper, 2009, p. 702) in order to present a counter-narrative to the dominant one which views Black male college achievers in the USA through a lens that focuses “almost exclusively on disengagement and deficits” (Harper, 2009, p. 702). In studies into the phenomenon of white privilege and its relationship to racism (Brainard, 2009), using critical race theory as a theoretical framework served to put “race at the center of critical analysis” (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 1 in Brainard, 2009, p. 55) and allowed the researcher to make a deep enquiry into how racial awareness is developed and thereafter to develop suggestions for techniques to “accelerate the dismantling of racism” (Brainard, 2009, p. 59).

#### **4.6 Researcher’s stance**

I have adopted the stance of “faithful reporter” (Blaikie, 2010, p.51) in this study, which can be defined as one in which “the researcher’s stance is much less detached”. This stance aims to enable “research participants to ‘speak for themselves’” or to “present the social actors’ point of view” (Blaikie, 2010, p. 51). This stance allows for the researcher to have been immersed in the phenomenon under investigation, but also requires the researcher to “‘retain the integrity of the phenomenon’. This means remaining faithful to the phenomenon under investigation by only producing reports in which the social actors can recognise themselves and others” (Blaikie, 2010, p.51).

An essential element of critical race theory is the challenge it poses to dominant, and negative, portrayals of Black people. Researchers using critical race theory also state their commitment to social justice (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002 in Harper, 2009, p. 702). In preceding chapters, I have detailed the extent of my attachment to the pre-converged

*Sowetan* as the daily flagship Black South African newspaper and my admiration for my former colleagues and editors as a collective. However, key to my doing this research was my goal of allowing the participants' voices to dominate the research. In order to be true to the research, I adopted principles aimed at curbing the injection of my preconceptions into the data gathering, analysis and conclusions, which included a self-adopted policy of not censoring participants' opinions in any way (whether in the collection or analysis phases); including atypical comments in the discussion sections even if these were from just one of the nine participants, and refraining from any attempt to minimise disparate opinions by explaining these away.

Hlatshwayo (2013) has pointed out that research boundaries may become blurred when the researcher becomes "an advocate or a campaigner for a certain position" (p. 115). Insiders can also be less likely than outsiders to pose critical questions which allow the phenomenon to emerge. On the other hand, participants can be more likely to open up to an insider researcher as relationships of trust have already been built. It is worth pointing out that early discussion of insider/outsider status assumed that the researcher was mainly an insider or an outsider, and thus each status carried with it certain pros and cons (Merriam et al, 2001). However, more recent discussions have shown the complexity inherent in either status and acknowledge that the boundaries between the two positions are not entirely delineated. It is argued in this study that in the course of research, the researcher experienced moments of being both an insider and outsider. Insider status came from the researcher's former status as colleague of the participant and from holding similar values (Merriam et al, 2001), while outsider status came from the researcher not being a Black journalist. Being an insider meant that during interviews there was an assumed understanding that was expressed through industry jargon or political language and that the researcher had access "to the introspective meaning of experience within a status" (Merriam et al, 2001, p. 414). However, being a

white researcher studying a Black experience with specific emphasis on race meant that certain understandings were not present, as they would have been in an interaction between a Black researcher and Black participants. Johnson-Bailey describes how her insider status as a Black woman, interviewing Black women participants, meant that a common understanding of racism was automatically shared:

“All of the women in the study possessed an understanding of societal hierarchical forces that shaped and determined their existence. They identified racism as the specific dominating factor, and while race was never raised as an issue in the interview process, race and the knowledge of living in a race-conscious society was a factor that researcher and participants shared” (Johnson-Bailey in Merriam et al, 2001, p. 406).

As an outsider researcher in this regard, I did not assume that the experience I shared with the participants of working on a converging newspaper meant that we automatically shared positions and values on racism, the Black press or even the convergence process itself. Therefore I designed frank indicative questions that aimed to elicit answers about these issues that would be complete in regard to every detail.

#### **4.7 Data sources**

I used primary data for this study, generated by interviewing participants through applying qualitative research methods. Interviews are known to be semi-natural social settings since they are “contrived or controlled” spaces (Hatch, 2002, p.7). The research findings of this study are based on the interrogation of the research data collected via interviews. Critical race theory was utilised to theorise and to frame the

findings. A discussion of the literature was further used to enrich the interpretation of the findings and to make the findings relevant.

#### **4.8 Data selection**

Phenomenologists research the lived experiences of participants. To successfully carry out such an investigation, phenomenologists collect data, through interviews, from research participants who have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Miller & Salkind, 2002). To this end, I targeted a purposive sample of several journalists. A purposive sample is one “where people from a pre-specified group are purposely sought out and sampled”, (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010, p. 149) with the aim being to generate the kind of “rich sources of data” (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010, p. 149) that were needed to explore the research question. Purposive samples are useful when researching a “specific group” (Ekwo, 2012, p. 102), and when data is sought from informants who are known to possess relevant information to the research question (Tongco, 2007). Sampling occurs when a few people are chosen from a larger group “to become the basis for estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, situation or outcome regarding the bigger group” (Kumar, 2005, p. 164 cited in Sesanti, 2011, p. 123). Common practice among researchers using interpretative phenomenological analysis is to target a “fairly homogeneous sample” for the purposes of being able to analyse the similarities and differences that exist within “a group that has been defined as similar according to important variables” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 9).

I devised the purposive sample by approaching 22 journalists who had worked at *Sowetan* during the period under review. The research question behind this thesis was

whether *Sowetan* journalists navigated the convergence of their very specialised newspaper with other newspapers more generally serving a mainstream readership, and emerged as participants in a new *Sowetan* that took the form of a crossover multimedia product; or whether the journalists felt that convergence had stripped *Sowetan* of its Black identity and eliminated its historical crusading role. Hence I chose to interview journalists from all hierarchical levels in the newspaper – from junior reporters to section editors to editors in chief. The group of 16 journalists I approached was a relatively large group given that the editorial staff on *Sowetan* during that period did not exceed 45 journalists, section editors, and editors in chief. Seven did not respond, three declined to be interviewed while 12 responded positively to requests for interviews. Three of the 12 eventually withdrew before the interviews. Of the four journalists who eventually withdrew, one cited time constraints. Despite guarantees of confidentiality for interviewees and an undertaking to remove details from interviews if they gave clues as to the identities of the interviewees, another two journalists cited concerns that they could face disciplinary action from *Sowetan* management and declined to be interviewed. Thus, a sample of nine journalists remained. The nine former *Sowetan* journalists all worked at *Sowetan* during the period under review and all were affected in one way or another by the merging of the newsrooms at the media corporation that owned *Sowetan*. Some were made redundant, others were long term freelance writers for the newspaper who then found that their articles were no longer being commissioned and/or published, others left *Sowetan* to take up jobs at other newspapers out of fear that they would be next in line for redundancy, and others left because they did not approve of the direction in which *Sowetan* was being taken by management, which is explored in further detail below.

My intention was to explore the phenomenon of convergence in the news corporation that owns *Sowetan* through the eyes of the journalists who experienced this. To this end, phenomenology is utilised to explore and make sense of the respondents' experience from their point of view. Academics have concluded that no less than five interviewees are needed for a purposive sample to generate reliable data (Seidler, 1974 cited in Tongco, 2007, p. 152). In addition, the goal of the research was to not to generate a set of results but to "produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation" (Schofield, 1993, p. 202 in Blaikie, 2010, p.217). While this sample constituted a "good spread" (Blaikie, 2010, p.239) of the journalists who worked at *Sowetan* during the period being researched, there is no assertion that their views represent the position of every journalist who worked on the newspaper at this time.

#### **4.9 Data collection**

This thesis consequently uses semi-structured interviews with nine former *Sowetan* journalists. In line with Crabtree and DiCicco-Bloom's approach (2006), the semi-structured interviews were arranged "around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s" (Crabtree & DiCicco-Bloom, 2006, p. 515). I conducted individual rather than group interviews because my aim was to generate as diverse a set of data as possible. I anticipated that individual interviews would provoke participants into discussing personal experiences of the very similar rearrangements to their working lives (redundancy, demotion, or forced transfer), from their own point of view whereas group interviews may have turned the data collection process into a meeting where participants may have felt some affinity as a collective and therefore been inclined to

make statements in support of each other, rather than expressing their own individual views on the subject. According to Crabtree and DiCicco-Bloom (2006), the group interview is a more “public” process and can prevent “delving as deeply into the individual” (Crabtree & DiCicco-Bloom, 2006, p. 515). This research method supports a phenomenological approach which aims to describe the meaning for several individuals of the lived experiences surrounding a phenomenon (Miller & Salkind, 2002).

Primary data was collected in interviews ranging in length from 40 minutes to one hour and 15 minutes, over a period of one year. Two interviews were done in writing over email, one was done on Facebook messaging, while the rest took place telephonically with further comments being sent by participants via email. Five of the telephonic interviews were followed by questions and answers conducted over email. The telephonic interviews were carried out on a Skype phone, recorded with two digital recorders and then transcribed. Participants had indicated earlier that they did not have easy access to Skype itself for the purposes of video interviewing and so this approach was ruled out in the early stages of data collection.

Telephone interviews were chosen as a method of collecting data mainly because the research participants for the project were located in South Africa during data collection. So to overcome the practical constraints such as costs associated with travelling and distance, the study relied on telephone interviews and email interviews for data collection (James & Busher, 2007). However, some of the participants preferred to answer questions in writing and requested email interviews. According to James and Busher (2007), using email interviewing to conduct qualitative research provides researchers with the ethical dilemma of ensuring the authenticity and trustfulness of the

data collected. However, prior knowledge of my research participants helped to verify their identities (James & Busher, 2007). Email interviewing can offer researchers a number of methodological possibilities to interview the participants individually and to generate asynchronous written dialogue between researchers and individual participants. Additionally, email interviewing offers an opportunity to transform the virtual online space and time “in which, potentially, our participants could reflect on their experiences in response to our questions, rather than being committed to replying promptly” (James & Busher, 2007, p. 104). Moreover, the internet technical facilities to save email threads of quasi-conversational exchanges allowed participants to explore and revisit their insight into developing their understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (James & Busher, 2007). The fact that I had interacted face-to-face with the respondents in a professional capacity prior to the online research gave the research participants confidence to participate in this research project (James & Busher, 2007). This also facilitated the process of constructing mutual trust and support, which generated a comfortable online space for the researcher and participants to share their experiences (James & Busher, 2007). In turn, this enabled research relationships “to go beyond stereotypic roles of question-asking and question-answering in order to ‘...acquire an understanding of the participant’s perspective through open and honest dialogue...’ (James & Busher, 2007, p. 104). I am of the view that the authenticity of my research participants’ voices was enhanced by combining both offline prior knowledge and interaction of my participants, as well as online interactions (James & Busher, 2007, p. 109).

The interviews took the form both of question and answer sessions, in line with semi-structured interview methods of data collection, and less structured interviews where participants spoke freely, narrating their stories, in line with unstructured interview



protocols. Initial interviews revealed that the structured questions had not taken into account all aspects of the participants' experiences of convergence and that using the questions, even in a semi-structured interview format, could be limiting the responses of some of the participants, despite further probing. When analysing this further, I noticed that to a journalist largely unused to being interviewed, but accustomed instead to interviewing others, the opening question could suggest that I was writing a story from a particular pre-determined angle, as might be the case in a newspaper interview. Not only might that be an angle that the participant had not chosen him or herself, but because in journalism the angle often dictates the manner in which the rest of the story unfolds, an unwanted or inappropriate opening question could influence the rest of the interview. Offering a choice of interview formats thus allowed some participants to decide the angle that they wanted to approach the interview from, rather than being prompted into a certain approach by the questions, and then to expand upon their experiences from there. As I had labelled myself an 'insider' in the data collection process, I also realised that journalists who were far senior to me in terms of their positions, their experience in journalism and their history in the anti-apartheid struggle, might prefer to tell me their stories first before I questioned them. In addition, this phenomenological study did not aim to decide whether study subjects' views are valid or not. Instead it aimed to leave those views as they are and engage in contemplation (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 190). Some phenomenologists have argued that phenomenology should not be anything other than a "faithful description of that which appears" (Zahavi, 2003, p. 14). Added to this, I was aware that the narrative styles of respondents, whether superficial or engaging, makes a considerable difference to the quality of a research project and trustworthiness of its outcome (James & Busher, 2007). Thus, as part of the process to construct authentic voices, research participants were encouraged to take greater ownership of the development and direction of the narratives during the

interview process (James & Busher, 2007). This meant that when respondents replied to the questions in an unexpected way, I followed the new direction of the participant's narrative by asking further questions about their responses rather than sticking to the agenda of the original interview schedule (James & Busher, 2007):

In accepting this greater control, and participants' ownership of the construction of the culture of these research interviews, we established not only their consent to be part of the project but a greater authenticity in their accounts that reflected their careful reflections on their identities, so strengthening the claims of the projects to be trustworthy and, therefore, ethical studies. (James & Busher, 2007, p. 108)

During the interviews, I decided to utilise storytelling as a method of data collection. Storytelling has been said to provide a "more complex and complete picture of social life" (Lewis, 2011, p. 506). Using storytelling as a method of data collection within a phenomenological paradigm creates a medium through which the researcher can share not only the narratives themselves, but also use "to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner that it appears" (Jackson, 2012, p.4, citing Moran, 2000). Storytelling recognises the fact that the research participants have placed a certain amount of trust in the researcher in telling of their lived experiences (Mutitu, 2010, p. 71) and part of this trust could arguably relate to trusting that the narration of the story itself takes precedence in the researcher's work over any need to draw conclusions. As is the case in this study which seeks to unearth the opinions of the journalists and editors who were subjected to downsizing, redundancy and restructuring, the hermeneutic phenomenology used by Mutitu allowed her to "share the voices" of the research participants "without the need to arrive at a definite conclusion or

definition of these experiences” (Mutitu, 2010, p. 73). As Lewis has pointed out (2011, p. 505), “it is through genuine repetition, storytelling, that humans narrate ways of knowing and being”. This research found storytelling a useful method when used as part of a qualitative and phenomenological methodology since more information emerged from “listening at length” (Taira, 2006) to participants than it did when answers were sought to pre-determined questions. This does not mean the researcher becomes passive, but rather involves “a more active listening than aggressive questioning” (Taira, 2006, p. 12). Lowes and Prowse point out that phenomenological research can utilise unstructured interviews entirely based on “one opening question” which prompts participants to expand upon the phenomenon as a whole (Lowes & Prowse, 2001, p. 475); or it can involve structured interviews to ensure that only relevant data is generated. They argue that both methods are acceptable within phenomenology as long as the researcher provides the detail of the approach used.

