

Reconceptualizing journalists under captured patrimonial media systems as a fractured  
interpretive community: The case of Zimbabwe

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Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way? (Proverbs 20 v.24).



## **Abstract**

Journalists within a nation are often described as members of the same interpretive community, especially in liberal Western democracies where their working environments are characterized by stable democratic conditions. This is helped by a sense of cooperation between the news media and the state. Conditions are different in post-colonial nations of the Global South, however, where the relationship between the news media and democracy is not fully developed. In fact, most of the Global South countries are at various democratization stages. They do not have the same levels of press freedom and autonomy as found in North America and Western Europe. As a result, not only are debates about press freedom fierce, but journalistic roles and ethical orientations are also hotly contested. These different journalistic conditions offer an opportunity to examine how journalists in the Global South operate as an interpretive community. Zimbabwe is one such country where journalists have been polarized for the past two decades, amidst press freedom contests. The study examines this debate by looking at Zimbabwean journalists as a fractured interpretive community rhetorically engaged with social interlocutors during key moments like World Press Freedom, newspaper closures, media policy debates, obituaries, and anniversary commemorations. Guided by theories of metajournalistic discourse, post-colonial theory and ubuntuism, textual analysis and interviews are used to examine points of convergence and divergence among Zimbabwean journalists and non-journalists on their conceptualization of press freedom and journalistic roles. This analysis advances general propositions not only about how journalistic interpretive communities operate, but also about how they operate in various contexts and what factors must be considered in

understanding how journalistic interpretive communities come into being or get disintegrated.

# Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>xvi</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>TAKING A DISCURSIVE APPROACH IN UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES .....</u></b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>LIBERAL DISRUPTION IN ZIMBABWE AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO UNDERSTAND GLOBAL SOUTH JOURNALISTIC CULTURES .....</u></b>	<b>3</b>
<b><u>TAKING A METAJOURNALISTIC DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE TO UNDERSTAND ZIMBABWEAN JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES .....</u></b>	<b>5</b>
<b><u>PRESS FREEDOM DEBATES AS A GATEWAY TO UNDERSTANDING JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE .....</u></b>	<b>8</b>
<b><u>RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b><u>SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....</u></b>	<b>11</b>
<b><u>ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY .....</u></b>	<b>14</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b><u>THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES .....</u></b>	<b>17</b>
<b><u>THE WESTERN JOURNALISM CONTEXT AS A LIBERAL JOURNALISTIC FIELD .....</u></b>	<b>22</b>
<b><u>HOW JOURNALISTS UNDER LIBERAL SETTINGS OF NORTH AMERICA AND WESTERN EUROPE OPERATE AS AN INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS .....</u></b>	<b>25</b>
<b><u>PARADIGM REPAIR AND BOUNDARY WORK AS COMMUNITY BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE TOOLS. ....</u></b>	<b>25</b>
<b><u>COLLECTIVE MEMORY AS A JOURNALISTIC AUTHORITY AND COMMUNITY BUILDING TOOL .....</u></b>	<b>29</b>
<b><u>PREVALENCE OF A MONITORIAL JOURNALISTIC CULTURE IN WESTERN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES .....</u></b>	<b>31</b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b>33</b>

<b>CHAPTER 3.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b><u>JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTESTED SUB-SAHARAN TRANSITIONAL POST-COLONIAL CONTEXT .....</u></b>	<b><u>34</u></b>
<b><u>DEMOCRATIZATION, UNRESOLVED COLONIAL LEGACIES, AND THE EMERGENCE OF AN AMBIVALENT JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA .....</u></b>	<b><u>35</u></b>
<b>SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA’S PATRIMONIAL MEDIA SYSTEMS AND THEIR THREAT TO A UNITED JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b><u>ZIMBABWE’S INDEPENDENCE AND THE BIRTH OF A POLARIZED JOURNALISTIC FIELD. ....</u></b>	<b><u>44</u></b>
<b>ZIMBABWEAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE TOO POLARIZED FOR A UNITED JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY ..</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>TOO CLOSE TO THE CENTERS OF POWER: ZIMBABWEAN NEWS MEDIA ENVIRONMENT AS A POLARIZED FIELD ...</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>PRESS FREEDOM DEBATES AS METAJOURNALISTIC DISCOURSE TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE ZIMBABWEAN JOURNALISTS OPERATE AS AN INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>METAJOURNALISTIC DISCOURSE AS A LENS TO UNDERSTAND JOURNALISTIC CULTURE .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>56</u></b>
<b>CHAPTER 4.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b><u>METHODOLOGY.....</u></b>	<b><u>58</u></b>
<b><u>DATA SAMPLE .....</u></b>	<b><u>59</u></b>
<b>PRESS FREEDOM DEBATES .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>PRESS LAW AND PRESS REFORM DEBATES .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>OBITUARIES AND ANNIVERSARY ARTICLES.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>THE DAILY NEWS CLOSURE AND DIGITAL JOURNALISM DEBATES AFTER HOPEWELL CHIN’ONO’S ARREST .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>INTERVIEWS.....</b>	<b>65</b>
<b><u>DATA ANALYSIS .....</u></b>	<b><u>68</u></b>
<b><u>POSITIONALITY .....</u></b>	<b><u>69</u></b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>70</u></b>
<b>PART 1.....</b>	<b>71</b>

<b><u>WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE A JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY? – GEOGRAPHIC CULTURE AND POWER STRUCTURE EFFECTS .....</u></b>	<b><u>71</u></b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 5.....</u></b>	<b><u>77</u></b>
<b><u>PRESS FREEDOM AND ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATION IN THE ZIMBABWEAN PUBLIC PRESS: A NATIONALISTIC PERSPECTIVE .....</u></b>	<b><u>77</u></b>
<b><u>THE PUBLIC PRESS’ NATIONALISTIC CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PRESS FREEDOM .....</u></b>	<b><u>77</u></b>
<b><u>PRESS FREEDOM MUST BE LOCALLY CONTEXTUALIZED.....</u></b>	<b><u>77</u></b>
<b><u>SHADOWS EVERYWHERE: ZIMBABWEAN REGIME’S INSECURITIES, FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN AND PRESS FREEDOM LIMITATIONS .....</u></b>	<b><u>88</u></b>
<b><u>IN DEFENSE OF THE NATIONAL INTEREST: THE PUBLIC PRESS’S JOURNALISTIC ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATION .....</u></b>	<b><u>98</u></b>
<b><u>DEFINING THE NATIONAL INTEREST .....</u></b>	<b><u>100</u></b>
<b><u>FOURTH ESTATE ROLE REDEFINED: THE PUBLIC PRESS AS A GOVERNMENT PARTNER.....</u></b>	<b><u>102</u></b>
<b><u>THE PUBLIC PRESS AS A NATION BUILDING IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUS.....</u></b>	<b><u>105</u></b>
<b><u>THE PUBLIC PRESS AS AN AGENT OF CHANGE: ADVANCING DEVELOPMENT.....</u></b>	<b><u>109</u></b>
<b><u>PUBLIC PRESS AMBIVALENCE OVER HOLDING THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABLE .....</u></b>	<b><u>112</u></b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>115</u></b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 6.....</u></b>	<b><u>119</u></b>
<b><u>PRESS FREEDOM AND ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATION IN THE ZIMBABWEAN PRIVATE PRESS: A LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE .....</u></b>	<b><u>119</u></b>
<b><u>THE PRIVATE PRESS’ LIBERAL AND UNIVERSAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PRESS FREEDOM ...</u></b>	<b><u>120</u></b>
<b><u>THE WINDHOEK DECLARATION AND THE PRIVATE PRESS’ LIBERAL CONCEPTUALIZATION OF PRESS FREEDOM.</u></b>	<b><u>121</u></b>
<b><u>PRESS FREEDOM CONTEXTUALIZATION IS A TIRED ARGUMENT: A PRIVATE PRESS PERSPECTIVE .....</u></b>	<b><u>125</u></b>
<b><u>AUTONOMY PROTECTION BOUNDARY WORK – DISPELLING PRESS FREEDOM FEARS .....</u></b>	<b><u>131</u></b>
<b><u>IN DEFENSE OF THE FOURTH ESTATE ROLE: THE PRIVATE PRESS’ JOURNALISTIC ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATION .....</u></b>	<b><u>137</u></b>
<b><u>DEFINING THE NATIONAL INTEREST: A PRIVATE PRESS PERSPECTIVE .....</u></b>	<b><u>138</u></b>
<b><u>THE FOURTH ESTATE ROLE EXTENDED: THE PRIVATE PRESS AS A GOVERNMENT ADVERSARY.....</u></b>	<b><u>141</u></b>
<b><u>THE PRESS AS A PUBLIC SPHERE .....</u></b>	<b><u>151</u></b>

PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH WATCHDOG JOURNALISM .....	155
<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>PART 2.....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b><u>DIVIDED IN LIFE AND IN DEATH: LIMITATIONS OF JOURNALISTIC COMMUNITY BUILDING MECHANISMS IN A POLARIZED CONTEXT.....</u></b>	<b><u>160</u></b>
<b><u>STRUGGLE TO REFORM THE NEWS MEDIA IN ZIMBABWE: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND POLITICAL SETBACKS .....</u></b>	<b><u>161</u></b>
TRACING THE ORIGINS OF ZIMBABWE’S FRACTURED JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY AND ITS PROFESSIONALIZATION CHALLENGES .....	165
<b>CHAPTER 7.....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b><u>ZIMBABWE MEDIA LAW REFORM DEBATES, 1995-2023 – NEWS MEDIA DANCING IN AND OUT OF GOVERNMENT’S TUNE.....</u></b>	<b><u>168</u></b>
<b><u>MEDIA LAW REFORM AND THE GENESIS OF A FRACTURED JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY IN ZIMBABWE: 1995-1999 .....</u></b>	<b><u>169</u></b>
PUBLIC PRESS CALLS FOR SELF-REGULATION.....	170
PRO-STATE NON-JOURNALISTIC ACTORS DRAW BOUNDARIES OF PERMISSIBLE FREEDOM .....	174
THE PUBLIC PRESS SUCCUMBS, COLLUDES WITH THE STATE IN SUPPORT OF STATUTORY REGULATION.....	177
LEFT ALONE: PRIVATE PRESS FACES THE WRATH OF THE STATE .....	179
<b><u>THINGS FALL APART - REPRESSIVE LAW MAKING AND FALL OF THE MEDIA REFORM AGENDA: 2000 - 2017.....</u></b>	<b><u>181</u></b>
<b>IN DEFENSE OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY: PUBLIC PRESS’ NATIONALISTIC RHETORIC.....</b>	<b>183</b>
NATION-BUILDING AS PUBLIC PRESS’ RATIONALE IN DEFENDING REPRESSIVE LAWS .....	183
FIGHTING WESTERN HEGEMONY .....	186
NORMALIZING REPRESSION.....	192
<b>FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL: PRESS LAWS AND THE PRIVATE PRESS RESPONSE.....</b>	<b>196</b>
IN DEFENSE OF LIBERAL IDEALS: PRIVATE PRESS’ ATTEMPT TO UPEND THE PUBLIC PRESS’ NATIONALISTIC RHETORIC .....	196
IN DEFENSE OF THE RULE OF LAW: PRIVATE PRESS’ FIGHT AGAINST SELECTIVE APPLICATION OF THE LAW AND UNDUE LEGAL PROCESSES.....	201
<b><u>THE NEW DISPENSATION AND MEDIA REFORM IN ZIMBABWE: ENDURING MISTRUST FROM THE PRIVATE PRESS: 2017 – 2023.....</u></b>	<b><u>206</u></b>

<b>OUT WITH THE PAST, IN WITH THE NEW: PUBLIC PRESS EMBRACES MEDIA REFORMS .....</b>	<b>209</b>
GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT TO ENDING MEDIA POLARIZATION .....	209
LIBERALIZING THE NEWS MEDIA SECTOR .....	212
<b>GOVERNMENT GIVES WITH ONE HAND, AND TAKES AWAY WITH THE OTHER: PRIVATE PRESS PERSPECTIVE ON MEDIA REFORM IN ZIMBABWE. ....</b>	<b>215</b>
POLARIZATION NEUTRALIZED OR MEDIA CAPTURE...?.....	215
ALUTA CONTINUA: MEDIA REFORM MUSTN'T BE FOR PR PURPOSES.....	218
<b><u>CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>221</u></b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 8.....</u></b>	<b><u>225</u></b>
<b><u>POLARIZATION TAKEN A GEAR UP: WHEN JOURNALISTS HATE EACH OTHER TO DEATH.....</u></b>	<b><u>225</u></b>
<b><u>DAILY NEWS CLOSURE AND THE PRESS' CONTRADICTORY RESPONSES .....</u></b>	<b><u>227</u></b>
THE <i>DAILY NEWS</i> HAS NO ONE TO BLAME BUT ITSELF: A PUBLIC PRESS' SCHADENFREUDE REACTION .....	229
PARADIGM REPAIR IN THE PRIVATELY CONTROLLED PRESS .....	237
<b><u>PRESS DISCORD IN NEGOTIATING DIGITAL JOURNALISM DEFINITIONS AND BOUNDARIES: THE CASE OF HOPEWELL CHIN'ONO.....</u></b>	<b><u>245</u></b>
HOPEWELL CHIN'ONO AND THE COVID-GATE SCANDAL.....	247
CHIN'ONO'S BRAND: SELF-POSITIONING WITHIN JOURNALISM.....	249
HOPEWELL CHIN'ONO AS A POLITICAL ACTIVIST: A PUBLIC PRESS PERSPECTIVE .....	253
HOPEWELL CHIN'ONO "IS A SMALL FISH FIGHTING STUPID GREED": A PRIVATE PRESS PERSPECTIVE.....	258
<b><u>CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>264</u></b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 9.....</u></b>	<b><u>266</u></b>
<b><u>COLLECTIVE MEMORY AS A COMMUNITY (RE)BUILDING AND MAINTENANCE TOOL: OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS .....</u></b>	<b><u>266</u></b>
<b><u>COLLECTIVE MEMORY BATTLES OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>268</u></b>
NARRATIVES OF INCLUSION: REMEMBERING ZIMBABWE'S JOURNALISTIC MARTYRS .....	269
THE NARRATIVE OF EXCLUSION: IN MEMORY OF ZIMBABWE'S PATRIOTIC JOURNALISTS.....	279
<b><u>COLLECTIVE MEMORY BATTLES OF CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY.....</u></b>	<b><u>284</u></b>
THE NARRATIVE OF CONTINUITY: JOURNALISTS NEVER DIE .....	285

DECEASED JOURNALISTS AS PART OF INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY .....	285
JOURNALISTS CONTINUE TO LIVE THROUGH THEIR MENTEES AND TRAINEES.....	290
DECEASED JOURNALISTS WILL CONTINUE TO LIVE AS PART OF NATIONAL MEMORY .....	293
<b>THE NARRATIVE OF DISCONTINUITY .....</b>	<b>295</b>
<b><u>ANNIVERSARY JOURNALISM: POSITIONING THE PRESS.....</u></b>	<b><u>299</u></b>
<b>ZIMPAPERS AS THE PEOPLE’S SERVANT: 1980-2015.....</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>THE CHAMPION OF FREEDOM: ALPHA MEDIA HOLDINGS’S (AMH) SELF-POSITIONING .....</b>	<b>302</b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION .....</u></b>	<b><u>307</u></b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 10.....</u></b>	<b><u>310</u></b>
<b><u>CONCLUSION: JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES BEYOND THE LIBERAL WESTERN WORLD.....</u></b>	<b><u>310</u></b>
<b><u>HOW CONTEXT DETERMINES THE STRUCTURE OF JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES .....</u></b>	<b><u>311</u></b>
<b>HOW ZIMBABWEAN JOURNALISTS OPERATE AS A FRACTURED INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY .....</b>	<b>313</b>
ONE COUNTRY, SAME PROFESSION, DIFFERENT FRAMES OF REFERENCE AND ROLE CONCEPTIONS.....	314
ZIMBABWEAN JOURNALISTIC INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY: A DIVIDED HOUSE THAT CANNOT STAND AGAINST PROFESSIONAL THREATS .....	319
<b>ADDING VOICE TO THE CAUSE FOR A MODERATE AND HEURISTIC APPROACH IN DE-WESTERNIZING JOURNALISM STUDIES .....</b>	<b>324</b>
<b><u>MEDIA REFORM SHOULD GO BEYOND LEGAL CHANGES: ZIMBABWE NEEDS A JOURNALISTIC CULTURAL REFORM .....</u></b>	<b><u>327</u></b>
<b><u>LIMITATIONS .....</u></b>	<b><u>332</u></b>
<b><u>FUTURE RESEARCH .....</u></b>	<b><u>333</u></b>
<b><u>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</u></b>	<b><u>336</u></b>
<b><u>APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....</u></b>	<b><u>383</u></b>
<b><u>APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEWEE PROFILES.....</u></b>	<b><u>386</u></b>





## **List of Tables**

Table 1.1 – Zimbabwe’s leading print newspapers.....	52
Table 1.2 – Anonymized profiles of academics, press freedom activists, government officials, and journalists interviewed for this study.....	386

## **List of figures**

Figure 1.1 – Hopewell Chin’ono’s Twitter profile, 2020.....	250
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## Chapter 1

### **Taking a discursive approach in understanding journalistic interpretive communities**

In times of economic, political, social, technological, and occupational disruptions or controversies, journalists in stable Western liberal democracies have in unison, responded to threats against their profession through processes of paradigm repair, asserting their occupational identity, and safeguarding their jurisdictional territory (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Waisbord, 2013). This high level of solidarity has supported their conceptualization as a unitary journalistic “interpretive community” (Zelizer, 1993): a group of professionals engaged in common reporting activities, sharing a common purpose with a common frame of reference (Berkowitz & TerKeurst's, 1999). What this means is that Western journalists share a common journalistic culture in all of its dimensions (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). That is, first, they share similar liberal working conditions characterized by a democratic political and governance system, higher socio-economic development, as well as socio-cultural values that respect press freedom which Hanitzsch and colleagues refer to as the opportunity structure. Second, they also share the extrinsic dimension of their journalistic culture that involves perceived influences on journalistic activities as well as levels of editorial autonomy. Third, they also have a shared understanding of their journalistic culture’s intrinsic dimension, which refers to perceptions about journalistic roles, ethics, and trust in public institutions. This is not, however, to suggest that all journalists in these communities are always united as fissures along race and age have emerged before (see Eason, 1986), while the very idea of a

collective Western journalism paradigm has also been questioned (see Berkowitz & Eko, 2007; Wasserman & De Beer, 2009). Instead, the point is to highlight the shared sense of how the field operates in a more united way than in other contexts.