#### **4.10 Data reduction and analysis**

The analytic approach I used was interpretative phenomenological analysis. Hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology allows for the interpretation of narratives which have illustrated “the practical wisdom that informs and organizes people’s activities...based on the meanings, concerns, and purposes that are constituted by one’s membership and participation in a family, community, and culture” (Benner & Wrubel, 1989; Dreyfus, 1991, cited in Benner, 1994, p. 146). Interpretative phenomenological analysis entailed me undergoing a process of total immersion in the data (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014) through reading and re-reading interview transcripts “in order to become as familiar as possible with the account” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 66). Following this came a process of marking these transcripts with comments, producing preliminary themes from the comments, arranging the themes into sets of similar

sections, and finally creating an inventory of the themes and any sub-themes (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Minami, 2011). I utilised “open coding” (Emerson et al., 1995 in Minami, 2011, p.78), whereby I read line by line and underlined striking pieces of information, numbering these so that I could begin picking out data which coalesced around a central idea. I used colour highlights and numbering to mark statements of a similar nature and Post Its to note my comments, which included “paraphrases”, “preliminary interpretations”, and notes about emerging “similarities and differences” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 66).

Because I viewed the participants’ perspectives through the lens of critical race theory, I interpreted the participants’ own interpretations in light of the critical race theory that emphasises “the need to understand racism within its social, economic, and historical context” (Gillborn, 2015, p.278 citing Matsuda et al. 1993), and in addition, the critical race theory which “refers to a set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices that place the interests and perspectives of White people at the center of what is considered normal and everyday” (Gillborn, 2015, p.278). This was relevant to this study because the very downsizing and deskilling that took place at *Sowetan* was part of a convergence process that aimed to merge the newspaper with non-Black, traditionally white publications - with these white publications being seen as ‘normal’, not promoting whiteness in any way, but just going about the business of being ‘mainstream’ newspapers, and hence not something that the Black newspaper (*Sowetan*) could object to being merged with on the grounds that *Sowetan*’s own Black identity would be diluted by the merger. Critical race theory has commonly critiqued how "assimilation into white cultural norms was hardly desirable" (Winant, 2000, p. 179). The pre-eminence of race, is of course, also a central tenet of any critical race theory enquiry and in this study, I sought to uncover whether participants saw the convergence process as de-linked from race, or as a

‘colour-blind’ process, or whether they foregrounded the impact of convergence on *Sowetan*’s Black identity.

The temporary codes included “Black news”; “Black successes”; “*Sowetan* weaker”; “racism”; “tabloids ridicule Black people” and others. Nothing was excluded at this stage to allow the themes to emerge more organically. Where the codes overlapped, I “double underlined” them with red markers (Minami, 2011, p. 79). Temporary codes relating to racism in the media, *Sowetan* being a Black newspaper, and mainstream tabloids serving to ridicule Black readers, often overlapped.

In line with phenomenological analytic methods, my aim was to uncover the central meanings in each interview and “try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 66). For example, I debated whether to exclude a temporary code – that of convergence causing health problems for *Sowetan* journalists - on the grounds that it possibly had a “weak evidential base” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p.12), but decided that it would not be true to the phenomenological approach to do this. I later found that this theme had already emerged in earlier research into *Sowetan*, as will be described later in this chapter.

I then listed the themes that were beginning to become apparent on sheets of paper, individually, for each participant in the order in which they were interviewed. Although some scholars choose to utilise themes generated from the first interview to “orient the subsequent analysis” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 73), I decided this would mitigate against the phenomenological approach by potentially restricting the number of themes that may emerge and that it also might limit the depth and breadth of potential themes.

The table below summarises the second stage I followed in the process, directly after coding, and prior to clustering – where preliminary themes were identified per participant:

<b>Preliminary themes emerging out of the data from participant one</b>		
<b>Statements</b>	<b>Temporary codes indicated by statement</b>	<b>Early themes emerging</b>
<p>“Most of the stories were about black people celebrating their successes as well as highlighting their plight”</p> <p>“<i>Sowetan</i> has carried the dreams, hopes and aspirations of black South African as well as mirrored their fears and struggles”</p> <p>“I’m an African and though I do not experience the sort of life that the majority of blacks endure, I fully understand and sympathise with them”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black news</li> <li>- Black successes</li> <li>- Black peoples’ problems</li> </ul>	<p>1. Black readers at the heart of <i>Sowetan</i> journalists’ work / the Black angle</p>
<p>“paper’s editorial policy in recent years seem to have weakened”</p> <p>“retrenchments weakened editorial policy and quality of stories”.</p> <p>“poor story output”.</p> <p>“centralization was a bad idea which killed the ability for journalist to focus on black stories”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Sowetan</i> weaker</li> <li>- Stories poor quality</li> </ul>	<p>2. <i>Sowetan</i> has declined in quality post convergence</p>
<p>“I covered stories concerning black people”</p> <p>“report on inspiring stories celebrating black life as well as to reflecting on daily challenges which Africans face”</p> <p>“black issues are in the periphery of mainstream white newspapers”.</p> <p>“centralization was a bad idea which killed the ability for journalist to focus on black stories”.</p> <p>“Essentially its difficult now to say whether <i>Sowetan</i> still has its original vision to be the voice of the black people in South Africa”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Black newspaper member of the Black press</li> <li>- Different to the mainstream press</li> <li>- Who did the journalists write for?</li> </ul>	<p>3. Writing for Black readers</p>

<p>“I have been a victim of racism and continue to be subjected to such experiences. As such I would like to see the <i>Sowetan</i> take a leading role in reporting on racism in its various forms in places such as Cape Town and farms”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Sowetan</i> combatting societal racism</li> <li>- Individual struggle against racism</li> </ul>	<p>4. <i>Sowetan</i>’s role as a Black newspaper in campaigning against racism</p>
<p>“Some of the editors whom I had a good working relationship with had to live and new one came in whom I had trouble to connect with”.</p> <p>“retrenchments robbed the paper of great talent”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Sowetan</i> stripped of talented editors</li> </ul>	<p>5. Effects of convergence on remaining journalists</p>
<p>“rich history of defending black community and not to ridicule them. It was created to convey content that celebrates the dignity of blacks and not to undermine it. It endeavored to raise black challenges and proffer solutions”.</p> <p>“This is arguably not the case with tabloids such as the <i>Daily Voice</i> and <i>Daily Sun</i> entrench poverty, racial prejudice and crime among black and so-called colored communities”.</p> <p>“The <i>Daily Sun</i> is an instrument by a group powerful white people to mock, ridicule and undermine the intelligence, value system, aspirations and dreams of black folks. substandard and toxic newspaper which should either be cleaned up or banned all together”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tabloids ridicule Black people</li> <li>- Tabloids make social problems worse</li> </ul>	<p>6. <i>Sowetan</i> different to a tabloid newspaper aimed at Black readers but without practising the traditions of the Black Press</p>

Continuing the process, I began a process of “clustering” the themes together on a large sheet of butcher’s paper/flip chart paper. Clustering entails searching for “connections between the themes in order to cluster them together in a meaningful way” (Fade, 2004, p. 649), which, in this thesis, took the form of detailing emergent themes and identifying “super-ordinate categories” (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 179) which then became the major themes. Similar processes were used by Minami (2011) and Wasserman (2009) in their qualitative studies into journalists working at tabloid newspapers in South Africa, the USA and Japan. I then drafted a written account of the themes, delineating each one. I provided supporting evidence for each theme with

extracts from the data and added “analytic comments”. (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p.13)

#### **4.11 Ethical considerations**

This study received ethical approval from the ethics committee at Auckland University of Technology. The conditions of that approval were that all participants would be guaranteed anonymity, because of the small number of media corporations dominating the South African newspaper market, the perceived similarity of the convergence processes underway at all media corporations and a fear of possible professional reprisals against journalists who were seen to be speaking openly about workplace re-organisation. In line with this and with AUT’s ethical imperatives, I informed all research participants about intention of the study and sought their written consent, which was provided by email. Participants were not coerced, participation was entirely voluntary with no reward or payment being made, no conflicts of interest arose, and harm was avoided. By ensuring participants’ confidentiality through not identifying them and through removing identifying factors from the data during the analysis process, I attempted to mitigate any negative and unintended consequences for the participants, such as possible future marginalisation by South African news corporation management.

In order to minimise any potential discomfort the participants might feel at being reminded of a difficult phase in their careers, which in many cases involved sudden redundancies, interview questions were emailed to all participants prior to the interviews and I invited participants to respond in writing if they felt that this was the best way to capture the wholeness of their lived experiences during the period under



review. I also examined further ethical considerations related to the fact that I was researching people who I knew well and whose experiences I felt I had some idea of. I concluded, in line with Hammersley and Traianou's thinking, that generating qualitative data often requires researchers to be in "quite close, and sometimes long-term, relationships with people" (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, p.1). In order for "people's perspectives are to be understood adequately" (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012, p.1), close relationships are often necessary for qualitative research data generation. Having worked on *Sowetan* during the period being researched and having commiserated with those journalists who had been made redundant as a result of the convergence process, I realised that I would need to be mindful of the "likely impact" of my own past connections to the participants and the newspaper (Ekwo, 2012, p.106).

A factor that influenced this research was that, as the newspaper's sole Parliamentary correspondent, I was the only *Sowetan* journalist who was not based in either the main newsroom in Johannesburg or in a news bureau in one of the provinces. Thus, throughout my time at *Sowetan*, my colleagues were not physically present and I spent time with them only once a year at staff meetings or on two occasions when I was part of a team sent to cover a major political event. However, I was in touch by phone with the journalists and with my superiors (the section editors) several times per day and did build up close relationships with many of the *Sowetan* staff. This thesis has made explicit the fact that I am partial, having worked with the research participants on the newspaper for nearly four years during the period now being researched.

#### 4.12 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has detailed the process whereby I set about answering my research questions:

- 1) In what ways did *Sowetan* journalists navigate the convergence of their specialised newspaper with other newspapers more generally serving a mainstream readership, and how did they emerge as participants in a new *Sowetan* that took the form of a crossover multimedia product?
- 2) What effects did *Sowetan* journalists believe convergence had on the paper's identity and role within South African society?

With critical race theory underpinning the research, I utilised a phenomenological approach to collecting data from a group of former *Sowetan* journalists through semi-structured interviews, in a bid to see whether they held similar views on their experiences of convergence on the newspaper. Interpretative phenomenological analysis allowed me to engross myself in the information provided by the participants, to code the data and then to generate the key themes that I felt emerged from the research undertaken. In the following chapter, the themes will be discussed in detail. The following chapters (Chapter four and Chapter five) present the findings of this research in the form of six themes. As already pointed out, these themes emerged during the data collection and data coding.

## **CHAPTER 5:        DISCUSSION**

### ***From convergence to diminished news quality***

#### **5.1 Introduction**

*Sowetan* comes from a very rich history. It is the first Black newspaper that did not care about the violence and the gore, the sex and the booze that characterised the headlines of other newspapers. With [former editor] Aggrey Klaaste at the helm, *Sowetan* introduced a community initiative, “Building the Nation” or “Nation Building”, which said that ... Black newspapers, were not about the stereotype that whites or the government thought appealed to Black people. It was not important for them to write about the fights at the shebeens (unlicensed pub), the drinking binges, the women with short skirts. *Sowetan* never had a page three girl. That is the importance that the newspaper attached to black lives and the respect with which they treated the Black readership. People, not just in Soweto, but people who read the *Sowetan* felt part of the newspaper. The newspaper was their own. (participant four)

The statement by participant four above describes the ethos of *Sowetan*, its approach to covering Black news for Black readers, and the bond between reader and newspaper. With that in mind, the findings of the research have been organized into two chapters, containing six key themes clustered around two major areas. The first chapter (Chapter Five) covers, broadly, themes associated with the personal impact of downsizing and convergence on the participants as individuals, mainly framed in the context of how participants either lost their jobs or had their job descriptions re-organised in a manner that was not to their liking. The second chapter (Chapter Six) covers the different ways in which participants experienced the downsizing of

*Sowetan* as a political and ideological loss not only to themselves, but to their broader Black community or family. Chapter Six also covers the participants' exposition on the impact that the downsizing of *Sowetan* would have on the future of the Black press in South Africa.

Chapter Five focuses on three themes associated with work reorganisation and redundancies, namely:

- That the parent company effected convergence of *Sowetan* with its other titles through the use of unethical labour practices (with sub themes analysing convergence and redundancies; the downsizing of the workforce by age; and management attempts to sack most of the *Sowetan* editorial staff);
- That convergence had resulted in experienced journalists being replaced by very junior staff, which had negatively impacted on the quality of the news;
- That former journalists had experienced physical illnesses owing to the stress sustained not only from losing their jobs but from experiencing what they felt to be the degradation of *Sowetan's* Black identity.

All but one of the participants had been negatively affected by convergence in that they either lost their permanent and secure jobs immediately, later on, or were made to do work they did not value or felt compelled to resign. The following discussion explores these themes.

## **5.2 Convergence is accompanied by unethical labour practices**

### *5.2.1 Convergence means redundancies*

As on many other newspapers globally, convergence and downsizing started when the newspaper was taken over by a new corporation, in this case, Avusa (now called Times Media Group). Participant eight describes how journalists were informed that new ownership meant changes were going to take place:

There were rumours in early 2009 that new owners Avusa were going to implement changes. We were not sure what changes, but found out soon enough that they included moving *Sowetan* from its Industria premises which was very close to the communities we served. That happened later that year when we were moved to Rosebank with assurances that no one was going to lose their job. That did not last though, despite the Mwaša fighting so hard. A few months after relocating, the retrenchments started. (*participant eight*)

This comment, by participant eight, indicates that, as was the case with other newspapers mentioned earlier in the literature review, the transfer of ownership of a newspaper from one media corporation to another was not an unexceptional event that had no impact on the newspaper's journalists, but instead heralded largely negative changes to come.