It is this journalistic culture, as defined above, that when commonly shared, allows journalists to make unitary claims of their professional jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). Implicitly, this ability to make jurisdictional claims in unison is what also makes journalists operating under liberal democracies a highly developed professional grouping, not in the taxonomic sense criticized by Zelizer (1993), but in terms of their ability to defend their professional territory (Waisbord, 2013). However, conditions are different under captured, patrimonial/clientelist media systems (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Mabweazara et al., 2020; Waisbord, 2013), or polarized pluralist contexts (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004), and those that closely resemble them, hence the same professional tendencies witnessed under liberal democracies cannot automatically be expected to play out everywhere. Building off this background, this dissertation proposes the concept of fractured journalistic interpretive community as an alternative approach to understand how journalists working under captured, polarized, patrimonial/clientelist media regimes operate as an interpretive community. The study advances this argument using the case of Zimbabwe.

Below, this introductory chapter explores the Zimbabwean context focusing on why it is suitable in understanding how journalistic interpretive communities operate beyond North America and Western Europe. Second, it also explores how press freedom debates occurring around World Press Freedom Days can provide an entry point into understanding to what extent the country's journalists are members of a united interpretive

community. This is followed with the study's research questions, then its significance in understanding journalistic cultures beyond liberal media systems, and it ends with a preview of how this dissertation is organized.

### **Liberal disruption in Zimbabwe and the opportunity to understand Global South journalistic cultures**

For more than two decades, Zimbabwe has not only undergone moments of political, economic, social, technological, legal disruptions and controversies, but the country has witnessed the emergence of a toxically polarized news media environment divided between state and privately controlled entities (see Mangena, 2014; Mazango, 2005), making it a fruitful case to examine how journalistic interpretive communities operate beyond liberal media contexts. Here, the term polarization is used as it is central not only to the debate on news media reform in Zimbabwe, but also journalism practice (Mazango, 2005; McCandless, 2011; Willems, 2004). The rain started pounding on Zimbabwe from the early 1990s when the country entered a period of democratization/re-democratization or transition (Mazango, 2005) following the end of the Cold War, which gave rise to liberalism as a dominant ideology (Fukuyama, 1989). Liberalism brought with it its values of freedom, tolerance, responsibility, equality of opportunities and justice (Sørensen, 2006). In Zimbabwe, these ideas challenged the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front's (ZANU PF) one-party state ambitions as well as its commitments to socialism based on Marxism-Leninism principles (Shaw, 1986) marking the beginning of political, economic, social, and legal disruptions.

These disruptions manifested in the rise of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), formed in 1999 to challenge the ruling ZANU PF as part of political liberalization.

The MDC's formation was also on the backdrop of the emergence of privately controlled newspapers critical of the government (Chuma, 2004; Mukasa, 2003) during the same time. These liberal disruptions, undermining the ruling party's hold onto power, marked the beginning of political and social polarization in Zimbabwe (Mangena, 2014; Mazango, 2005; Mutsvairo & Muneri, 2020). This was evidenced by how ZANU PF and the MDC saw two different versions of the same reality (Mazango, 2005) when it came to unresolved colonial issues like land reform and contemporary issues like constitutional reform, Western imposed sanctions, electoral violence, withdrawal of international financial institutions from the country, and Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth (McCandless, 2011). To maintain its legitimacy, ZANU PF co-opted the publicly controlled news media and shut out the opposition MDC from public communication spaces. The ruling party also employed various repressive laws and extralegal strategies to suppress and control the privately controlled news media (Chuma, 2004; Moyo, 2003).

The government's repressive actions sparked press freedom debates (Mlotshwa, 2019), setting it in confrontation with civil society organizations advocating for press freedom and democratization like the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) (Mukasa, 2003). While much research has examined press freedom debates in Zimbabwe, broadly focusing on the relationship between the press and politics (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020; Mlotshwa, 2019; Mukasa, 2003), scholarship is yet to broaden this research to understand the Zimbabwean journalistic culture. Press freedom debates in Zimbabwe provide an opportunity to understand the country's journalistic culture in terms of not only how its journalists conceptualize press freedom but also journalistic roles, as well as trust in public institutions. This approach follows Fourie (2002) as well as Wasserman and de Beer's

(2006) argument that press freedom debates can be a good starting point to re-think and understand journalistic role conceptualization in Africa. This is because calls for press freedom are legitimated based on journalistic purpose in society. Following this approach, the study thus extends Zimbabwean scholarship examining the country's news media polarization (Mangena, 2014; Mazango, 2005; Mutsvairo & Muneri, 2020) seen in bifurcated coverage of the Zimbabwean story (Chari, 2008, 2010, 2013; Mutsvairo, 2013; Willems, 2004) to understand how the country's journalists operate as a journalistic interpretive community. In this endeavor, the study takes a metajournalistic discourse-informed discursive approach (Carlson, 2016; Hanitzsch, et al., 2019) as explained below.

### **Taking a metajournalistic discursive perspective to understand Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities**

Understanding how journalistic interpretive communities operate beyond liberal democracies requires an approach that first de-essentializes journalism from the trappings of Western understanding that have shaped its conceptualization thus far. A discursive approach as proposed by Hanitzsch et al. (2019) is crucial in this endeavor. A discursive perspective conceptualizes journalism as a discursively (re)created social institution. This means, as Hanitzsch et al. (2019) argue, the formal and informal rules, conventions, and practices that inform journalism have no true essence beyond how both journalistic and non-journalistic actors talk about them (Carlson, 2016). This is the crucial assumption underlying this discursive approach: that "journalism has no true 'essence': it exists because and as we talk about it" (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019, p.30). Simply put, how we understand journalism depends on discourse. By extension, this approach also means journalistic interpretive communities have no true essence, they exist because and as



journalistic and non-journalistic actors talk about them. This manifests in how journalistic and non-journalistic actors talk about and execute key elements of journalistic practice like press roles, autonomy, freedom, and ethics. However, to understand these elements, it is important to first define what a journalistic interpretive community is.

As implied earlier, an interpretive community is a group of “people engaged in common activities and common purposes who employ a common frame of reference for interpreting their social settings” (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999, p. 127). Building off this conceptualization, for purposes of this dissertation, a journalistic interpretive community is understood as a group of journalists engaged in common reporting activities, with a common conceptualization of their journalistic roles and employing the same ideology as their frame of reference. Ideological reference here is important because liberalism has been key in the understanding of journalistic roles as holding the government accountable under liberal democracies. This is evidenced by the four press theories as proposed by Siebert et al. (1963). Thus, while the understanding here remains the same that journalistic interpretive communities are glued together by their shared discourse (Zelizer, 1993), the study also puts emphasis on how this discourse is shaped by the geographic context within which they operate (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). This contextual variability of discourse that shapes journalistic interpretive communities can be best conceptualized using Carlson's (2016) metajournalistic discourse theory.

Basically, metajournalistic discourse is an amalgamation of various concepts (interpretive communities, paradigm repair, collective memory, boundary work) that have been used to understand how journalism is defined by both journalistic and non-journalistic actors (Carlson, 2016). This theory ties in well with this study's discursive approach that

de-essentializes journalism understanding (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) by recognizing that journalism varies in space and time, is contextual, and its legitimacy is relational. Thus, even though the theory was developed in North America, this dissertation shows how it can be adapted and extended to be applicable in other contexts that are not typical liberal democracies, such as the Global South and other regions around the globe. In this instance, the theory provides a useful lens in understanding how journalistic interpretive communities operate beyond North America and Western Europe, especially under postcolonial societies.

It is also important to recognize the post-colonial context as a different setting that does not allow journalistic interpretive communities to operate the same way as they do in North America and large parts of Western Europe. Post-colonial contexts are characterized by efforts to challenge colonial legacies (Kumar, 2014; Rodney-Gumede, 2020) that pose challenges to the operation of journalists as a unitary interpretive community thereby naturally challenging Western assumptions about journalism history, development, and role in society (Shome, 2016). For once, as Rodney-Gumede (2020) argues, news media roles under postcolonial contexts are contested. This contestation emanates from different conceptualizations of press freedom which in itself originates from the clash between liberalism and nationalism (Fourie, 2002; Wasserman & de Beer, 2006). This ideological conflict undermines journalists' ability to share a common frame of reference which is crucial in their ability to operate as a united interpretive community (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). To show how this plays out, the study examines press freedom debates in Zimbabwe as a central element in the discursive institutionalization of journalism in the country.

## **Press freedom debates as a gateway to understanding journalistic interpretive communities in Zimbabwe**

Following the argument that press freedom debates can be one way to understand journalistic role conceptualization in Southern Africa (Fourie, 2002; Wasserman & de Beer, 2006) this study takes press freedom debates in Zimbabwe as a gateway to understanding how the country's journalistic interpretive communities operate. In other words, the study takes moments of press freedom debates as discursive opportunities where Zimbabwean journalists (re)articulate their journalistic values, norms, and practices. Broadly, these debates are thus hereby taken as moments for the discursive institutionalization of the country's journalistic culture, which by extension, also mean discursive institutionalization of the country's journalistic interpretive communities.

While press freedom debates generated during the World Press Freedom Days are the central element in this study, the dissertation also considers how the concept has been implicated in other key press moments like obituaries when veteran journalists die, anniversaries of significant events for the news media, and periods when press laws were debated. The study thus analyzes and compares press freedom debates involving journalistic and non-journalistic actors generated in the Zimbabwean press between 1993 and 2023. The discourses were traced from the year 1993 when the UN declared May 3<sup>rd</sup> the World Press Freedom Day to 2023, the day's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Berger, 2011). In addition, as implied above, the study also includes examination of obituaries written for veteran journalists, news media anniversary articles, as well as debates around press law debates. As with press freedom debates, views of non-journalistic actors are also considered. Discourses from non-journalistic actors are important because legitimacy of

whatever roles, norms and values journalists construct for themselves depend on the perceptions of social interlocutors – that is critics from other fields who can legitimize or delegitimize journalistic roles (Vos, 2016). The study considers these press debates as a form of metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016) that both shapes and reflects how Zimbabwe’s journalistic interpretive communities (Zelizer, 1993) operate differently in the Global South as compared to the Global North (Waisbord, 2013).

Since news media roles are central to press freedom debates in Sub-Saharan Africa (Fourie, 2002), the study also uses interviews with journalists and non-journalistic actors from civil society organizations and related fields like education to understand how they converge and diverge around what they think journalists should do, what journalists want to do, and what they say they actually do (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017), as well as how they do it. Normative, cognitive, narrated journalistic roles, and ethical standards/practices form the basis for legitimizing calls for press freedom. Included in the interviews are representative organizations like the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ), Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), and Media Monitors. This is because such organizations are involved in the professionalization of journalism in different ways (Waisbord, 2013). Except for ZMC, which is a statutory body, the rest are civil society organizations representing journalistic interests by fighting for press freedom and news media autonomy in the form of self-regulation as well as improving journalistic standards. In total, I analyzed 551 newspaper articles, plus 367 tweets, and engaged in interviews with 50 participants, searching for answers to questions discussed below.

## Research Questions

While assumptions of a coherent journalistic interpretive community have dominated journalism discussions in North America and Western Europe, the lack of a dominant paradigm or clear dominant journalism culture in the Global South regions like Sub-Saharan Africa undermines prospects of a solid journalistic interpretive community (Waisbord, 2013). As such, the study examines the extent to which Zimbabwean journalists have a shared project defined by ideal roles, practices, standards, and notions of press freedom versus competing practices and understandings of what journalism should be. To find answers to these queries, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Zimbabwean journalists working within publicly and privately controlled news media outlets converge and diverge around key elements of the journalistic culture, including digital journalism, in public discourse?
  - a) How do they converge or diverge around press freedom and role conceptualizations?
  - b) To what extent do journalists working in publicly and privately controlled news media attempt to build a united community through collective memorialization from obituaries, and anniversaries?
2. How do social critics (politicians, commentators, educators, press freedom activists and government regulatory agents), try to influence how Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities are imagined through public discourse about journalism?
  - a) Who speaks through the news media?

- b) How do these non-journalistic actors advance conceptualizations of press freedom and journalistic roles?

### **Significance of the study**

The above research questions make this dissertation significant for making four contributions: two theoretical and two practical interventions. The first theoretical argument relates to understanding how journalistic interpretive communities operate beyond liberal contexts such as North America and Western Europe. By examining how Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities operate, the study advances the goal to de-Westernize journalism studies (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Nyamjoh, 2011; Wasserman & De Beer, 2009). Theoretically, it is important to understand how press freedom, journalistic roles and related norms are defined in different contexts (Wasserman & De Beer, 2009) as these concepts are not universal due to political, economic, cultural and technological variations (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Roudakova, 2012; Sparks, 2011). Currently, a large part of the knowledge about journalistic interpretive communities comes from North America, except for a few studies now emerging in Global South contexts such as Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Berger, 2008; Moon, 2021; Zirugo, 2021). There is little understanding of how journalistic interpretive communities operate beyond the Western world, mainly North America and Western Europe (Waisbord, 2013). The second theoretical argument is about how de-Westernization of journalism studies can be done in a non-radical way, by selecting, adapting and extending existing relevant traditional Western theories for use as conceptual lenses where applicable (Mabweazara, 2015; Ngomba, 2012). This is, however, not to say non-Western theoretical concepts are not welcome; they are certainly encouraged as they contribute to the field. But existing theory

remains useful for interrogating Global South spaces. After all, Africa itself is not uniform as it is multicultural hence no single theory can be deemed applicable to explain it in its various dimensions (Tomaselli, 2003).

The study also contributes to ongoing debates to reform the news media in Zimbabwe (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020; Mare, 2019). Using Zimbabwe's fractured journalistic interpretive communities as an illustration, the study argues that as part of reforming the news media in the country, the state's involvement in the public press through ownership must be stopped as that has been part of media capture (Alfandika, 2019; Alfandika & Gwindingwe, 2021; Saunders, 1999). Alternatively, a mechanism should be put in place whereby the public press is not accountable to the information ministry but either to parliament or a statutory protected independent body outside the state. The dissertation makes this argument by demonstrating how the state's involvement in news media ownership has distorted the country's journalistic culture, undermining the press's ability to play its social roles like holding the government accountable. In addition, government involvement has also forced public press journalists to pay allegiance to the government of the day, which undermines their ability to unite with their colleagues in the private press in making jurisdictional claims for autonomy. This inability undermines the journalists' efforts to professionalize their occupation (Waisbord, 2013). Broadly, the study also contributes to regional Sub-Saharan efforts to find pathways in reforming the news media (Wasserman & Beenequista, 2017).

Finally, the lessons from the Zimbabwe experience may be useful for different regions around the globe experiencing enhanced strife around the role of journalism and political polarization (Thompson, 2021). While news media polarization in and of itself is

not necessarily a bad thing as it may strengthen democracy (Somer & McCoy, 2018), some countries are running the danger of experiencing pernicious polarization that may lead to social mistrust among the population and institutions of democracy (McCoy & Somer, 2021). Even stable democracies like the US, for instance, runs the risk of having pernicious polarization courtesy of combative politicians, such as Donald Trump with a tendency of belittling the press and calling journalists “the enemy of the people” (Carlson et al., 2021). This phenomenon has also been witnessed in Eastern Europe where state media capture in places like Hungary, Russia, and Latvia, among others, has not only led to self-censorship (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018; Schimpfössl & Yablokov, 2020) but political polarization in the society (Tóth et al., 2022). Already there has been a general decline in trust in the press, according to the Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report for 2023 (Newman et al., 2023), and some scholars suspect that the rhetoric of politicians like Donald Trump might be contributing to this (Meeks, 2020). There is thus a possibility that this may result in fractured interpretive communities of journalists in places long thought to have a unified field, for this is exactly how it started in Zimbabwe. In the early 1980s, Zimbabwean politicians had the tendency of denigrating journalists as “pseudo-editorial professors” working as “imperialist agents” each time they faced criticism from the press (Chuma, 2004, p.128). It took about two decades before this blew into fully-fledged news media polarization, resulting in a fractured journalistic interpretive community (Chari, 2010; Mazango, 2005; McCandless, 2011; Willems, 2004). Thus, the process can be slow, but eventually consequential. Therefore, the study not only proposes what may happen, but draws the attention of stakeholders to the effect that they might need to consider



polarization seriously before it degenerates into a real problem. But before getting into these debates, below, the study gives a preview of how they study is organized.

### **Organization of the study**

This dissertation is organized into ten chapters, including this introduction. Chapter Two, “The contextual nature of journalistic interpretive communities” explores how journalists North America and Western Europe operate as an interpretive community by examining assumptions of consensus regarding three elements of journalistic culture: role conceptualization, press freedom perception, and trust in public institutions. The chapter further explores the guiding theoretical framework made up of theories of metajournalistic discourse (interpretive communities, paradigm repair, boundary work and collective memory). Chapter Three, “Journalistic interpretive communities in contested Sub-Saharan transitional post-colonial fields” makes a case for the importance of contextualized studies in the Global South and other contexts with less stable media systems to advance general propositions about journalistic interpretive communities, using Zimbabwe’s polarized news media environment as a case study. Chapter Four, “Methodology” lays out how the study applied textual analysis and interviews to understand how the Zimbabwean public and private press journalists engaged in a contest over formal and informal rules to guide the institution of journalism in the country. Also implicated in the struggle are non-journalistic actors in the form of pro-government individuals and those who are anti-government.