Other participants elaborated at some length about how they felt the downsizing and redundancies had not been conducted in an ethical manner. To start with, participants five and eight mentioned that restructuring and downsizing reached the journalists in the

form of a rumour rather than a formal announcement by management or written  
communiqué to the journalists' union:

No-one from the management came to us and told us from the word go that this thing is going to happen. No. We only heard from colleagues and then people were really panicking because they knew they were going to lose jobs. And the other thing, we didn't know how many people they wanted to lay off so everyone was thinking "I might be the one going". I mean it was terrible, it was terrible and then by the time the management came to us, it was late. (participant five)

The communication around retrenchments was very poor, causing a lot of anxiety among staff. *Sowetan* managers seemed impotent to make any decisions, let alone communicate them to members of staff. It caused a lot of resentment as well. (participant eight).

These comments give a clear indication that although management initially indicated that there would be no job losses when it compelled *Sowetan* to move to new offices in an upmarket, largely white suburb, it quickly transpired that the move was only the beginning of a convergence process. *Sowetan* journalists subsequently experienced considerable anxiety because the inadequate way that management communicated convergence and the associated redundancies led to the mushrooming of rumours and hence a widespread fear that nobody was protected against losing their job.

### *5.2.2 Downsizing the workforce by age*

At the time, management said it was downsizing *Sowetan* to save costs, but at the same time, middle-aged section editors were told verbally by management that they were

being targeted for redundancy on the grounds that they were “dinosaurs”, says participant four. The contradicting reasons given for the downsizing, plus the planned redundancies of the entire section editor complement from the features editor to the news editor to the education editor and across the board, provided more justification for the participants to feel that convergence was being furthered for unethical reasons. Participant four pointed out that there was no expectation of a lifetime job on the newspaper but was unhappy about the hidden reasons behind management’s decision to make the section editor complement, in particular, redundant virtually en masse:

I don’t think that people should be at jobs forever, no, like Africa would have life presidents, no, there are no life journalists. People don’t work eternally as journalists but when you want to build a newspaper brand I don’t think you kick people out lock, stock and barrel. (participant four)

Participant four also begins to allude, here, to the relationship between the staff of Black newspapers and the readers of those newspapers, where leading journalists are seen as key to upholding the crusading and advocacy traditions of the Black newspaper.

Participant six described how a new section editor, who was white and came from a conservative newspaper, was “brought in through the back door” (without the position being advertised internally or externally and without the editorial staff being informed of the pending appointment), to work as a section editor even though there was already someone working in that position. This left the existing Black section editor not knowing what work to do, what authority he or she could still exercise and how to direct the content that the section needed to generate daily. Another editor resigned after being removed from editorial work and made to oversee the letters page, which was considered to be a job requiring far less intellectual oversight.

Other journalists resigned in protest at the treatment of their colleagues and indicated that they did not want to be seen to be aligning themselves with the convergence process that the newspaper management was implementing:

The person who comes there without any job being advertised, they come through the back door, you don't want to be part of that situation. (participant six).

In other words, participant six is suggesting that new staff who did not subscribe to the ethos of the Black press, and who had no experience in advocacy journalism, were not hired to work at the converged *Sowetan* through a fair and open process in which other suitably qualified journalists could also contest for the position.

In her research into Finnish newsrooms, Nikunen (2014) found that “the tendency to downsize the workforce according to age alongside implementing convergent newsrooms, articulated the connection between technological skills and age in a particular way.” Nikunen (2014) acknowledges that making older journalists redundant by compelling them to take early retirement, or to retire when they had been accustomed to working past retirement age, was primarily an economic measure. However, because it occurred when the new era of digital and online journalism was born, “the pension packages became a part of a transition from old journalism to a new multi-platform journalism” (Nikunen, 2014, p. 884). Senior journalists thus became linked in the minds of many with outdated, slower pre-digital forms of producing the news even though in practice they might have been as technologically savvy as their younger colleagues (Nikunen, 2014). Because the more experienced, and therefore older, section editors were not given any opportunity to prove that they could manage a



new multi-platform *Sowetan*, this reinforced the view that the convergence of *Sowetan* with other titles was taking place through the use of unethical labour practices.

### *5.2.3 Management attempts' to sack remaining journalists*

Following an initial round of downsizing, participants stated that those who were not made redundant at first were often made to resign later on as a “punishment” for alleged transgressions. This group included senior journalists, section editors and junior reporters. Three participants said these transgressions, or instances of misconduct, had been created or trumped up by management. According to participant two, after the section editors and regional editors were made redundant, “then they started at the reporters – those that they don’t want, they started harassing them, applying disciplinary action that was really unnecessary most of the time. They used disciplinary action to get rid of those people”.

Participant seven described how some journalists from *Sowetan* news bureaux in the smaller cities were first told to choose between unemployment (because their bureau would be shut down) or to relocate to Johannesburg and work from the main newsroom. However, soon afterwards they were then told that they were not really wanted in Johannesburg and advised, apparently unofficially in a visit by senior management to take voluntary redundancy and become a freelancer for the newspaper, or “go to Johannesburg and get fired”:

We agreed that I would write stories on a freelance basis. They agreed [saying] we are not going to write it down but you are going to write for the whole organisation. You can write for us on a freelance basis and we are going to pay you a rate. And then I wrote. I continued for a year or so, I continued for two

years until *Sowetan* stopped publishing my stories for reasons unknown to me.

(participant seven)

Participant seven refers here to the impression created by Times Media Group management that they wanted to 'get rid' of all *Sowetan* staff, whether this was financially necessary or not. Participants felt that making nearly all the section editors and their positions redundant and then setting the journalists to work under mainly white section editors from other titles would irrevocably alter the daily news content of *Sowetan* and that it was probably a ruse to change the brand of the newspaper, rather than a cost saving measure directly connected to convergence. This idea became shared amongst all participants, whether they were made redundant almost immediately, or transferred to other work within the converged operation or made redundant after the initial round of downsizing. For example, a participant spoke of how those section editors who were not immediately made redundant were either demoted and given demeaning jobs to do, or told not to do their own jobs even though they remained in the position. Participants articulated that convergence was really just a smoke screen to 'do away with' *Sowetan* and replace it with a new national daily group flagship paper. Times Media Group had for some time wanted to own a mainstream daily newspaper with a circulation to match the success of its Sunday paper, the *Sunday Times*. It had created the mainstream daily, *The Times*, prior to the start of convergence and participant four felt that Times Media Group management was aiming to use convergence to ensure that *The Times* became the most prominent daily newspaper in the group:

The aim was to strengthen *The Times* using pooled resources. *Sowetan* made them money but they did not care about it. They thought they could transport the

successes of the *Sunday Times* into this new daily. You must understand that the *Sunday Times* was built over many decades, it built its following - it was hard work that went into doing that. Success for a newspaper title is not achieved overnight. (participant four)

Participants four, five, six, seven and eight clearly felt that convergence of the newspapers was carried out using unethical labour practices. The fact that mass redundancies meant that entire beats were eliminated, contributed to a general fear on the part of participants that *Sowetan* would not be able to continue to publish with such depleted staffing levels, and therefore to general anxiety that more and more redundancies would happen until all the journalists working on the paper at that time had lost their jobs.

### **5.3 Convergence and ‘juniorisation’ leads to ‘poor quality news’**

Duncan (2011) found that downsizing had led to poor quality journalism at another Times Media Group title - South Africa’s largest weekly newspaper, the *Sunday Times*. After the paper had to retract a number of front page stories in 2007 and 2008 that were later proven erroneous, it commissioned a panel of media experts to draw up a report on the “editorial blunders” (Duncan, 2011, p. 357). This report told “a sorry tale of newsroom corporatisation”, (Duncan, 2011, p. 357) where downsizing had led to too many managers and not enough journalists. Managers on the newspaper had “rewritten and ‘sexed up” stories in order to make those stories suitable for the front page, and had also “allowed key checks and balances to lapse” (Duncan, 2011, p. 357, as cited in Fray et al., 2010, p. 79). The conclusion was that downsizing had led to “downward pressure on the quality of news” (Duncan, 2011, p. 361).

Having less news to fill the newspaper, or being compelled to share news across titles has previously been found to lead to a decrease in news quality. According to US newspaper investor Warren Buffett: “We do not believe that success will come from cutting either the new content or frequency of publication. Indeed, skimpy news coverage will almost certainly lead to skimpy readership” (Dunlop, 2013, p. 248). In another study, only 14 out of 1100 senior journalists in Australia expressed total support for online journalism partially because fact checking on online newspapers was perceived to be less vigorous with fewer senior editors scrutinising each story (O’Donnell et al. 2012). In Finnish newsrooms, Nikunen found that the increased multi-skilling resulting from convergence had a negative impact in that it increased the amount of work journalists were required to do to “adapt versions of their stories” for all the different new digital platforms (Nikunen, 2010 in Saikkonen and Hakamies, 2014, p. 39). And while digitization permitted the birth of the 24 hour news cycle, it also led to “growing demands for cost efficiencies catalyzed by new technologies of production” which resulted in large numbers of journalists losing their jobs, which in turn “affected newsroom morale and caused a deterioration in news quality in some respects” (Nikunen, 2010 in Saikkonen and Hakamies, 2014, p. 39). Globally, journalists have reported new trends whereby news is “dumbed down” for the online edition, or content is “dumped” from print onto online (O’Donnell et al. 2012, p. 16).

In *Sowetan*’s case, participant one believed that the news being generated after convergence was of lesser quality than the news produced by the more adequately staffed former *Sowetan* newsroom:

I think the retrenchments [redundancies] weakened editorial policy and quality of stories. I think the retrenchments robbed the paper of great talent resulting in poor story output. (participant one)

Participant four added more detail to this comment by mentioning that, following convergence, *Sowetan* contained spelling mistakes, typographical errors, and misspelt Black names:

You know *Sowetan* is a Black title, we should know Black people better than anyone else but if you are going to misspell a Black surname, if you are going to for example refer to Basetsana Kumalo, whose surname is Ku and refer to her as Khu, you know that shows how little importance you attach to your work.

(participant four)

Participant four's comment is explored in more detail in the following chapter, since in South Africa, the misspelling of Black African names by white journalists carries particular political connotations. Participant two also added more specific detail to the assertion that *Sowetan* had declined in quality after convergence, stating that the declining circulation of *Sowetan* following the merger of its newsrooms with other titles was an indication that the quality of the newspaper was on the wane:

*Sowetan* is suffering at the moment if you look at the quality. It has gone down completely. This is a paper that used to have close to a million or more readers a day. They can't talk about that today...when the quality of the paper went down, people started to get away from it. They identified other publications.

(participant two)

Participant two also spoke critically of the "juniorisation" of the newsroom, as did participant four. With experienced journalists and editors being made redundant, this brought an end to the mentoring of the new and inexperienced journalists and journalism graduates who were regularly hired at *Sowetan*. These participants said they

had always supported the employment of inexperienced or graduate journalists, as this had always been the practice at *Sowetan*, but believed that the removal of mentors (the section editor complement of staff and the senior journalists) had changed the culture and values of the *Sowetan* newsroom irrevocably. There were no longer any editors experienced in the praxis of gathering Black news to mentor the journalists.

According to participant two, the new journalists were set to work under the editors of the new centralised news bureaux who were focussed on having staff generate general articles that could be used across all the titles, not only in *Sowetan*:

...even the junior staff are new guys. So the newsroom has become 'juniorised'. So *Sowetan* had lost competence because the senior staff are not there, it is juniors who are not experienced in journalism, their contribution to the paper is not as qualitative as it was under those senior guys. They have put in new people but there is no mentorship from the senior people, because senior people are no longer there. (participant two)

The 'juniorisation' of the newsroom has never worked well for any paper. At *Sowetan*, those who were let go left with many years of combined experience. For any self-respecting newspaper, a retraction bodes ill for its integrity. As a result of people with experience leaving, Matters of Fact became almost a daily feature of the paper. Those who were tasked with checking and rechecking facts were not there to save the paper these glaring blunders. (participant four)

Participants two and four clearly refer to the point raised by the literature reviewed, which is that converged newsrooms all over the world face obstacles in trying to maintain quality standards at the same time as seeking to 'do more with less' – having

fewer journalists on staff, and compelling those journalists to file additional stories as well as images, video and audio for different multimedia platforms. Rodgers (2011, p. 16) has also pointed out that, in general, “cross-consultation” between journalists and between journalists and editors (an integral part of quality control in the newsroom) has almost withered away in the new digital newsrooms. This means that the discussions and debates that were previously exchanged between newspaper editors and journalists while a story was being written for the next day’s edition had disappeared in the “dispersed” newsroom of journalists with the looming presence of the “constantly mutating news file” (Rodgers, 2011, p. 16) in the digital background.

#### **5.4 Physical illness related to separation from *Sowetan***

Many academic studies have been devoted to the study of stress related to job loss, retrenchment, redundancy and job insecurity (Anaf et al. 2013; Klehel, van Vianen, Zikic, 2013; Weller, 2012). On South African newspapers, at least one study points to a former newspaper editor dying at least partly “from heartache” as a result of losing his job. According to Sesanti (2011), well-known former *Sowetan* editor Aggrey Klaaste, was said to have died “as much from heartache as from the illness that took his life” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 24 and 25). When Klaaste was told in 2002 by *Sowetan*’s corporate owners that he, personally, would be moved from *Sowetan*’s Soweto headquarters to the white suburb of Bryanston where the news corporation was then headquartered, he “was so shocked’ that he said nothing” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 24 and 25). This was the start of Klaaste’s emotional pain, according to Sesanti:

His (Klaaste’s) concern was not only for himself but for his Nation Building programme which he felt had to be run from the *Sowetan* and not from a distant Bryanston. Klaaste believed that the Nation Building programme was about

people and that it needed a voice and a life through the *Sowetan*. (Sesanti, 2011, p. 24 and 25).