The presentation of empirical findings is divided into two parts. Part 1 “What does it take to make a journalistic interpretive community? – Geographic culture and power structure effects” looks at different forces that influence the discourse shaping discussions

about Zimbabwean journalism leading to a fractured journalistic interpretive community featuring different public and private press communities. This part is made up of two chapters: Chapter Five and Chapter Six. Chapter Five, “Press freedom and role conceptualization in the Zimbabwean public press: A nationalistic perspective” examines the public press’ nationalistic conceptualization of press freedom as witnessed from editorial, opinion, or analytical pieces as well as how its understanding informs its negotiation of a set of journalistic roles meant to serve the national interest. Chapter Six, “Press freedom and role conceptualization in the Zimbabwean private press: A liberal perspective” focuses on how the private press’ liberal conceptualization of press freedom leads to the notion of an extended version of the Fourth Estate role that goes beyond holding the government accountable to include advocacy and being a representative of the downtrodden.

Part 2 “Divided in life and in death: Limitations of journalistic community building mechanisms in a polarized context” examines how the fracture demonstrated in Part 1 arose and how it undermines Zimbabwean journalists’ ability to speak with one voice in fighting media repression. Part 2 is divided into three chapters. Chapter Seven, “Zimbabwe Media Law Reform Debates, 1995-2023 – News media dancing in and out of Government’s tune” explores how, when journalists are fractured into different journalistic interpretive communities, can fail to advocate together for the reform of repressive news media laws. This chapter traces Zimbabwe’s media law reform debate from as early as 1995 to 2023 showing how, along the way, they failed to defend their professional jurisdiction from excessive state interference through legal and extra-judicial means due to polarization. Chapter Eight, “Polarization taken a gear up: When journalists hate each other to death”

further illustrates the damages of media polarization and a fractured journalistic interpretive community with case studies showing how the public and private press responded in a fragmented manner to direct threats to their professional space. The first case study focuses on how the public press celebrated the shutdown of a privately controlled press, the *Daily News*, while the private press engaged in autonomy protection boundary work and commiseration. The second case showcases once again how the press responded in a fragmented manner when an investigative journalist, Hopewell Chin'ono was arrested for inciting public violence after calling upon citizens to protest corruption following his exposure of a \$60 million COVID-19 drugs procurement scandal. Chapter Nine, "Collective memory as a community (re)building and maintenance tool: Opportunities and limitations" explores how Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities are divided even in death as those who worked for the public press are memorialized through obituaries through the same platform. Those who worked for the private press are also memorialized through their platforms. This discourse is characterized with narratives of inclusion and exclusion, continuity, and discontinuity showing the limitations of collective memory as a journalistic authority and community building tool under polarized and contested transitional environments. Chapter Ten concludes this dissertation by giving proposed assumptions of how fractured journalistic interpretive communities should be understood and suggested directions for future research.

## Chapter 2

### **The contextual nature of journalistic interpretive communities**

To make a case for how conditions may not be ripe for the emergence, sustenance, and maintenance of a united journalistic interpretive community under contested and transitional regions of the Global South, including captured, polarized, and patrimonial contexts around the globe, this chapter starts off by showing how conditions are different in North America and Western Europe. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to give an illustration of how conditions are different under the liberal Western world, which makes it possible for journalists to operate as a united journalistic interpretive community. This chapter is thus divided into three main sections: the Western journalism context as a liberal journalistic field; the prevalence of a monitorial journalistic culture mainly in North America and Western Europe; and the conclusion that ties all arguments together. The first section looks at how journalists from the liberal Western countries manage to come together as a united interpretive community when confronted by any threats to their profession. The second section, on the other hand, looks at how this is facilitated by a commonly shared journalistic culture that emphasizes holding the elites accountable.

Reference to the Global North here minimized to refer to the US, Canada, Ireland, UK and Western Europe in general as liberal Western democracies to exclude Central and Eastern Europe courtesy of varied regional media systems. This is based on Hallin and Mancini's (2004) ideal but not static liberal, democratic corporatist, and polarized pluralist models. Four dimensions: inclusiveness of the press market; degree of political parallelism; levels of journalistic professionalism, and role of the state in media operations as operationalized by Brüggemann et al., (2014) are used to differentiate these models.

Inclusiveness of the press market refers to the extent to which the press reaches different social segments, while political parallelism is about the extent to which advocacy is a part of the mission of journalism. Political parallelism also refers to the extent to which media institutions align with political parties, camps, and media outlets as well as how journalists' and audiences' political affiliation respectively influence news coverage and consumption. Professionalism refers to the extent to which journalists enjoy occupational autonomy, the extent to which they have codified distinctive professional norms and oriented towards serving the public interest. Lastly, the role of the state refers to how it can intervene in media operations in one or more of the following three mechanisms: complementing, supporting, or restricting private media. The state can complement private media through public broadcasting, support it through press subsidies, or restrict it through content limitations, market regulation, among other mechanisms.

The above dimensions, according to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative media framework as concurred by Brüggemann et al. (2014), produce three different media systems categorized as the liberal, democratic corporatist, and the polarized pluralist models. The liberal model encompasses Great Britain, United States, Canada, and Ireland, while the democratic corporatist model refers to the Nordic countries, as well as German, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Lastly, the polarized pluralist model refers to media systems in the Mediterranean region made up of France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. According to Brüggemann et al.'s (2014) operationalization, the liberal model is characterized by high press penetration, low levels of political parallelism, high professionalism, and a weakened state role in news media operations. The democratic corporatist model is also characterized by high social reach of the press, relatively high

levels of political parallelism, high levels of professionalism, and a strong role of the state in the news media industry. Lastly, the polarized pluralist model is characterized by low press reach, high degrees of political parallelism, poor professionalism, and strong intervention of the state in the news media sector.

The conditions above mean that the idea of a united journalistic interpretive community highly holds under the liberal and democratic corporatist models due to low levels of state intervention and high degrees of professionalism. Professionalism, for the sake of this dissertation, refers to journalists' ability to protect their journalistic autonomy by making jurisdictional claims, pushing back against interference with their profession by non-journalistic actors (Abbott, 1988; Waisbord, 2013). What this means is that in places where this dissertation uses the term liberal Western democracy, as indicated earlier, it has to be noted that it is referring to North America and Western Europe made up of Great Britain, US, Canada, Ireland including the Nordic countries as well as German, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the Mediterranean region, including countries such as France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain are excluded from the liberal Western category. This is because of the conditions of polarization and political parallelism that they experience which may affect journalistic culture in different ways, thereby undermining journalists' abilities to protect their autonomy. The chapter gets back to this issue under the second section exploring the dominance of a monitorial journalistic culture under stable liberal democratic conditions of North America and Western Europe. However, it must be noted that the models, as already mentioned by Hallin and Mancini (2004), are not static, but ideal and also fluid.

Despite the contextual complexity noted above, the regional categories remain important lenses for understanding how journalistic interpretive communities come to be a unitary body or a fragmented one within particular localities characterized by different geographic power and cultural dynamics (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). This is because such contextual factors determine journalists' ability to mobilize the discourse that unites them as an interpretive community (Zelizer, 1993) as well as professionalize their field by making jurisdictional claims (Abbott, 1988; Waisbord, 2013). Locating journalistic interpretive communities in context means examining them as constituent elements of particular geographic settings whose culture and power structures shape their makeup (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). In line with Hanitzsch et al's. (2019) discursive approach guiding this study, this calls for recognition of interpretive communities as cultural sites where meanings shaping journalistic interpretive communities are (re)constructed and shared (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999) by both journalistic and non-journalistic actors (Carlson, 2016). This also means, to explain the structure of journalistic interpretive communities it is important to recognize factors that shape the nature of interpretations that constitute them.

The significance of recognizing journalistic interpretive communities as constituent elements of certain geographic contexts is that it helps to understand how discourses that structure journalistic interpretive communities are pre-constrained by preferred meanings of the social world within which they are a sub-system (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). Even though when they made this argument, Berkowitz and TerKeurst (1999) were referring to social system meanings that shape journalistic interpretations of news, the same argument can be transposed to argue that preferred community meanings also pre-constrain

the discourses that shape the structure of journalistic interpretive communities. This means there is no unlimited polysemy in terms of meanings that shape the character of journalistic interpretive communities as those meanings must be shaped by the preferred interpretations of various interpretive groups within which they operate. This also means as a subsystem of a larger social system, the discourse uniting journalistic interpretive communities (Zelizer, 1993) is shaped by the extent to which local power structures are central to journalistic operations.

This understanding is pivotal in understanding how journalistic interpretive communities under captured, polarized, patrimonial/clientelist, and authoritarian media systems in transitional contexts of the Global South and perhaps similar settings even in Europe operate differently from those of their counterparts under stable liberal democratic conditions. This approach both acknowledges and expands Waisbord's (2013) argument that the idea of journalistic interpretive communities exists in the Global North than in the Global South. While this is certainly true, the study nuances the argument by making further distinctions, based on Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative framework as operationalized by Brüggemann et al. (2014) between liberal democracies of North America and Western Europe versus Mediterranean countries and Eastern Europe. Chapter Three will revisit this argument showing how nations operating under the polarized pluralist models have some similarities with media systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is not only to avoid a generalized compartmentalization of the world into the Global North versus the Global South, but to showcase how the conceptual framework proposed here may be applicable beyond the Zimbabwean case study under examination. To make this argument clearer, this chapter starts by providing evidence for how journalists working



under North America and Western media systems operate as a united interpretive community courtesy of the liberal context within which they are situated. This liberal journalistic context can be best understood as a field that is closer to business than politics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) as compared to the one in which their counterparts under polarized pluralist as well as captured and patrimonial media systems operate. This argument can make much better sense when looked at from the field theory perspective.