In this study, four participants mentioned physical illness, stress and psychological symptoms experienced by themselves or other journalists because of the convergence. Panic, sadness, “a lot of anxiety”, and “a lot of resentment” were the terms that participants five and eight used to describe how they felt when the convergence process was communicated to them verbally by the news corporation’s management.

Participant seven experienced a more serious psychological occurrence in the form of a vivid recollection (otherwise known as a ‘flashback’) of apartheid. This ‘flashback’ came after *Sowetan* journalists working outside of Johannesburg were told that their news bureaux were being shut down and that if they wanted to continue in their jobs, they would have to relocate to Johannesburg:

And then they agreed to say that offices would simply close and people would have to come and work in Johannesburg. There is a name for it - when the apartheid government used to take people from their homes to work in Johannesburg - when a man has to leave his wife behind and work in Johannesburg. (participant seven).

When participant seven received this instruction, he/she had a ‘flashback’ of apartheid-era migrant labour practices, where Black men had to leave their homes and families and move to single-sex hostels near the cities where they would work as migrant labour. Black women commonly had to leave their families and homes and enter sleep-in domestic servitude in the homes of white families.



According to participant six, the restructuring was seen as being driven by a certain group of people from management and hence the convergence process had involved “purges” of staff by this group. These ‘purges’ were stressful for those journalists who were not made redundant in the first round, as they feared that although they had retained their jobs, they were ‘on the chopping block’:

There is a certain group. They are trying very hard...[name removed] from the [title of beat removed] - I understand they want to purge her. The guy from [name of department removed] died of a heart attack. You know Bra [Brother name removed]? He just woke up dead the other day. He didn't wake up actually, we woke up to news of his death...it was stress related. So they are purging everyone there. It is part of life. (participant six)

Hence, it is clear that participant six saw the convergence process not only as a source of psychological stress but also of physical illness.

In summary, participants were of the opinion that Times Media Group management used unethical and unpleasant labour malpractices to effect the convergence of *Sowetan* with other newspapers. Management attempted to shroud a wave of sudden redundancies, age discrimination, recurring threats of disciplinary action and sidelining of senior *Sowetan* personnel by failing to communicate its plans in writing to any of the journalists, and refusing to adequately negotiate these. Instead, from the participants' point of view, management made use of bullying, empty promises and threats of future redundancies, and age-ist labelling to strip the newspaper of virtually all its staff. This led to journalists experiencing physical and psychological trauma as a result not only of losing their jobs but also from experiencing what they felt to be the degradation of

*Sowetan*'s Black identity, and therefore their own professional identities as Black journalists linked in the public eye to a powerful Black brand. According to Huber and Solorzano (2015), such health problems relating to the Black experience and as experienced by Black people can be described as race-related health consequences. Concepts such as mundane extreme environmental stress, racial battle fatigue and racial trauma are some of the intellectual tools that critical race theory researchers use when describing these race-related health consequences.

## **CHAPTER 6:      DISCUSSION**

### ***From Black newspaper to crossover newspaper***

This chapter focuses on four themes associated with the close political and ideological association that participants felt with the Black press, namely:

- Participants' perspectives on *Sowetan* as the flagship daily Black newspaper in South Africa (with sub themes analyzing the intellectual identity of *Sowetan*, and *Sowetan*'s practice of advocacy journalism and writing in service to Black readers)
- That former journalists felt that *Sowetan*'s Black identity had been degraded and even erased by the convergence process;
- That former journalists believed that *Sowetan* no longer existed to serve Black readers, and that tabloid newspapers aimed at a Black readership were not legitimate members of the Black Press, but instead were tools of white publishers aimed at 'dumbing down' Black readers;
- And that the notion of a Black newspaper following the traditions of the global Black press should not have been cast aside in favour of "crossover" news aimed at audiences of all races.

Although convergence meant for participants in this study that they either lost their jobs or were made to do work they did not value, participants were not solely pre-occupied with labour-related issues and their own predicaments following job losses. The history

of *Sowetan* was dwelt on at some length by most participants, as was the importance of the paper's Black identity, and the type of journalism practiced on the paper in comparison to the journalism of mainstream newspapers. Participants also spoke much of the tradition of service to the readers of *Sowetan*. The following discussion explores these themes.

## **6.1 *Sowetan* as the flagship daily Black newspaper in South Africa**

### *6.1.1 The intellectual identity of Sowetan*

Participant one speaks of the impact that convergence, including centralization of all Times Media Group newsrooms, had on the intellectual identity of *Sowetan*, saying:

Centralisation was a bad idea which killed the ability for journalists to focus on Black stories. Essentially it's difficult now to say whether *Sowetan* still has its original vision to be the voice of the Black people in South Africa. (participant one)

Here, participant one speaks of the intellectual identity of *Sowetan*. According to Tsedu, by 1998, the South African black press was "essentially two newspapers, The *Sowetan* [daily] and The *City Press* [weekly]" (1998, p. 56). *Sowetan* also explicitly identified itself in its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition as a Black newspaper following the "earliest traditions of the Black press". (Cowling, p. 326) As such, *Sowetan* journalists were purely focused on gathering and writing news of interest to Black communities across South Africa (Radebe, 2007, p. 45).

*Sowetan* emerged in an era of heightened Black Consciousness in Soweto in the 1970s. The apartheid police had murdered Black Consciousness architect, Steve Bantu Biko in custody, and had slain several hundred Soweto students on 16 June 1976 during the

Soweto Uprising – a protest against being forced to learn in Afrikaans – a non-indigenous language based on Dutch, which was introduced into South Africa from the year 1652 onwards when the Dutch began colonising the country. In 1925, Afrikaans had been made an official language of South Africa alongside English, as a result of the growing power that had been amassed by white Afrikaner parliamentarians (van Rensburg, 1999, p. 81). When the Afrikaner based National Party took power in 1948 and introduced Apartheid, Afrikaans was given a further boost, becoming a compulsory language throughout primary and high school which students had to pass in order to graduate, and with fluency becoming a requirement for many jobs including those in the media, teaching and public service (van Rensburg, 1999, p. 81). Afrikaans was unsuccessfully used by the apartheid government as part of a “social engineering project” which aimed to unite white settlers under a “unique South African identity” but which instead became “synonymous with white oppression” (South African History Online). By 1976, the apartheid government had decided that although white school pupils would continue to be taught in either English or Afrikaans – as the parents of individuals saw fit - Black school pupils would henceforth be taught in Afrikaans only. This decision was made on the basis that in order to flourish, the Apartheid system required Black South Africans to form a layer of cheap industrial labour only, and never to aspire nor be permitted to work in professional occupations. The white South African police as well as white bosses on the railways, in the mining industry, on white farms and in factories generally were predominantly Afrikaans speakers (Ndlovu, 2006).

The imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction for Black school pupils sparked the Soweto Uprising, in which Black student leaders as young as 15 years of age led a co-ordinated series of protests and stay-aways which spread across the entire country. Seven Soweto schools were key to the beginning of the uprising: Phefeni

Junior Secondary School, Belle Higher Primary School, Emthonjeni Higher Primary School, Thulasizwe Higher Primary School, Pimville Higher Primary School, Khulangolwazi Higher Primary School and Senaoane Junior Secondary School (Ndlovu, 2006). During the uprising, the apartheid government killed at least 850 school pupils (Brink, Malungane, Lebelo, Ntshangase, Krige, 2001). The Soweto Uprising and the apartheid government's murder of Steve Biko are known as landmark events in the struggle against apartheid, with 16 June (the day of the Soweto Uprising) having since been declared by the post-apartheid government as a public holiday. *Sowetan* was similarly associated with the "Black people of Soweto", their struggles, and also with the broader Black community, participant two said:

Once you talk about *Sowetan* to many people, they know it is our paper. This is the paper we identify with. (participant two)

Participant eight also described how *Sowetan* had been a struggle newspaper throughout apartheid years and continued to "cover and articulate issues affecting black people in South Africa" after apartheid ended:

The brief was well understood, that ours was not a mainstream view of most events. We always had a black angle, if you will. A perspective of our people is how we approached most stories, seeking to include their voices and give it a slant that best suited our audience. That has been the approach even earlier when the newspaper still had white owners before 1994. Klaaste had championed this for a very long time and everyone shared his vision. (participant eight)

Participant eight's view is pertinent because it shows that it was well-known in the newsroom and in the broader Black community that *Sowetan* was not a mainstream newspaper, which could easily be merged with other mainstream newspapers, but a

member of the Black press. Other participants alluded to the fact that *Sowetan* journalists had different editorial objectives to the mainstream press. In the mainstream press in South Africa, the subjects involved in events such as fires in informal settlements (shanty towns) or protests against a lack of housing, or strikes, are frequently not named but instead are referred to as ‘the victims of the fire’, ‘the mob’ and so on. At *Sowetan*, this was not the case, participant six said:

Well, we would go in there, we would put faces of the people, there would be faces and voices of people we were writing about so that would make it very easy for people to identify unlike where your other guys maybe – I’m not saying they didn’t do that – but they would just put it raw as hard news, as blood, so many shacks burnt whereas we would go there and talk to people, about how it affects them, and I think that was the main difference. (participant six)

Participant six refers to the phenomenon mentioned earlier in the literature review whereby the mainstream media marginalizes and under-reports ‘Black issues’.

Participant one explains more specifically the form this under-reporting takes in the South African media:

In the main, Black issues are in the periphery of mainstream white newspapers. For example, a violent murder of a Black person is given less attention as compared to a troop of baboons roaming in leafy white neighbourhoods of Cape Town. (participant one)

Participant one calls attention here to the instances in which white communities can have minor inconveniences to their lifestyles highlighted, often in great detail, by the mainstream media while Black communities may experience awful, tragic and deadly attacks which then go virtually unnoticed by the mainstream media, which participant

one clearly sees as colluding in the pushing of Black communities out to the “periphery” of society. Participant one also spoke of how *Sowetan* had always “carried the dreams, hopes and aspirations of Black South Africans as well as mirrored their fears and struggles in a country which remains economically dominated by the white minority”. Participants in a study on Māori entrepreneurship in screen production (Henry, 2012) expressed similar sentiments as the *Sowetan* journalists, with participants stating that it was important that they work in the Māori media as Māori because they wanted to tell their own stories and also to see that these stories were “done right and with integrity” (p. 126). One participant said that working for the Māori media was important as Māori needed “to close rank on mainstream media as they are willing to only show our weakness not our strength” (Henry, 2012, p. 128).

Journalists on other Black South African newspapers have also previously indicated that Black South African journalists continued, after the fall of the apartheid government, to have a “responsibility to articulate Black people’s fears and plight, adding that white journalists could not be expected to go to black people’s areas and claim to want to articulate black peoples’ frustrations” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 174).

It is a given that *Sowetan* was always a Black newspaper, but there has been past debate about whether *Sowetan* qualified as a Black Consciousness newspaper or not. On the one hand, the political leanings of most *Sowetan* journalists in the 1980s were towards Black Consciousness (Tomaselli, 2000 and Dubow, 2014) and the newspaper was also a closed union shop for decades for the Black Consciousness-aligned journalists union (the Media Workers Association of South Africa), as opposed to the historically white journalists union (the South African Union of Journalists) or the non-racial Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) affiliate, the Communication Workers Union. A 1987 survey also found that *Sowetan* was “too biased towards Black Consciousness”



(Tomaselli, 2000, p. 384). On the other hand, arguments have been advanced that *Sowetan* did not qualify as a Black Consciousness newspaper because it did not align itself with any Black Consciousness party, and because its readers were more inclined ideologically to support the non-racial trade union movement Cosatu and its ally, the dominant liberation party, the non-racial ANC (Dubow, 2014). *Sowetan* had also been launched as a “commercial” newspaper with the goal of making a profit rather than promoting the Black Consciousness ideology (Tomaselli, 2000, p. 394). In the main, however, scholars found that *Sowetan* had, over the years, become associated with the Black Consciousness movement because it was “a newspaper that reflected the lives and views of blacks under the hardships of apartheid”.

#### *6.1.2 Advocacy journalism, and writing in service to Black readers*

Cowling (2014, p. 332) has described *Sowetan* journalists as those “infused with a strong need to represent the unrepresented majority and to serve their cause” “public-interest version of a journalist”. Another progressive newspaper, the *Mail and Guardian*, also described the journalism practiced at *Sowetan* as having evolved into a “unique form of committed journalism” (Cowling, 2014, p. 340). This approach was highlighted by participant eight who described a phenomenon where *Sowetan* journalists did not only seek to report the news as it happened but sought to “champion” issues, and provide an “alternative voice” to the mainstream media:

Even at the dawn of democracy, the *Sowetan* continued being the voice of the voiceless. The transition, which is still under way, demanded that the newspaper continued to champion the struggles of the newly freed nation. The new struggle was for economic emancipation and the *Sowetan*’s role was to be at the forefront of that. Even political freedom was not widely enjoyed then and the role of the

media was to continuously highlight those issues - as an alternative voice to a dominant mainstream media which was (and still is) in the hands of white ownership. (participant eight)

It is noteworthy that participant eight is of the opinion that *Sowetan* would continue its advocacy mandate and be at the “forefront” of a new struggle after apartheid ended in 1994. This participant made mention that specific sections of the newspaper, such as the Community News section, had been set up to bring *Sowetan* “closer to our readers”:

On occasion we generated news stories from those notices. For example when families could not bury their dead, or track mission people. We would follow up that and write stories, most of which resulted in issues being resolved (participant eight).