### **The Western journalism context as a liberal journalistic field**

A field, according to Bourdieu (1993), is a structured space of positions in relation to other fields. With reference to journalism, it is a heteronomous field whose transformation or conservation depends on its degree of autonomy from the economic and political fields (Benson, 1999). This is why Bourdieu (2005) argues that to understand what is happening in a field, one has to understand the field's degree of autonomy. Autonomy determines the positions that the field's agents, that is journalists take. Specifically, degree of autonomy determines whether journalists are willing to be distinctive from other fields and claim jurisdictional control (Waisbord, 2013). As has been argued earlier, conditions under liberal systems are more conducive for the existence of a united journalistic interpretive community with leeway to make jurisdictional claims for professional autonomy. This is what the Hallin and Mancini's (2004) media systems approach, as discussed above, helps clarify.

There is a very close connection between the idea of an interpretive community as a constituent element of the geographic zone within which it operates, and the journalistic field idea (Bourdieu, 2005), as well as Hallin and Mancini's (2004) media systems theory. The geographic context within which journalistic interpretive communities operate is a

field and at the same time a media system. Thus, to conceptualize journalistic interpretive communities as constituent elements of particular geographic communities (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999) is to understand them as subjects of the social systems and societal beliefs of the contexts within which they operate (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In line with Hallin and Mancini's (2004) models this dissertation argues that North America and Western Europe, from where the interpretive community concept originated, is a liberal field that allows not only for a higher degree of journalistic autonomy than other contexts, but the emergence, existence, and maintenance of a unitary journalistic interpretive community. This can be understood by looking at the role of the state within this liberal field. Within the above liberal model, the role of the state is limited by the existence of a well-developed rational-legal authority (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In the US, for instance, the First Amendment and its related rationales of marketplace of ideas, self-governance, facilitating stable change, and self-realization (Franklin et al., 2016; Garvey & Schauer, 1996) represent a strong rational-legal authority that limits the state from restricting free speech. As in the US, in the UK, legal decisions have also separated the press from the government in cases involving invalidation of censorship and stamp duties (Waisbord, 2013).

The above state limitations, however, do not necessarily mean the press is completely autonomous. As noted by Hallin and Mancini (2004), even though the journalism field is relatively distant from the political field than in other contexts, it is closer to the commercial/economic field as also acknowledged by Waisbord (2013). Despite this limitation though, research shows that due to early democratization and press freedom development in Western liberal democracies, there now exists a highly developed professional group of journalists than in other contexts. This professionalism, as noted

earlier, is not in the taxonomic or normative sense, but in the sense that these journalists have a higher ability to defend their jurisdictional territory in solidarity than their counterparts operating under authoritarian political systems. It is this ability to make jurisdictional claims that makes them a unitary journalistic interpretive community.

In line with Hallin and Mancini's (2004) polarized pluralist model, comparative research shows that journalists in the Mediterranean region, generally display high levels of political, economic, and organizational influence than their counterparts in North America and Western Europe. For instance, Hanitzsch et al. (2019) argue that Spanish journalists display high levels of political and organizational influences. They argue that in Spain, the government tightly controls the broadcasting sector through licensing mechanisms. In addition, Hamada et al. (2019) also found that Italian journalists reported low levels of journalistic autonomy, again echoing the effects of political parallelism as noted in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative media framework models. Journalists from Central Europe further differ from their colleagues in Western Europe in that they have low trust in public institutions (Van Dalen et al., 2019). These findings from comparative research show challenges that may confront journalists in Central Europe, in operating as a united journalistic interpretive community. This can be made clearer by demonstrating how journalists in North America and Western Europe operate as a united interpretive community and how that is facilitated by the liberal conditions under which they work.

## **How journalists under liberal settings of North America and Western Europe operate as an interpretive community of believers**

Qualification of Western journalists working under mature and stable liberal democracies as an interpretive community emanates from how, during moments of political, economic, political, legal, technological, occupational disruptions and controversies, what Zelizer (1993) calls critical incidents, have managed to respond in solidarity to defend their professional ideals (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). During these moments, Western journalists have shared discourses (re)articulating their professional norms, ideal practices, and values in a manner that show high levels of journalistic consensus, demonstrating that they share a common journalistic project (Waisbord, 2013). These discourses have served to unite them as an interpretive community (Zelizer, 1993). This does not only portray these journalists as a united journalistic interpretive community, but also proves how they are a highly professionalized occupational grouping.

Below, the section looks at how North American and Western European journalists have united themselves into an interpretive community through processes of paradigm repair, boundary work, and collective memorialization. Theoretically, discourses from these various processes are better conceptualized as metajournalistic discourse, an amalgamation of all these processes used to understand what is, and is not journalism (Carlson, 2016). Due to close connections between paradigm repair and boundary work, the section combines these two processes.

### ***Paradigm repair and boundary work as community building and maintenance tools.***

Through paradigm repair, a process whereby journalists reassert the objective news paradigm, journalists under liberal democracies have managed to unite themselves as an

interpretive community during moments of crisis like plagiarism and fabrication (Berkowitz, 2000). These acts of plagiarism and fabrication, among others, have collectively been perceived as threats to the credibility of the journalism profession, hence journalists have addressed them as a community to stave off a wider questioning of journalistic practices. Through this process, these journalists have not only shown a common way of defining what it means to be a journalist (Usher, 2010), but have also demonstrated that they are a community of believers guided by one professional credential to protect: credibility (Eason, 1986). In addition, they have also managed to express frustrations as a community when fellow journalists stray away from journalistic values and norms such as objectivity (Hindman & Thomas, 2013). This can be further understood by looking at paradigm repair strategies that these journalists have employed in dealing with cases of journalistic deviance and the common journalistic values they have emphasized.

As a community, journalistic interpretive communities of Western Europe and North America have tended to apply common strategies in dealing with deviant reporters. Whenever reporters have expressed personal social standings that threaten journalistic objectivity, they have drawn boundaries between the reporter's work and personal values (Reese, 1990). This has been part of larger processes of paradigm boosterism (Berkowitz, 2000) or paradigm overhaul (Cecil, 2002) whereby journalists have argued that their journalistic news routines are able to protect news from threatening values (Hindman, 2005; Reese, 1990). This expression of the mainstream press' news paradigm's superiority (Berkowitz, 2000) does not question journalism's objective paradigm or confront its weaknesses (Cecil, 2002). Instead, blame is put either on bad journalists, newsrooms'

vetting systems, news subjects, audiences, or other outsiders like the paparazzi (Cecil, 2002; Hindman, 2003; Hindman & Thomas, 2013). This has not only served to unite these journalists as a community but helped them make arguments to defend their professional autonomy, pushing against threats of statutory regulation for instance (see Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014) by demonstrating that they are capable of policing their field.

As part of defending and promoting their news paradigm in the face of challenges, journalistic interpretive communities under Western liberal settings have also marginalized deviant journalists and their work by making both appear insignificant and unrepresentative of their profession (Hindman, 2003; Hindman & Thomas, 2013; Reese, 1990). These journalists have also united themselves by engaging in expulsion boundary work, whereby they would draw boundaries between “authentic” journalists and outsiders like the paparazzi and tabloid players (Berkowitz, 2000; Bishop, 1999; Hindman, 2003). At the same time, these journalists have also been united in autonomy protection boundary work processes to protect free speech values and fend off self-censorship from either dogmatic beliefs or statutory regulation by calling for self-regulation (Berkowitz & Eko, 2007; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014). Generally, boundary work is a process through which journalists and others set parameters of who counts as a journalist, what is appropriate journalism, appropriate practice and deviant (Carlson, 2015). Other common strategies that have united journalists of North America and Western Europe or at least shown their common mindset have been evasion of responsibility, playing victim, or attempts to reduce offensiveness either by claiming good intentions, apologizing, reflecting on previous good deeds, explaining the situation, or promising to change (Hindman, 2005). All these

strategies have served to defend the dominant news paradigm without questioning it, thereby cementing their community behind a common journalistic ideology.

Journalists under liberal settings have also united themselves by expressing agreed upon journalistic roles, appropriate practices, and guiding values. Commonly expressed journalistic roles have been serving the public interest, giving voice to the voiceless, being crusaders of democracy as well as defending press freedom (Usher, 2010). In serving these journalistic functions, it has been expressed that journalists should not be participants that trigger news events (Bennet et al., 1985). Similarly, these journalists have also condemned unorthodox news gathering practices such as stalking or aggressive intrusion (Bishop, 1999; Hindman, 2003), or hacking the dead, non-public figures or grieving private family members (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014). Journalists have expressed that strategies of subterfuge in news gathering are only permissible when they work in the public interest like exposing big stories or crooks as well as greater wrongdoing. Journalists in North America and Western Europe have also united themselves by emphasizing objectivity as a key news tenet that should not be mixed with opinions (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014; Eason, 1986; Usher, 2010). Through processes of paradigm repair, these journalists have also united themselves into a community by commonly articulating standards of factuality, maintaining credibility, appropriate sourcing practices (like use of multiple sources) and accuracy even in photojournalism (Carlson, 2009; Cecil, 2002; Eason, 1986). In addition, these journalists have also promoted traditional news values, like that news is what is negative (Bishop, 1999). Not questioning, but promoting the above-mentioned news values, standards, and practices, or applying them conditionally, is what has united Western journalists into common interpretive communities.

As alluded to earlier, while these journalists have tended to come together as a community around the above-mentioned objective news paradigm, news practices, values, and standards, as well as expected traits of a reporter, some divisions have also reared their head. In some instances, paradigm repair processes have shown community fissures along age, race and gender classes (Eason, 1986; Usher, 2010). Paradigm repair processes have also shown that there is no single Western paradigm, which has also differentiated itself from other regional news paradigms. Differences have also emerged in arguments to defend or criticize particular deviant journalists (Hindman & Thomas, 2013). Besides these divisions, it must be noted that these divisions are minor to threaten the existence of a united journalistic interpretive community in liberal democracies as what might appear under polarized pluralistic media systems or those that closely resemble them in the Global South, structured by captured patrimonial relations.

### ***Collective memory as a journalistic authority and community building tool***

Besides the above crisis driven incidents, journalists also bring themselves together through collective memorialization whereby they build their journalistic authority, and just like other interpretive groups, circulate knowledge about journalism (Savelsberg & King, 2007), thereby building themselves into a community (Zelizer, 1992, 1993). Through collective memory, journalists build their authority justifying why they deserve to be trusted as storytellers especially during anniversaries (Kitch, 2002). Collective memory also allows journalists to account for missed opportunities, for instance, if they were not present during moments of paradigm repair or boundary work above, they can make up for the lost opportunity through memorialization (Zelizer, 1992). This is related to how collective memory works in double time: local and durational modes of interpretation



(Zelizer, 1993). The above incidents dealt with through paradigm repair and boundary work account for the local mode of interpretation when journalists, from a particularistic perspective, react to an incident as a united body. However, as Zelizer argues, this united body tends to loosen up in durational discourse when journalists begin to memorialize with a critical eye. All the same, however, this loosening does not really threaten the existence of a united interpretive community.

Collective memory comes in three different forms: commemorations/anniversary journalism, historical analogies, and historical contexts (Edy, 1999). Chance commemorations have allowed journalists under liberal Western to enunciate appreciated journalistic qualities that were embodied by distinguished or veteran journalists when they pass on. These values include volunteerism, bravery, sacrifice, witnessing and detachment (Carlson, 2006). Other qualities that have been emphasized as appropriate to these journalistic interpretive communities have been first-hand reporting, good presentational skills, being cultural icons that provide social cohesion, a good work ethic and being trustworthy (Carlson, 2007; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2011). Anniversaries also allow news media institutions to celebrate their longevity and construct journalistic authority from their prior achievements (Kitch, 2002). This is an opportunity for news media institutions to justify why they should be trusted by the audience to be the first tellers of history as well as its re-tellers. It is also a moment when news media institutions define who they are based on what they have stood for from the past as well as pivot their identities into the future.

Thus, paradigm repair, boundary work, and collective memory processes, during critical incidents, have served to bring Western journalists, largely in North America and Western Europe together as interpretive communities. Beyond defense of their

jurisdictional claim as a united journalistic interpretive community, these journalists also share common journalistic cultures which has also been key in their professionalization project. Below, this section looks at how journalists working under liberal Western settings have a common understanding and shared perspective on key elements of journalistic culture.

### **Prevalence of a monitorial journalistic culture in Western liberal democracies**

A journalistic culture can be understood in terms of its extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions, as well as its restraining or enabling opportunity structure or social context (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019). The extrinsic dimensions of journalistic culture refer to journalists' perceived influences and levels of autonomy. Intrinsic dimensions, on the other hand, refer to journalists' conceptualization of journalistic roles, ethics, and trust in public institutions. This is also connected to the journalists' opportunity structure which falls into three categories: politics and governance context; socio-economic development; and sociocultural value systems. Research shows that journalists in liberal Western Europe and North America have a shared understanding of their extrinsic and intrinsic journalistic cultural dimensions, classified as a monitorial journalistic culture (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019).

In terms of its extrinsic dimension, the monitorial journalistic culture is characterized by perceived low levels of influence from political, economic, organizational, and personal network factors. Based on surveys, journalists from North America and Western Europe have generally reported low levels of political and economic influence (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011). This has been especially for journalists from Europe, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States.

Even organizational influence has been reported as low in most liberal Western countries (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Western European journalists have also reported high levels of editorial autonomy with high scores coming from Belgium, Canada, and Finland, as well as Australia (Hamada et al., 2019; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). According to Hamada et al. (2019), editorial autonomy is deeply interwoven with Western liberal democracy's normative ideals of journalistic legitimacy, and also tends to be protected formally. It is also associated with high degrees of democratic development in these countries. This goes back to the earlier argument that liberal ideals in Western countries allow for greater levels of journalistic autonomy than many other contexts as demonstrated by Hallin and Mancini's (2004) media systems theory.

Journalists operating under the monitorial journalistic culture also tend to have a high degree of consensus in terms of their journalistic culture's intrinsic dimension that involves journalistic roles, and ethical conceptualizations as well as trust in public institutions (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019). Investigating political and business elites to hold them accountable, better known as watchdog journalism, as well as disseminating information to the public have been the highly valued journalistic roles in Western liberal societies (Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Hanitzsch, et al., 2019; Weaver et al., 2007; Weaver & Willnat, 2012). According to Hanitzsch et al. (2019) these journalists under liberal Western democracies despise collaborative and accommodative journalistic roles. Epistemologically, these journalists also have high regard for impartiality, neutrality, factuality, and reliability and are less supportive of any values (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). When it comes to ethical orientations, according to Ramaprasad et al. (2019) journalists from Western Europe and North America take an absolutist approach whereby certain

actions are judged either as intrinsically morally right or wrong. Except for the US, most journalists in most Western European countries have also been found to display high levels of trust in public institutions (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019; Van Dalen et al., 2019). All the cultural dimensions reported here are best explained by the high levels of press freedom enjoyed by journalists in liberal Western democracies, even though this factor cannot account for all elements of the journalistic culture. As Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011) noted, politics and the economy are the biggest factors that account for journalistic cultural differences around the globe.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how the liberal ideology in Western Europe and North America forms a shared frame of reference for journalists in these regions. Based on this liberal frame of reference, these journalists also share a common monitorial purpose to hold elites accountable through watchdog journalism. This means these journalists are not only engaged in common reporting activities but have a common understanding of their journalistic culture. The chapter has also shown how the liberal journalistic field in Western countries allows journalists to professionalize by giving them constitutionally protected press freedom rights that allows them to make jurisdictional claims. These journalists can do this through different processes that include paradigm repair, boundary work, and collective memory. However, this liberal context in North America and Western Europe is worlds apart from what prevails in many parts of the Global South, including Sub-Saharan Africa, hence this chapter's argument that it is imperative to look at how journalistic interpretive communities operate beyond liberal Western democracies, and this is the goal of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### **Journalistic interpretive communities in the contested Sub-Saharan transitional post-colonial context**

Unlike the liberal journalistic fields of Western Europe and North America, characterized by high levels of press freedom and journalistic autonomy, news media environments in the Global South, especially Sub-Saharan Africa in this case can best be understood as contested transitional post-colonial contexts undergoing hybridization of global democracy and local nationalistic ideals (Fourie, 2002; Rodny-Gumede, 2020). Recognizing them as post-colonial regions acknowledges that their races, ethnicities, states, and nations are a colonial product which continues to shape them through various political, economic, and cultural relations (Kumar, 2014). This implies that to understand journalistic interpretive communities in the Global South, one must consider that they operate in societies whose transformation is about challenging colonial legacies (Rodny-Gumede, 2020). This contextualization challenges taken-for-granted assumptions of a united journalistic interpretive community as found in liberal Western democracies. To understand how the transitional nature of the Global South challenges assumptions of united journalistic interpretive communities and other ideas in journalism studies research, it is important to briefly outline how democratization has impacted Sub-Saharan Africa's journalistic cultures.

This chapter thus contextualizes the study of journalistic interpretive communities within a Global South news media environment. The first section broadly looks at how Sub-Saharan Africa's post-colonial context, and its unresolved colonial legacies, in relation to its cultural philosophies militate against the existence of a united journalistic interpretive

community. In the second section, the study narrows down onto the Zimbabwean context, exploring how not only colonial legacies undermine the potential emergence of a united journalistic interpretive community, but political interference also plays a huge role.

### **Democratization, unresolved colonial legacies, and the emergence of an ambivalent journalistic interpretive community in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa was driven by the 1990s' global democratization movement (Berger, 2000; Blake, 1997). This had an impact on journalistic roles. Whereas originally, the major imperative for journalism soon after independence in Sub-Saharan African countries was development journalism, democratization gave journalism a new political mandate. The mandate to facilitate achievement of multiparty politics, press freedom, independent judiciary establishment, and non-partisan news media access, thereby redefining journalism as communication for the public interest (Berger, 2000). This was to be expected as journalism has a key role in transitional contexts (Lohner et al., 2019). This shift however led to calls to rethink the role of journalism in several Sub-Saharan countries (e.g., Fourie, 2002), which was mainly due to their post-colonial situation. At the onset of the 1990s democratization movement, the press-politics relationship had not fully evolved (Lohner et al., 2019), which was naturally expected due to lack of a media and democracy tradition (Berger, 2002). This situation created an unstable Sub-Saharan African situation characterized by press freedom suppression and lack of access to information given its precarious democracy on the backdrop of unresolved colonial legacies, political, socio-economic rifts, unequal development and racial contestations (Berger, 2002; Rodney-Gumede & Chasi, 2016). Naturally, this led to contests

over journalistic roles, press freedom and ethical orientations which all threaten the existence of stable interpretive communities.