For this participant, *Sowetan* journalists did more than report the news – they also engaged in supporting those people in their stories who required a form of support. All of the participants, across different age groups, described *Sowetan* as a newspaper that embraced principles of solidarity and collaboration with the Black community. This is noteworthy because in South Africa, younger Black journalists who grew up in the post-apartheid era, are assumed and trained to have the same mainstream, “professional” approach to journalism as their white colleagues, whereas older Black journalists were said to have come from an era where, under the apartheid regime, they were Black first and journalists second. Being Black first and a journalist second was illustrated by participant four:

The duty of a black journalist under apartheid had always been to highlight the vulgarity of the system and give the black man hope that freedom will happen in

their lifetime. From the pioneers like Percy Qoboza, youngsters who followed in their footsteps appreciated the fact that their duty was to be, first and foremost - black. Being a journalist was secondary and a necessary pedestal. (participant four)

Participant four makes mention here of a form of “revolutionary journalism” long practiced by the Black Press, which has a long history dating back to the uprising by white Americans against the British in 1772, where “revolutionary journalists focused public hostility against British colonial power” (Robie, 2008, p. 20). Journalists in Ghana, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa later used this form of journalism in the struggle against colonisation. Participant four also outlines the praxis of “radical journalism” that *Sowetan* was involved in, which can be summed up as a journalism which “attempts to expose destructive or oppressive situations and to help ‘clean them up’” (Robie, 2008, p. 21). Similarly, the participants in this study spoke of their belief that *Sowetan* journalists were there to serve Black readers. Participants were asked to describe the editorial and political principles guiding them as *Sowetan* journalists. Participant nine said the political principle that guided his/her work was that “Black was not inferior”. This participant saw him/herself as “an anti-apartheid agent by dint of having a public platform to influence thought”.

Participant one indicated that *Sowetan* was the newspaper for “black people celebrating their successes as well as highlighting their plight in post-apartheid South Africa” while participant two spoke more specifically about the kind of columns and sections that *Sowetan* contained, which were seen as useful and desirable by Black readers:

There are things there in the paper that people always associate with – there was something called the community news which was more about funeral notices, obituaries of the people, that people always look forward to every Friday but when this paper was restructured all those things that the Black people associated with in the newspaper, they were completely removed. There were specific columns that the people identified with. All those columns are no longer there. They introduced new columnists that have got nothing to do with the majority of the Black people. They are columnists that really write things that people don't care about. (participant two)

Participant two indicates here that convergence has undermined *Sowetan*'s tradition of advocacy journalism. Participant three stated explicitly that removing the experienced and long serving Black section editors from the newspaper and placing the reporters under the control of mainly white editors had "killed the paper":

Another thing that has put the final nail into the coffin is the current move where you have Afrikaans speaking people who have now been made the middle editors of *Sowetan*. So that thing has now killed *Sowetan* so to speak. I think that was the final nail. Because now instead of newspapers appointing [name of Black journalist] as their news editor, we cater for different markets, we cater for different race. Whatever their motives or reasons are, I really think they killed that paper. (participant three)

*Sowetan*'s Black section editors prior to convergence had formed an important layer of senior staff on the newspaper whose mandate was to ensure that *Sowetan* maintained its position as a Black newspaper, working in service to Black readers. Participant three's

comment describes how, once these editors were made redundant, the traditional role of *Sowetan* became degraded, and when *Sowetan* began catering for different races in its choice of staff and articles, this “killed *Sowetan*”.

### *6.1.3 Advocacy journalism in action in the “Nation Building Programme”*

Advocacy journalism on *Sowetan* also found expression in the newspaper’s “Nation Building Programme”, which was initiated in 1988 during the height of one of the State of Emergency periods declared by the apartheid government by two of *Sowetan*’s most well-known staffers, editor Aggrey Klaaste and assistant editor Sam Mabe (Mecoamere, 2008). The programme functioned to champion pride and economic development for Black communities (Radebe, 2007, p. 44) through an “ubuntu-based, public and corporate partnerships concept” (Mecoamere, 2008). The Programme offered a number of awards for excellence including the national teaching awards, young communicator awards, maths and science teacher of the year award and community builder of the year award. According to Mecoamere (2010) these awards aimed to laud Black people who achieved excellence “often against great odds” and who set “examples of fulfilment gained from giving and giving brotherhood and unity a chance”. The Nation-Building Programme also ran workshops on parenting skills (Mecoamere, 2010) and worked in partnership with various organizations on initiatives that aimed to portray children “as active citizens” rather than “voiceless and ‘needy’ recipients of help in the form of charity” (Lerner, ND). According to Cowling, (2014, p. 335) “Black achievers were encouraged to get involved and the paper reported on community projects and held symposia on issues affecting black communities”.

The Nation-Building Programme was opposed by many in the Black Consciousness community when it was launched because:

[The founders] pushed the then unusual agenda of rebuilding South Africa together with whites. This strategy was opposed by people who looked down on cooperation and collaboration with the enemy, as it were. (Mecoamere, 2010)

However, the influential Klaaste won the *Sowetan* staff and public over by linking the Nation-Building Programme to *Sowetan's* role as a Black newspaper practicing advocacy journalism, stating that *Sowetan's* primary aim was to lead the way in “repairing the damage apartheid had wrought on the structures within black communities across the country” (Mecoamere, 2010). The programme was so popular that South African president, Nelson Mandela, had paid tribute to it on its tenth anniversary in 1998, saying that “it required profound vision for the *Sowetan* to conceive its Nation Building Programme” and “the Nation-Building Initiative has done our nation a service” (Mandela, 1998). The project was also actualised in a ‘Nation Building Manifesto’ that *Sowetan* published. The programme was covered on the “Nation Building” pages of *Sowetan* for 23 years, with its own dedicated editor, Victor Mecoamere, until it was shut down by Times Media Group management in 2011. These pages were a key point of interaction and collaboration with the readership.

The majority of the participants in this study were particularly rankled that, following convergence, Times Media Group management had cancelled the popular “Nation Building” pages in the newspaper, with participant six saying:

Nation building ...the way I understood it was that we had to build our communities. We built people, we affirmed a lot of people because it became their voice. Nation Building was the voice. We used to target people and the programmes were aimed at empowering people under the circumstances,

because the [apartheid] government then was just predominantly uninterested.  
(participant six)

Participant six is giving a clear indication that participants felt strongly that their role was not only to advocate for the Black readership but also to work in collaboration with the broader Black community.

According to participant eight, all *Sowetan* journalists supported the “vision” of the Nation Building project, which was “uplifting the communities we worked in and the country as a whole”. Participant four stated that the introduction of the Nation Building Programme was clearly designed to support *Sowetan*’s existing editorial policies and principles as an advocating newspaper:

You know, *Sowetan* comes from a very rich history. It is the first Black newspaper that did not care about the violence and the gore, the sex and the booze that characterised the headlines of other newspapers. With Aggrey Klaaste at the helm, *Sowetan* introduced a community initiative, “Building the Nation” or “Nation Building”, which said that newspapers were not about, or Black newspapers, were not about the stereotype that whites or the government thought appealed to Black people. (participant four)

It is clear from the participants’ views that they felt that *Sowetan*’s Nation Building Programme was more than a project aimed at highlighting and motivating for Black success. The Nation Building Programme also marked a political stand by Black journalists and editors against the misrepresentation and oppression of Black people by the apartheid government and white society in general.

#### 6.1.4 *Sowetan's approach to reporting racism*

Another part of *Sowetan's* advocacy role involved reporting racism when other papers ignored it or did not see it as important news. As detailed in chapters one and two, the mainstream media does not adequately cover Black news, is often plagued by racism within its ranks, and often practices racial profiling. According to participant six, *Sowetan* was one of the only newspapers that ever followed stories about racism until their conclusion and also tried to “expose” racist practices. Participant six gave this example:

There is this farmer who tortured this kid and threw snakes all over the body of this kid but that guy has not been arrested, even the law enforcement are still saying they are still investigating. I don't know what they will be investigating for over 2 weeks. Those things still exist and they need to be exposed as much as possible. (participant six)

Pointing to just one current example of a racist attack in South Africa, participant six is clearly unconvinced by arguments that crossover media can replace the Black press on the grounds that South Africa is now a post-racial society. Participant five also refers to this, stating that *Sowetan* used to write about racism but has ceased doing so:

No, I don't think they still have that [role], I think they lost it. In the past definitely because *Sowetan* wrote about the struggle, about Black life, things that affected Black people but now I don't think they still play that role. I think it is more like writing stories that sell the newspaper, I don't think they really write stories that identify with Black people. And you don't see those kind of stories anymore in *Sowetan*, like racism stories, I don't think they still see them as important. (participant five)



Participant one pointed out that as a Black journalist, he continued to be subjected to racism, and hence knew that racism was not diminishing, yet *Sowetan* was no longer covering racism at the level it used to. This participant also stated that *Sowetan* should be covering stories of institutional racism, and said he “would like to see the *Sowetan* take a leading role in reporting on racism in its various forms”.

Participants three and eight alluded to the fact that convergence had eliminated any chance of *Sowetan* being able to continue covering racism, because *Sowetan*'s strength lay in its ability to serve its core Black readership:

*Sowetan* seems to have gone more mainstream since being taken over by Avusa. While successive editors have tried to keep the focus on its core readers, advertising and other demands have seen it drift away from the people. The moral of the story is that *Sowetan* cannot be everything to everyone. It has a niche audience and ideally it should continue to service that. (participant eight)

Here, participant eight refers to the need for the Black press not to lose its racial identity or advocacy role, and suggests that once the Black press ‘goes mainstream’, it is in danger of losing its loyal readers. Participant nine, on the other hand, held a conflicting view to the other participants stating that other organisations might step in to combat racism because “racism is a societal project and no single organisation has a greater or more unique role than the next”.

## 6.2 *Sowetan's* Black identity eroded and erased by the convergence process

### 6.2.1 *Sowetan undermined as a Black title*

Several participants felt that, following the merging of the newsrooms, the paper no longer qualified as a Black newspaper, let alone as the flagship daily publication of South Africa's Black Press. Participant three expressed concern that convergence within the corporation had led to the erosion of the Black Press, with *Sowetan* as a major player in the country being undermined as a Black title/brand:

*Sowetan* is a shadow of what it used to be. It doesn't talk to your normal Black people anymore, I think it has lost focus and I think people realise that it now speaks to affluent readers and the upper class and it no longer caters for your normal township people. (participant three)

My interpretation of this comment is that participant three is alluding to the fact that *Sowetan* now has to draw its articles from a central pool of stories generated not by its own journalists, many of whom have been made redundant, but from the pool of stories written with the middle-class, mainly white readers of *The Times* in mind. Participant three clearly feels that publishing articles that have not been written for Black readers has undermined *Sowetan's* Black identity. Participant five stated this more explicitly:

Before, *Sowetan* was called a Black newspaper and that was its name, it was a Black newspaper ...you would know that there were Black reporters and everything was Black, the stories were Black. But then, as everyone was writing for every newspaper in the group, I think that is how *Sowetan* lost its identity. Hence the sales have dropped. (participant five)

Using the terms “coconut-ish, another participant stated that following convergence, *Sowetan* only appeared to be Black but in reality, being white on the inside. This is another clear reference to the fact that although the newspaper’s name and masthead had not changed, the content inside the paper was no longer being written primarily for Black readers:

*Sowetan* has actually changed from being that brand that it used to be to something that is ‘coconut-ish’, if I can use that word. The way things are at the moment, they have Mlungu-lised, when you use the word Mlungu-lised, it is Shangaan for saying “everything is now turning white,” it is turning white-ish. I think the better word is coconut-ish. (participant seven)

After converging its newsroom with other Times Media Group titles, *Sowetan* had no option but to publish articles from the central basket, generated by a pool of journalists, the majority of whom were not writing from the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786). So, apart from referencing something that is only Black outside but has a white core, participant seven’s comment depicts the link between mainstream news and whiteness, and the contrast between mainstream news and news reported from the “Black angle”.

Participant eight was even more explicit, stating that the structure of newly centralised newsrooms did not allow for any news of interest to Black readers to be generated and that the other journalists in the centralised newsroom had never even been briefed or trained on how to write news from the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786). The *Sowetan* journalists who had not been made redundant and who were trained to report Black news were often sent out on mainstream stories instead, the writing up of which

was not supposed to be done from the “Black angle”. Participant eight describes that despite this, *Sowetan* still had to fill its pages with copy every day and hence often had to publish articles that the editors knew would not be of interest to the readers:

There are attempts sometimes to tell that story differently but not always. The pool of stories does not always suit *Sowetan*. But if you are on the news desk and have pages to fill to beat the deadline then you just go with what you have.  
(participant eight)

Partly because of this, participants five felt that *Sowetan* was no longer able to “champion the Black cause”:

No, no, no. *Sowetan* is dead, *Sowetan* is dead, *Sowetan* is dead. It’s a shame. It is a shadow of itself. It’s a newspaper with a history but no future. (participant five)

Part of the reason for this was that in the newly centralised newsrooms, there was no recognition that it was “a must” for *Sowetan* to carry a major township based story every day, and since there was no importance attached to regular coverage of Black townships by the other newspapers (barring major events), participant three pointed out that it was impossible for journalists to attempt to generate content for *Sowetan* while working under the supervision of new white news editors or bureau chiefs from *The Times*:

Obviously the township stories... because once you have an Afrikaans speaking lady and you come to her and say there is an accident in Soweto, they don’t receive the same priority that they used to under your normal Black person from there, from Soweto. So I think the Sowetans, you know the Soweto people, lost interest in their paper – not necessarily lost interest but they abandoned it -

because they felt that the paper was no longer talking to them ....you go to your editor and say “five people have died in Soweto” and then the question will be “so what?”, because their argument will be there are people dying every day, so what’s so special about Soweto and so on. So whatever we used to see as major things happening in Soweto and publishing those particular things are no longer relevant to the current management or those in charge of *Sowetan*. (participant three)

As mentioned in the previous section, participants were also displeased that the Times Media Group management cancelled the Nation Building Programme pages and demoted the editor of those pages. According to participant two, this created the impression that *Sowetan* was “no longer about the nation, it is about making money. It is about commercialising things without considering its history”. Again, this is an indication from a participant that post-convergence, *Sowetan* was fast losing its place as the flagship daily newspaper of the South African Black press.

### *6.2.2 Convergence as it affects advocacy journalism and culturally appropriate practices*

Signs that *Sowetan*’s Black identity was being diminished even before the convergence process had been completed were provided by participant four, who stated that the generally “low morale” brought about by the redundancies had spilled over into the remaining journalists’ desire to continue their tradition of advocacy journalism. This was because management had been seen to be “gunning” for a particular journalist, who was later sacked over a complaint about one of his stories.

According to participant four:

If you break a story and the subject complains, chances are you will be fired. It is so easy now in *Sowetan* to be disciplined. You will be charged. *Sowetan* these days is no longer breaking stories. This is how journalists feel - you can't even go beyond press releases. Once a government department issues a press release, you will just follow it because once you try and contact your other sources to find out what the reason is behind [the release] and they give you more than what the officials want you to know, and the officials say it is not true, they [*Sowetan* editors] will charge you (participant four).

Participant four and two other participants stated that there was a collective feeling amongst the remaining journalists that management wanted to find ways to “get rid” of them, and so journalists had also begun to fear tackling controversial stories in case the subjects complained to the editor and this led to disciplinary action, which would provide management with the ideal opportunity to fire the journalist.

One participant voiced a different view. Participant nine did not oppose the convergence process, stating that *Sowetan* was in need of modernising. Prior to convergence, many of the journalists held “backward” views, in this participant's opinion. However, this participant also emphasised that *Sowetan* should continue to focus primarily on writing news for Black readers, with an emphasis on producing articles related to Black excellence (which was no longer possible post-convergence since *Sowetan* journalists had all been instructed to write articles primarily for non-Black, mainstream, titles). Discussing these points, participant nine introduced a new perspective on the cultural appropriateness of merging the newsrooms of historically white and Black newspapers.

According to participant nine, the merger was unlikely to be practical because Black publications like *Sowetan* used a different cultural lens to white newspapers when reporting stories:

Historically white publications tend to be middle to upper middle class focused and make the general assumption that the standards and practices accepted in Western Europe apply universally. For example, they uncritically accept that "respect is earned" whereas in black communities and therefore mainly black media, "respect is inherent to all" but especially so with age, but can, and is, lost by personal conduct. In my experience, we once named athlete Caster Semenya "a girl" since she was living in her parents' home and regarded in her community as "a girl" despite being 18. The feminist lobby tried to suggest we were disrespectful because we should have referred to her as "a woman". We had consciously chosen to call her what her community called her. (participant nine).

Participant nine is alluding to the the practice of Black African "cultural consciousness" (Sesanti, 2012, p. 236) in the media. Sesanti found that Black journalists on *City Press* newspaper, while experiencing "tensions" when their work practices conflicted with their cultural traditions (for example, when they had to report on stories that cast older African politicians "in a negative light"), their former editor had insisted that "respect in African culture 'does not mean that someone younger or junior accepts everything and anything that someone older or senior says or does'" (Sesanti, 2011, p. 236). Sesanti found that journalists in the Black press therefore practiced investigative journalism traditions within the context of Black African "cultural consciousness" (Sesanti, 2011,

p. 236). However, it is unclear whether it would be possible for journalists to practice Black African “cultural consciousness” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 236) on a Black newspaper which had been converged with white newspapers and where there was therefore no onus on reporting news from the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786).

### *6.2.3 Convergence expected to cause the demise of Sowetan*

All participants brought up the point that since *Sowetan* was now catering to its Black readership by using stories from a central basket which had not always been written for Black readers, the only foreseeable outcome for the newspaper was that it would cease to exist. According to participants three and eight, convergence meant that Times Media Group had forced *Sowetan* to abandon its readers, and they predicted certain consequences for the newspaper as a result:

Once you abandon your own people for a certain class or for certain people in another area, those people that you abandon decide that, *Sowetan* is no longer catering for them, let's leave it and those people that you now try to talk to don't recognise you. You are dead because you are now in no-man's land, because people that you have abandoned don't buy you anymore and those you are targeting don't recognise you. That is what has happened to the paper now.

(participant three)

Most of us felt as if Avusa was trying to kill off our newspaper. The “juniorisation” of the newsroom, with fewer senior journalists, made it harder to put out the paper daily. (participant eight)



Participants were sceptical of the rumour that *Sowetan* needed to downsize for financial reasons.

As long as there were Black readers, there would still be a need for a Black press, one participant argued. Using this logic, participants questioned the cost-cutting rationale given by newspaper management and instead described the convergence as a move “to really kill *Sowetan*”. Buffett concurs with this position, stating that from his point of view as a US media investor, newspapers which serve specific communities are still financially viable in the digital age:

Wherever there is a pervasive sense of community, a paper that serves the special informational needs of that community will remain indispensable to a significant portion of its residents (Buffett in Dunlop, 2013, p. 247).

### **6.3 Could *Sowetan* become a cross-over newspaper?**

Despite verbal announcements by management at earlier meetings that that cross-over news was the future, participants had no apparent belief that *Sowetan* was indeed being transformed into a cross-over newspaper. As highlighted in the previous sections, participants in this study experienced the convergence process as one characterised by mass redundancies of skilled journalists and section editors, the ‘juniorisation’ of the newsroom, an end to specialised beat reporting, the termination of the popular ‘Nation Building’ section in the newspaper, and a shrinking of *Sowetan*’s coverage area through closures of the news bureaux in some South African cities. Objectively, if *Sowetan* was to be transformed into a different kind of newspaper, resources and skills would have been added. Instead, resources and skills had been stripped from *Sowetan*. As explained

in 4.2.3, participants felt that the convergence process could even have been the first step towards closing *Sowetan* down completely.

Besides this, participants believed that the Black press was still relevant and necessary in post-apartheid South Africa, despite the fact that the major media corporations were turning flagship Black newspapers like *City Press* and *Sowetan* into cross-over publications that they hoped would appeal to all races. According to participant five:

We [Black people] might have won freedom, but out there, we are still struggling and people still need a platform where they can voice their concerns where the issues that affect them can be put on the table so that other people can see what is really happening. What is happening on the ground is that, yes, things have changed, but so much remains the same so we need a newspaper that will definitely speak about the ills, the social problems that people face and the negative things that are still happening to Black people in South Africa. So the Black newspaper is still needed. (participant five)

Cross-over writing has been defined as "a type of writing that addresses minority issues but that aims to reach a broad audience, including mainstream readers from the majority race" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2008/2009, p.1). However, Black newspapers report the news from the "Black angle", which as detailed in Chapter Two, simultaneously foregrounds how the issue being reported affects the Black community and also undermines counters racist and negative stereotypes of Black people (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786). Strother (1978) examined how the Black press in the USA carried out a "race-pride philosophy" (p. 92), interrogating the concept of the "Black angle" (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) as it was used by the *Chicago Defender* newspaper. The

“race-angled personality story” (Strother, 1978, p.94), where the contribution of Black citizens to the community was highlighted, was one way in which the Black Press used the “Black angle”. The personalities themselves were only deemed newsworthy in so far as they related “to the black experience” (Strother, 1978, p.95), in sharp contrast to the mainstream media where the lives and deeds of personalities are viewed as interesting to the public per se. The image of Black people presented by the *Chicago Defender* was “one of pride in accomplishment in a broad range of occupations....a picture of black professionals defining their own existence and determining their own destinies” (Strother, 1978, p.99). Thus, as an example of the Black press in the USA, Strother concluded that the *Chicago Defender* “generally promoted a pattern of race-advocacy structured to inculcate self-pride and self-determination in its readership” (Strother, 1978, p.99).

Sesanti’s study of *City Press* (2011) found a similar belief in “race-advocacy” aimed at fostering self-pride among the Black journalists working there, since those journalists believed that, post-apartheid, “the objectives of the struggle do not disappear” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 174). *City Press* journalists also believed that Black journalists should continue, post-apartheid, to ensure that “the marginalisation of the poor does not happen” (Sesanti, 2011, p. 174) by committing never to overlook the living conditions of poor and working class Black township residents.

Former *City Press* editor Mathatha Tsedu stated that “in their interaction with the rich and powerful, black journalists needed to be the representatives of the poor. The question that a journalist should pose to a president should reflect and represent the concerns of the poor” (Tsedu, 2008 in Sesanti, 2011, p. 174). While representing the poor might sound like a practice that should not be limited to journalists on Black

newspapers, but could also be a feasible practice for journalists on cross-over newspapers, it must be noted that South Africa is the most unequal country in the world and the poor are almost exclusively Black people. So, as previously highlighted, South African mainstream newspapers do not subscribe to the use of the “Black angle” and are more likely to under-report or negatively report on issues facing the Black poor and working class. Participants’ views as expressed in 5.1.1 that mainstream newspapers marginalise “Black issues” or push those issues out to the periphery, are also relevant here. This would explain the belief by participants that there was little likelihood that centralising the Times Media Group newsrooms was a legitimate first step towards turning *Sowetan* into a crossover newspaper, and that it was more likely that the convergence process simply aimed at diminishing *Sowetan’s* capacity to continue in the marketplace as the flagship daily Black newspaper.

#### **6.4 If *Sowetan* became a crossover paper, would that make the *Daily Sun* and other tabloids the new Black Press?**

As described in the previous section, participants in this study did not believe that Black South African readers would be best served by crossover newspapers, or that the processes underway at Times Media Group were likely to see *Sowetan* becoming a crossover newspaper. It therefore became necessary to investigate whether participants believed that *Sowetan* readers might stop buying the newspaper, since it no longer carried exclusively Black news, and turn to newer tabloid newspapers aimed solely at Black readers. One of these tabloids is the *Daily Sun*, launched in 2002 by the Media 24 news corporation. It is one of three tabloid newspapers owned by the major media corporations but received particular focus in this study because it is the only English language tabloid targeting Black readers.

The *Daily Sun* specifically targets Black readers with articles about fights at funerals, sexual escapades, superstition, witchcraft, vigilante killings and love triangles (*Daily Sun*, 2011 – 2014), and runs advice columns covering topics such as “how to eat chicken bones in front of a hot date” (*Daily Sun*, 2015). As such, participant one said the *Daily Sun* was diametrically opposed to the goals of upliftment of the Black community espoused by *Sowetan*:

In my view the *Daily Sun* is an instrument by a group powerful white people to mock, ridicule and undermine the intelligence, value system, aspirations and dreams of Black folks. In my opinion, in most part, I think it’s a substandard and toxic newspaper which should either be cleaned up or banned all together.

*Sowetan* is a paper with a rich history of defending black community and not to ridicule them. It was created to convey content that celebrates the dignity of blacks and not to undermine it. It endeavored to raise black challenges and proffer solutions.

This is arguably not the case with tabloids such as *The Voice* [a regional tabloid on sale mainly in the Western Cape province of South Africa] and *Daily Sun* which entrench poverty, racial prejudice and crime among black and so-called colored communities. (*participant one*)

Participant one references the belief that it was unlikely that *Sowetan* readers would find the *Daily Sun* to be a worthwhile replacement for *Sowetan*. Participant five also voices opposition to the “tabloidization” of *Sowetan*, stating that following convergence, *Sowetan* seemed to be disregarding its traditional mandate and competing with these tabloids:

In the past definitely because *Sowetan* wrote about the struggle, about Black life, things that affected Black people but now I don't think they still play that role. I think it is more like writing stories that sell the newspaper, I don't think they really write stories that identify with Black people. At the moment if you pick up *Sowetan* and then you pick up the *Daily Sun*, there is not that much difference because I think *Sowetan* is more like a tabloid and in the past it used to write about serious stories, things that really affected people but now it is more like – it runs these popular stories and it competes with the *Daily Sun*. (participant five)

These participants' opinions are in line with studies which have made explicit that the *Daily Sun* newspaper not only has a “reputation for sensationalism and championing of superstition” (Adendorff & Smith, 2014, p. 521), but also that it avoids coverage that emphasises how political and economic decisions by those in power impact on the Black community, in favour of tales about individuals and their often outlandish experiences. While *Sowetan* refused to carry articles that would support the promotion of superstition, the *Daily Sun* foregrounds superstition. According to the former publisher of the tabloid, the late Deon du Plessis, the *Daily Sun* was aimed at:

the guy in the blue overalls, a skilled black South African worker who is saving for a Toyota and owns a home in his township. He wants very much to know when police catch criminals, when evil spirits might be lurking, and when mattresses are on sale (Brulliard, 2008, p.1 in Adendorff and Smith, 2014, p. 524).

Du Plessis also said that for the *Daily Sun*'s readers, “the politics of struggle were over” (Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p. 533), whereas *Sowetan* continued, post-apartheid, to

highlight the struggles faced by Black readers who were still largely shut out of the economy (Commission for Employment Equity Report, 2009 – 2010). The differences between *Sowetan* and the *Daily Sun* have also been highlighted by Franklin (2009) who referred to *Sowetan* as "the mainstream stalwart of black journalism" (p.162) and pointed out that when Adelaide Tambo, well-known anti-apartheid activist and wife of former ANC president Oliver Tambo died in 2007, and *Sowetan* led the paper the next day with a story entitled "A nation mourns", du Plessis "ridiculed" *Sowetan's* choice of front page story, saying that the "collective is dead" (Franklin, 2009, p.162). According to du Plessis, the typical *Daily Sun* reader as a man who "worried about his kids, rather than manning the barricades" (Adendorff & Smith, 2014, p. 521). According to du Plessis (2006), *Daily Sun* readers were "cheerful" people, because apartheid had been vanquished and because "great things were happening in their lives", and also because they were not "deeply analytical people" (Du Plessis, 2006, p. 49 in Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p. 533) – again a complete contrast with *Sowetan* where it was acknowledged that Black communities and workers continued to act collectively to improve their social and political situation, as expressed by one participant in this study:

*Sowetan* has carried the dreams, hopes and aspirations of black South African as well as mirrored their fears and struggles in a country which remain economically dominated by the white minority. (participant one)

The *Daily Sun* has also been named as having contributed to anti-Black xenophobia (or afrophobia) in South Africa. According to Nyamnjoh (2010), tabloid newspapers in South Africa were also "all too ready to caricature and misrepresent" Black migrants from other African countries (p. 70) as being people who stood in the way of Black South Africans achieving financial security. Nyamnjoh writes that "it is hardly

surprising therefore, that following the May 2008 violent uprisings against *Makwerekwere* [Black nationals from other African countries], the *Daily Sun*, one of the leading tabloids and the most widely circulated in areas affected, not only failed to condemn the violence forthrightly but was also found guilty of employing inappropriate and discriminatory terminology to describe black African immigrants” (Nyamnjoh, 2010, p. 68 and 69). Nyamnjoh describes the stance taken by the *Daily Sun* as one which sought to first generate then replicate a distorted and static “frozen imagery” (Nyamnjoh, 2010, p.70) of Black African migrants instead of writing about Black African migrants as human beings who shared similar life experiences as other South Africans.

There is an ongoing academic debate globally over whether tabloids are a trashy form of entertainment which “contribute to a process of depoliticization” (Wasserman, 2009, p. 338) or whether they play a valuable role in “public life” by acting as service newspapers. The process through which tabloid newspapers depoliticise readers has been summed up as one where an accentuation on political stories and a cardinal focus on covering public interest news stories (Nicholas and o’Malley, 2013) is abandoned by the tabloid newspaper which often instead “panders to the lowest common denominator of public taste, it simplifies, it personalises, it thrives on sensation and scandal” (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2007, p. 283) and may even lead to “cynicism and a lack of interest in politics, while ignoring the real political issues in favour of superficial political scandal” (Örnebring and Jönsson, 2007, p. 283). Tabloids can also play a role in depoliticising the public just as mainstream newspapers can Wade (2011) has found that newspapers “can actively construct consensus by offering unique frames that depoliticize advocacy” (p. 1165).



In South Africa, leading Black public intellectuals and former journalists and editors such as South Africa's national Press Ombudsman Joe Thloloe, who has served as chairman of the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF), president of the Union of Black Journalists and Media Workers Association of South Africa, and editor of *Sowetan* from 1997 to 2008, support the idea that tabloid newspapers depoliticise the public. Thloloe has stated that the *Daily Sun* depicts Black people only in terms of negative racial stereotypes, and called it a paper "owned by white editorial directors who 'knew' the Bantu [Black people who speak the languages of Central and Southern Africa]"(Thloloe, 2004 in Franklin, 2009, p.165).

The concept of "knowing the Bantu" and hence knowing what "the Bantu" should be reading about themselves is a long-standing problem in South Africa dating back to the colonial discourse premised on Eurocentric notions that whites possess the authority to define the narrative, while the Black 'Other' is meant to simply receive this information (Fikes, 2009). The father of Black Consciousness in South Africa, Steve Biko wrote that whites invariably position themselves as teachers of Western wisdom, and urged Black South Africans to put an end to "the superior-inferior white-black stratification that makes the white a perpetual teacher and the black a perpetual pupil (and a poor one at that)" (Biko, 1987, p.24). The deliberate depoliticisation of Black readers by the *Daily Sun* has also been referred to by Tleane who said that tabloids, including the *Daily Sun*, had robbed "the working classes 'of platforms to express themselves, especially their economic conditions'" (Nicol, 2005, p.9 in Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p.540); and Khumalo who labelled the tabloids "morally uninspiring and unhelpful" for continually publishing photographs of dead bodies "and countless stories celebrating superstitions and *muti* murders [murders of people for their body parts which are then used in making 'medicines']" (2008, p.2 in Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p.540).

Another marked difference between the *Daily Sun* and *Sowetan* is seen in the efforts the *Daily Sun* makes to realise its creation of an “imagined community” and to create a “sense of group identity” (Adendorff and Smith, 2014, p. 525 and 527). With its publisher having identified what he wanted the *Daily Sun*’s buyers to read, the *Daily Sun* makes it clear who their “ideal reader” is, by featuring that reader’s letter to the editor as “the letter of the day placed in the middle of the page... marked prominently by a thick border separating it from surrounding letters” (Adendorff and Smith, 2014, p. 524). This approach by the *Daily Sun* recreates “the ideal reader’s identity as its own, thereby showing what values, norms, and beliefs the imagined community aligns with” (Adendorff and Smith, 2014, p. 525 and 527). At *Sowetan*, on the other hand, stories were largely chosen on the basis that they covered a political significant event, or that they impacted on a large number of Black people in one of the major townships, especially Soweto (participant five), or if they reflected the triumph of Black people over adversity. My own experience at *Sowetan*, working with a group of Cape Town-based freelance journalists on a short lived Cape Town edition of the newspaper, was that if the freelancers turned in any article about a love triangle, superstition, or about one person blaming a neighbour for something, I would receive a curt message from the newsdesk reminding me to emphasise to the freelancers that they were “not working at the *Daily Sun*”. It was not important to place the most scandalous story on the front page if this involved three individuals in a small town, but it was important for *Sowetan* to “never miss a big story happening in Soweto, never miss a big story happening in Soshanguve, in all these mega-townships” (*participant five*).

It is noteworthy that several journalism academics (Wasserman, 2009; Örnebring and Jönsson, 2007; Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010) have concluded that the *Daily Sun* and other South African tabloids “should not be too easily dismissed as politically

irrelevant, or unduly criticised for having a depoliticising or socially harmful influence on their readers” (Wasserman, 2009, p.20), on the grounds that the newspaper is responsive to Black working class and poor readers and often covers stories about evictions, racism and police violence (Wasserman, 2008). Based on qualitative research done with *Daily Sun* journalists, Wasserman (2009) found too that these journalists had stronger interlocutory connection with their readers than journalists on mainstream newspapers, mainly because they were instructed by editors to practice “an ethnographic type of journalism in which they were “ ‘embedded’ in the community” (Wasserman, 2009, p.23).

Other academics have concluded that the *Daily Sun* comes close to practicing “service journalism”, where “the role of the journalist is as advocate and campaigner on behalf of consumers” (Eide, 1997, p.178 in Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p. 535) and that on a continuum between “trash”, “tabloid” and “service and campaign journalism” (p.536), the *Daily Sun* would be appropriately positioned “within the tabloid/service journalism end of the spectrum” (p. 536):

<b>Trash</b>	<b>Tabloid</b>	<b>Service &amp; campaign Journalism</b>
Shock aesthetics	Moral disorder	News-you-can-use
Pronounced sensationalism	Threats to everyday life	Provides guidance to improve daily life
Disregard of ethics		

Figure 1: Continuum showing the characteristics of trash, tabloid and service and campaign journalism (Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p. 536)

However, none of these studies have used critical race theory to research the *Daily Sun*, even though the newspaper is published for Black readers. The problem of using a “colour blind” approach to research matters related to race, racism and Blackness has been dwelt upon at length by critical race theorists. The ‘colour blind’ approach ignores

the historical and present day advantages enjoyed by whites; and because “racial inequality permeates every aspect of social life...all the way to the macro-economic system” (Zamudio, M., Russell, C., Rios, F. and Bridgeman, C., 2011, p.3), ‘colour blind’ research is unable to shed any light on matters regarding Black people. For example, Steenveld and Strelitz’s study supports the liberal and colour blind notion that working class citizens (i.e. citizens of all races) living in Western democracies “have no interest” in keeping tabs on either political or economic power, and hence prefer to read scandalous or exciting non-political news that is provided by tabloid newspapers (Steenveld and Strelitz, 2010, p. 541). They suggest that as a result, the *Daily Sun* could not be blamed for depoliticising its readers (who Steenveld and Strelitz suggest had essentially already depoliticised themselves). Yet the South African population’s involvement in politics differs vastly by race. Black South Africans have traditionally been highly politicised, having mounted a decades-long local anti-apartheid struggle in workplaces, churches, institutions of higher learning, in addition to setting up an armed wing to combat apartheid, and also establishing a well-organised global solidarity structure against apartheid which encompassed a successful sanctions and divestment campaign. This politicisation continues today in the form of frequent protests in Black communities and social movement building (Pithouse, 2010, 2014, ; Naidoo, 2015; Alexander, 2010; Alexander et al; 2012).

I would argue that researching the *Daily Sun* without using critical race theory means there can be no examination of the extent to which the *Daily Sun* does or does not report from the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786). This accounts for the wide disparities between the conclusions drawn by the academic studies cited above and the views, on the other hand, of the majority of participants in this study and of leading

South African Black intellectuals. In this study, only participant nine felt that Black readers could benefit from reading the tabloids, for the following reasons:

Contrary to popular belief, the *Daily Sun* carries stories that are of real interest (not just interesting) to the black and working class readers, including politics, sports and faith issues. *Sowetan* is upper black working class and black middle-class orientated while *Daily Sun* is far more working class. (participant nine)

However, participant nine later said that *Sowetan*'s editors were still running the newspaper as if "Black people were confined to townships and rural areas and their children went to exclusively Black only schools, or where Blacks were working class or peasants". My interpretation of this is that participant nine believed that *Sowetan* should orientate itself more to the Black middle or upper working class, and not that it was already targeting stories at that market. For example, participant nine voiced frustration at *Sowetan*'s failure to cover "Black excellence", despite the frequent profiles on Black achievers and *Sowetan*'s Nation Building Programme pages. My interpretation of this is that participant nine felt that *Sowetan* should move away from its working class focus, and if it did not, then *Sowetan* readers could just as easily read the working class *Daily Sun* newspaper. However, this view was not shared by the eight other participants.

Participant eight acknowledged that there were people who wanted to read the *Daily Sun* but voiced opposition to the tabloid being the only option for Black readers, saying:

...this assumes that all of us are interested in sensational, tabloid journalism.

While there is obviously a place for *Daily Sun*, I think Black readers also deserve to be given a choice of what to read – good solid journalism.

*Sowetan* had to change with the times to remain relevant and profitable, but it did not have to lose its character and culture which had carried it and its readers for so long. *Daily Sun* sometimes makes a mockery of its readers. It obviously appeals to a sizeable chunk of the market, but it does not need to be so condescending. (participant eight)

So, participant eight draws a clear distinction between the ethos at tabloids like the *Daily Sun* (“sensational, tabloid journalism”) and newspapers like *Sowetan* (“good solid journalism”). Overall, the majority of participants in this study supported the continued existence of a serious Black press. They felt it was not viable to replace *Sowetan*’s historical practice of Black journalism with a new crossover journalism approach, because readers still wanted a Black daily newspaper, and because Black journalism in the traditional advocacy or crusading style, was still appropriate for covering news from the “Black angle”. The participants also opposed any suggestion that Black readers who wanted to read a specifically Black English-language daily newspaper but were no longer able to because of *Sowetan*’s new crossover status, could simply read the *Daily Sun*. Participants argued that the *Daily Sun* could not be described as a Black newspaper because it did not practice “race advocacy” or report news from the “Black angle” (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786), but instead often opposed these practices – instead of countering racist and negative stereotypes of Black people, the *Daily Sun* often “caricatured” Black individuals and communities. Participants also pointed to the existence and rumoured existence of a number of other regional and indigenous language newspapers targeting a Black readership to support their argument that the Black press was still popular in South Africa. Two participants said that they had heard that a new local Black newspaper had recently been started for primary distribution in Soweto – *Soweto Today*. Although the participants stated that they did not know much

about this regional newspaper, two participants also pointed to the continued popularity of Soweto-based radio stations, as well as the isiZulu language KwaZulu-Natal based newspaper, *Isolezwe*, as proof of the viability of the Black press:

People still want to read about what is happening with them. The fact that there is a newspaper in KwaZulu-Natal called *Isolezwe*, it's the biggest circulation newspaper in the... the biggest Black newspaper in the country, tells you that there is still a Black readership out there...it is a Zulu newspaper that is popular in KwaZulu-Natal, and therefore to me, the Black readership is still there.

(participant two)

The intention of this study is not to compare *Isolezwe* with *Sowetan* (since *Isolezwe* is a regional newspaper, not a national newspaper, and is not widely read by Black non-isiZulu speakers and hence the two newspapers have different readerships). However, participant two is clearly pointing out that in terms of content, *Isolezwe* is positioned closer to *Sowetan* (a Black newspaper) than *Daily Sun* (a tabloid). According to Wasserman, *Isolezwe* and other isiZulu language newspapers are “positioned at higher ends of the market spectrum than the tabloids” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 193). Hence, the fact that *Isolezwe* attracts a large readership shows that there is still a market for Black newspapers in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: Participants' perspectives as seen through the lens of critical race theory**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The over-arching theoretical framework that shapes discussions in this thesis is critical race theory. Proponents of this theory argue that 'race' has to be centred in analyses of injustice (Maisuria, 2012, p. 79). Critical race theory recognises "the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of colour as sources of knowledge" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 10 in Maisuria, 2012, p. 84). Moreover, critical race theory's ultimate objective is to contribute to efforts that aim to eliminate racial oppression (Lawrence III et al. 1993).

The role of white researchers in critical race theory has been critiqued and it has been questioned whether whites can "use critical race theory tenets when they don't have the racial standpoint, experience or perspective to adequately use the theory and its accompanying methodologies" (Hartlep, 2013, p.59). Hartlep argues that only persons of colour can use critical race theory, because "a critical race theory in which white researchers are allowed to narrate the oppression and subordination that non-Whites experience, is, by definition, flawed" (Hartlep, 2013, p.59). As a white researcher, I support Hartlep's argument, but in this case it would have been extremely difficult to investigate the merger of a Black newspaper with a number of historically white newspapers without looking at the historical role of the Black press, the lack of diversity in mainstream newsrooms, the use of the "Black angle" in the Black press, and the prevalence of racism in the white mainstream media. Given my previous relationship with the participants, I felt it was inevitable that participants would speak in our interviews about the historical role of *Sowetan* as a Black newspaper, the use of the "Black angle" (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) and the differences between the white and



Black press, particularly since *Sowetan* journalists had objected to the convergence process when it began (and while we worked together at the newspaper) on the grounds that they did not approve of merging a Black newspaper with white or mainstream newspapers. To have explored these aspects of the convergence process without the understanding, as espoused by critical race theory, that “racism is ordinary and structured by white supremacy” and that “ ‘race’ is a social construction” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 7-9 in Maisuria, 2012, p. 78), would have been to explore the convergence falsely through a colour-blind lens which may have negated an inquiry into *Sowetan*’s past and future advocacy role as a Black newspaper. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the *Daily Sun* tabloid newspaper is aimed at a Black readership but run by white management and practices none of the central tenets of Black journalism. Yet existing research studies into the paper have failed to use critical race theory as an underpinning and therefore have been unable to explore any issues related to the appropriateness of the *Daily Sun*’s treatment of Black readers.

Critical race theory has two intellectual strands; a discourse strand and a structural strand. The former explores the system of thoughts, images and language by which the racist society creates and maintains racial reality. The structural strand, on the other hand, focuses on the way in which the structure of society and its institutions serve the interests of the dominant groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2004), through institutional racism, among other things. This thesis deployed both branches of critical race theory.

## **7.2 Critical race theory’s Discourse strand**

One of the main themes that emerged under the critical race theory discourse strand is that some respondents felt that *Sowetan*’s role in reporting racism diminished following convergence. According to participant five, “in the past definitely because *Sowetan*

wrote about the struggle, about Black life, things that affected Black people but now I don't think they still play that role." Respondents pointed to the lack of interest by their new, mainly white editors, in stories about racism. Participant one pointed out that as a Black journalist, who is routinely subjected to racism in his day-to-day life, racism is a social problem that deserves to be vigorously debated and reported by newspapers. Using the terms "coconut-ish, another participant stated that following convergence, *Sowetan* only appeared to be Black but in reality, was white on the inside since most of the paper's content, post-convergence, was written by a large group of journalists working in the centralised newsroom who were generating content that could be used across all Times Media Group newspaper titles, Black or not.

Participants felt a sense of ideological betrayal from seeing *Sowetan* converged. This thesis argues that as a neoliberal project (also known as the financialisation of the media), convergence is based on the colour-blind ideology rejected by critical race theory, which shapes the "crossover" marketing strategies of convergent newspapers. The colour-blind ideology serves as a platform for continuing racial inequality (Walsh, 2009), with the outward portrayal of colour-blindness often hiding the "everyday privilege that accompanies whiteness as normative and mainstream" (Bell, 1992 in Rampersad, 2012, p. 71). According to Bailey (2007), colour-blind responses to racism only show "how whites can act in racist ways while at the same time believing they are behaving" (p.86) in an ethical manner. This thesis uses Goldberg's (2002) insight to argue that a neoliberal state like South Africa, although post-apartheid, is in fact a racial state. The economy of South Africa is racialised, with 70% of whites and just 13.6% of 'Black Africans' (a term used by government to distinguish between Black people of African descent and Black people of Indian or Asian descent) occupying top management positions "despite whites only constituting 10.3% of the entire

economically active population while Africans constitute 76.2% of the working population” (White males continue to dominate top management positions, 2015). Colour-blindness attempts to transcend racism without acknowledging “racial histories and their accompanying racist inequities and iniquities” or recognising that those histories have created “racially classed and gendered distinctions” between people (Goldberg, 2002, p. 221).

This critical race theory perspective is consistent with the views of the respondents in this study. Participants in this study felt that the converged newsroom facilitated a “colour blind” working environment which was not race neutral at all, but was one in which Black journalists and readers were undermined; for example, the incorrect spelling of Black names that began to be practiced by *Sowetan* following convergence. Participants clearly connected this practice to the insidious apartheid practice of devaluing and refusing to pronounce African names and even of whites renaming Black people with English names. The incorrect spelling of African names is done to emphasise whiteness is the norm, and that African names are “outside the norm” because they are “difficult” to spell and pronounce (Walsh, 2009). For instance, participant four argued that:

You know *Sowetan* is a Black title, we should know Black people better than anyone else but if you are going to misspell a Black surname, if you are going to for example refer to Basetsana Kumalo, whose surname is Ku and refer to her as Khu, you know that shows how little importance you attach to your work.

(participant four)

My interpretation of this is that participants are referring here to an “othering” process whereby normative whiteness was reinforced via the convergence process (Walsh,

2009). This reinforcing of whiteness as the norm coincided with the period during which *Sowetan* management removed all the section editors, making some redundant, demoting others and in some cases appointing new white editors in the same position, leaving the Black editors without a clear role. During this period, the mostly Black journalists at *Sowetan* were to work under mainly white section editors from other titles. Participants felt that this irrevocably altered the daily news content of *Sowetan* and contributed to alienating Black journalists from their own newspaper. This alienation was exacerbated when the 'Nation Building Programme' pages were cancelled. Notwithstanding the initial Black Consciousness community resistance to the Nation Building Programme decades earlier, to participants in this study the termination of the Nation Building Programme represented the forced end of a project founded by a revered, deceased Black editor (Aggrey Klaaste), to emphasise Black excellence. So, following this, participants felt that the converged *Sowetan* had become a newspaper that stood for a vision that was inconsistent with the views of the Black community. As seen through a critical race theory lens, the recasting of *Sowetan* as a paper that would also appeal to white readers alienated participants, while simultaneously, strengthened the white normative project that research participants felt was being established at the convergent newsroom of the *Sowetan*.

### **7.3 Critical race theory's Structural Strand**

As already pointed out in the previous chapter, convergence goes hand-in-hand with downsizing, restructuring, and redundancies. Respondents in this study pointed out that news about downsizing at *Sowetan* reached the journalists in the form of a rumour rather than a formal announcement by management or communique to the journalists' union. Participant eight points out that in early 2009 there were rumours that the new

owners were going to implement changes at *Sowetan*. Soon after the relocation, came the retrenchments.

The retrenchment of experienced Black journalists meant there were no longer any editors experienced in the praxis of gathering Black news to mentor the younger generation of journalists. Respondents felt that this further contributed to the altering of the culture and values of *Sowetan's* newsroom. These practices are consistent with the colour-blind ideology which shapes the cross-over marketing strategies of a converged newspaper. As far as the colour-blind ideology is concerned, organisations that embody a Black identity, exist in an antiquated state of racial confinement from which multicultural, multiracial society must be delivered (Sexton, 2008). The newly converged newsroom further reflects the commodity culture that South Africa's post-apartheid government encourages. Although not explicitly racist, the commodity culture is based on the consumption values that are consistent with whiteness. According to Wilson (2005, p. 587), "while the model of consumption may be white, the way of capitalism is not to deny anyone access to the commodity circuit." Hence, Black consumers largely understand that they may engage in the commodity circuit as long as they accept that, by and large, the market reflects the tastes and values of the target market – middle class white people. In such a state of affairs, as participants have pointed out, the logical fear is that the Black Consciousness tradition that is associated with *Sowetan* historically, will be jettisoned. This had a negative impact on the health of the respondents. For instances, four participants mentioned physical illness, stress and psychological post-traumatic symptoms experienced by themselves or other journalists because of the convergence process.

Huber and Solorzano (2015) are of the view that research shows that there are harmful psychological and physiological effects of negative racial experiences. For instance, young black American men “targeted by stop and frisk practices may become angry or frustrated, their blood pressure may rise, and heart rates may increase” (Huber and Solorzano, 2015, p. 310). Over time, that could lead serious health problems such as high blood pressure, depression and anxiety (Huber and Solorzano, 2015). This thesis argues that a combination of convergence and the devaluation of the Black Consciousness tradition and what that tradition stood for, negatively impacted the health of some respondents.

#### **7.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the insight generated from this chapter was gained from critical reflection on the racialized lived experience of the participants, as is consistent with the critical race theory approach. According to Lawrence III, Matsuda, Delgado and Crenshaw (1993, p. 6), “critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color” in its exploration of how modern society functions. Using critical race theory to deconstruct the ideology around newspaper convergence in South Africa has shown that concepts such as cross-over marketing and colour-blindness serve, in reality, to support the existing position of the mainstream media. This position is to promote white standards of news as the norm, to undermine the advocacy journalism practiced by historically Black newspapers, to push Black news out to the periphery, and to create an imagined, or I would argue, “imaginary” community of Black readers who are actively discouraged from reading the kind of news that promotes Black unity, Black advancement, and political participation.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT:            CONCLUSION**

This phenomenological study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding into the phenomenon of downsizing and convergence on a major Black daily newspaper: *Sowetan*. The study did not aim to conclude that all journalists at Black newspapers, or even at *Sowetan*, share the same opinions of convergence, but sought instead to centre the experiences and opinions of the journalists who had worked on the newspaper. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn about whether, as per the research question, *Sowetan* journalists navigated the convergence of their specialised newspaper with other newspapers more generally serving a mainstream readership, emerged, or not as participants in a new *Sowetan* that took the form of a crossover multimedia product. These conclusions are that journalists on a formerly Black newspaper continue to value the idea of a Black press even after they are removed from it, or transferred into a “crossover” publication or move to work for a mainstream newspaper. Considering the views of participants as articulated in the discussion chapters above, it is clear that this group of *Sowetan* journalists were highly committed to working in service to Black readers, not only in actively using the ‘Black angle’ when writing stories, or in spending most of their time in Black communities seeking out and covering news, but through their participation in *Sowetan* initiatives which had as their goal the elevation of the Black community (the Nation Building Programme).

The participants in this study stated repeatedly that they did not believe that South Africa had entered a “post-racial” era where Black news would be irrelevant. Even after they left *Sowetan*, or were made redundant, participants in this study continued to value the Black Press and were very critical of the practices of the non-Black mainstream media and the Black-focussed “sensational” tabloid media. It is clear from the discussion chapters above that not one participant embraced the idea of either the

tabloid media or the mainstream media as being preferable as a work environment, or as a read, to the Black Press. While one participant stated that convergence had been necessary at *Sowetan* because the newspaper was in need of modernisation, this participant still believed that *Sowetan* should have foregrounded the concept of Black excellence – in other words, that *Sowetan* should continue to operate as a Black newspaper. Hence, one can conclude that the journalists' political beliefs in Black Consciousness was not diminished even after *Sowetan*'s newsroom was converged with non-Black titles and it lost its own Black Consciousness role.

Like many other studies into converged newspapers, this study also finds that after it was downsized and converged with other newspapers, *Sowetan* was no longer able to devote as much attention to the community it served, for a number of reasons, namely that during the downsizing phase of convergence, nearly all the section editors and some senior journalists were made redundant, and two of the paper's news bureaux shut down completely while another three subsumed into the newly centralised news generating systems. Participants in this study clearly believed, as per the second research question, that convergence had an impact on the paper's Black identity and role within South African society. Participants in this study saw the redundancies and closure of *Sowetan*'s news bureaux, which occurred as part of the convergence process, as the beginning of an attack by newspaper management on the paper's Black identity. The first reason for this belief is that these processes stripped the converged *Sowetan* of the layer of experienced and overtly Black Conscious section editors who had previously not only provided leadership on the newspaper, but had also mentored new and inexperienced Black journalists. The second reason participants gave for their belief that convergence had impacted upon *Sowetan*'s Black identity was that they were unable to practice their use of the "Black angle" (Clawson et al. 2003, p.786) when



reporting for a converged newsroom that placed no importance on Black issues. So, even though they were still writing for *Sowetan* (amongst other titles) and even though *Sowetan* still had a Black readership, the participants felt unable because of the structure of the newly converged workplace, to generate content that would be of interest to Black readers.

The participants indicated that they felt the Black press was still relevant and could not be replaced by 'crossover' newspapers. Currently, Black newspapers consciously adopt a "reflective, interpretive approach" when reporting the news, which allows them to write about "systemic and structural inequalities", unlike journalists from outside the Black press who "tend to take an episodic rather than a thematic perspective towards the events they cover" (Campbell et al. 2011, p. 23). On the other hand, the Black press will report such stories as racism because African American readers have long ago tired of "harmful, unpleasant, or distasteful media representations" (Davis and Gandy, 1999, p. 368) of themselves, such as the mainstream media image of "black males as violent and threatening" (Davis and Gandy, 1999, p. 13).

I have identified the limitations of this study as follows:

- 1) The study has a sole focus on the experiences of *Sowetan* journalists, and did not seek to include *Sowetan* sub-editors who may also have been made redundant through the convergence process. The choice to limit the sample to journalists and editors only was made because these staff members are at the coalface of generating news and interacting with *Sowetan* readers. I thus believed them best positioned to answer the research questions, namely, whether the journalists became committed to writing crossover news following the convergence process or not; and what effects *Sowetan* journalists believed

convergence to have had on the paper's identity and role within South African society. However, limiting this study to journalists alone potentially means there is less diversity in the views expressed in this study. Two thirds of the participants interviewed were part of union negotiations with Times Media Group against convergence redundancies, and hence would probably have developed a joint, consensus position against convergence.

- 2) The research design was limited to presenting only the participants' views of the convergence phenomenon through semi-structured interviews. It did not include a period of observation in the main newsroom in Johannesburg, or the satellite newsrooms in EThekweni and Pretoria. This was primarily because I began this study after the bulk of the convergence had taken place, and after a large number of redundancies had happened. To have observed a smaller pool of *Sowetan* journalists at work in the newly centralized newsrooms with their new colleagues who previously worked at Times Media Group's other titles would have altered the scope of this study.

Possibilities for future research could include a content analysis study of articles that have appeared in either *Sowetan* or *City Press* or both, before and after convergence. Such a study would illuminate how converging these Black newspapers with historically white newspapers has impacted on the content of the newspapers.

I believe a study of the *Daily Sun* tabloid newspaper using critical race theory would also be a strong possibility for future research. This study could focus on the *Daily Sun's* promotion (or not, as the study will determine) of negative stereotypes of Black

people and communities, particularly the existing negative stereotypes of African hypersexuality, a pre-occupation with witchcraft and superstition, and with criminal profiling of Black individuals and communities.

In conclusion, this thesis has described how the mainstream media marginalises stories about racism or perpetuates racism by using negative racial stereotypes to report on Black people. The Black press, on the other hand, has a successful track record of advocacy journalism against slavery and apartheid and is ideally positioned to deliver stories on the manifestations of 21<sup>st</sup> century institutional racism. The Black press has also been credited with continuing to report the news “without discrediting the influence of race” (Campbell, LeDuff, Jenkins, & Brown, 2011, p. 23) even in the "so-called 'post-racial' era" (p. 22). Participants in this study clearly believe that the continued existence of the Black press is important and necessary.

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