The above contests were compounded by the clash between Western liberal and African nationalistic and ubuntu perspectives (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005). Ubuntu is an African philosophy that guides human conduct by emphasizing community solidarity (Mokgoro, 1998). The problem, however, or threat to existence of a stable journalistic interpretive community comes from Ubuntu's different versions that can be regarded as liberal, conservative, and middle way. Ubuntu prescribes journalistic roles and press freedom conceptualizations that are both in tandem and at loggerheads with liberal Western views, creating fertile ground for contestations around journalistic orientations. This is naturally expected because the Global South has strongly been influenced by liberal Western countries (Berger, 2000) hence some journalists are likely to take conservative positions while others will take liberal ones. Unlike Western news media paradigms that put emphasis on objective and detached reporting (Carlson, 2006; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014; Reese, 1990), Ubuntu argues that journalists cannot afford to be detached from community problems (Blankenberg, 1999). Instead, they should present them in a biased way as community members with a stake. Another potential source of contention is Ubuntu's argument that state interventionism is permissible to ensure media diversity and proper journalistic coverage, especially when the news media treat their subjects unfairly (Blankenberg, 1999; Metz, 2015). This move could be potentially challenged on press freedom grounds (Fourie, 2007). This has already manifested in press freedom, role conceptualization, and ethical orientation debates in Sub-Saharan Africa. These contests have not only created an unstable news media environment, but meant that in Sub-Saharan

Africa there is lack of a common frame of reference to guide journalists' conceptualizations of their social purpose (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). Since these contests are driven by a clash between liberal values and Sub-Saharan philosophical concepts such as Ubuntu, ideas of nationalism, and unresolved colonial legacies in general, the study is also contextualized using the post-colonial perspective.

Post-colonial theory helps contextualize journalism studies in the Global South by acknowledging that communication systems in these contexts, including journalistic practices, are a product of colonialism (Kumar, 2014). This is because even ideas of nationalism that challenge concepts of liberalism as highlighted above also have their origin in colonial history. Furthermore, a post-colonial approach questions Western assumptions about the history of mass communication and journalism in general (Shome, 2016). This approach helps consider journalistic interpretive communities and their culture within the context in which they operate. This is in line with Berkowitz and TerKeurst's (1999) argument that journalistic interpretive communities must be conceptualized as constituent elements of particular geographic contexts. A post-colonial approach also helps recognize that the challenge with liberalism of the 1990s is that it came on the backdrop of unresolved colonial legacies (Rodney-Gumede, 2020). This context was also bound to create unstable conditions for a liberal journalistic field in line with its principles of freedom and property rights. As argued by Sørensen (2006), liberalism did not fully define the relationship between the individual and the state, hence this was bound to create conflicts in nationalistic contexts like Zimbabwe where the government had always been interventionist. Broadly, the clash between liberalism and nationalistic ideals in post-colonial contexts mean these journalists lack a shared journalistic culture even when



operating within the same geographic context or national boundaries (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019) leading to the emergence of an ambivalent journalistic interpretive community in the Global South. This ambivalent journalistic interpretive community manifests in a variegated journalistic culture that has its roots in patrimonial media structures.

### **Sub-Saharan Africa's patrimonial media systems and their threat to a united journalistic interpretive community**

Despite consolidation of democracy in the Global South, courtesy of the democratization processes above, conditions are not ripe for the existence of a united journalistic interpretive community as evidenced by journalistic failures to professionalize (Waisbord, 2013). Instead of democratization leading to a liberal media system, Sub-Saharan Africa has seen the emergence of a captured, patrimonial, and clientelist media system that is inimical to the rise and maintenance of a united journalistic interpretive community (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Mabweazara et al., 2020). According to Mabweazara, et al. (2023) and Mabweazara et al. (2020), based on a review of literature on the political economy of the media in Sub-Saharan Africa, the region is characterized by patrimonial and captured media systems. Patrimonial relations in Sub-Saharan Africa manifest in different forms. Through opaque and corrupt licensing regimes, the news media in the region are subordinated to the interests of politically powerful individuals. Through this system, even privately controlled news media are implicated in patrimonial relations resulting in them casting a blind eye to corrupt activities by the elites. In addition, those with political power also exert patrimonial media relations by forcing the news media to dance according to their tune lest they lose economic privileges. These patrimonial

relations are further consequential for everyday news practice as evidenced by journalists' news sourcing practices. Furthermore, in Sub-Saharan Africa, patrimonial news media relations are entrenched through editorial appointments shaped by political interests. These patrimonial relations, according to both Mabweazara, et al. (2023) and Mabweazara et al. (2020), not only result in favored media institutions, but are entrenched through systematic mechanisms of media capture.

Media capture in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Mabweazara, et al. (2023) and Mabweazara et al. (2020) takes different forms. These forms include legal and administrative capture, ownership, and financial/economic inducements. Legal capture can undermine journalistic autonomy through regulatory frameworks which protect patrimonial media relations and reflects in partisan coverage of national issues. Administratively, legal capture can be executed by requiring media institutions to register, obtain licenses for operation or give financial guarantees to regulatory bodies. These forms of capture frustrate the private press, forcing it to self-censor to avoid license cancellation. Legal and administrative capture also manifests through political prosecution of journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through ownership, Sub-Saharan governments also capture the news media by awarding news media licenses to their own fellow elites, refusing to liberalize the broadcast sector, or awarding licenses on the condition that stations should not broadcast news. Sometimes Sub-Saharan governments award licenses to existing state-controlled news media organization to expand their portfolios as a form of liberalization. These forms of ownership capture undermine press freedom as some organizations avoid asking tough questions for fear of losing their licenses. Lastly, Sub-Saharan governments capture the news media through discretionary distribution of advertising contracts. Even

private players also participate in this form of capture. At times, financial inducements also take the form of brown envelope journalism facilitated by the socio-economic conditions within which journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa operate.

Generally, the Sub-Saharan African context is characterized by harsh socio-economic conditions (Kupe, 2004; Mabweazara, 2010; Mabweazara, 2015) opening the regions' journalists to media capture and patrimonial relations (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Waisbord, 2013). In addition, due to the nationalistic ideologies that also characterize the region, its socio-cultural value system does not prioritize press freedom as compared to countries in liberal Western democracies (Berger, 2011; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Sørensen, 2006). These contextual variables and forms of media capture in Sub-Saharan Africa, as given by Mabweazara, et al. (2023) as well as Mabweazara et al. (2020) create conditions that are not necessarily identical but echo in many respects settings under polarized pluralist media systems of Central Europe (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) as well as those in Eastern Europe where journalists experience higher levels of political, economic, and organizational pressures undermining their autonomy (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019). As a result, journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa operate under a journalistic culture that militates against the emergence of a united journalistic interpretive community.

Unlike Western journalists who share a common monitorial journalistic culture (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019), journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa tend to have different and sometimes conflicting conceptualizations of press freedom, journalistic roles, and ethical orientations. The effect of this is that they lack a sense of belonging to a united and uniform professional community that manifests in lack of solidarity to address common threats (Lohner et al., 2019). While some African journalists take an absolutist notion of press

freedom, which aligns with a liberal perspective, others consider sensitivity of their transitional contexts (Voltmer & Wasserman, 2014). Journalists who consider sensitivity of their contexts are receptive to some forms of regulation by the state (Mwesige, 2004). Since press freedom is used to debate journalistic roles (Fourie, 2002), this has led to different conceptualizations of the press' democratic roles in Sub-Saharan Africa (Voltmer & Wasserman, 2014) which further point to challenges in the constitution of a united journalistic interpretive community.

One source of fracture in role conceptualization in Sub-Saharan Africa is that governments favor development journalism and not liberal democratic roles (Berger, 2000). This has led governments to accuse journalists who advocate for liberal democratic roles like watchdog journalism of sabotaging the national interest (Rodny-Gumede, 2015) resulting in government-journalistic contestations over journalistic roles in young democracies (Rodny-Gumede, 2014; Rodny-Gumede & Chasi, 2016). Debate has largely been centered around concepts of national and public interest. Governments tend to define national interest as that which ensures the survival of the nation which journalists find inadequate (Wasserman & de Beer, 2006). Journalists consider this role prescription as narrow hence they advocate for the public interest role which they consider to be broader (Rodny-Gumede, 2014, 2015; Wasserman & de Beer, 2006). These journalists argue that the public interest is superior to the national interest, should not be defined by the government and it is about safeguarding people's constitutional rights. However, Rodny-Gumede (2014, 2015) notes that this idea of public interest also depends on whether journalists work for tabloid or broadsheet newspapers. In other words, national and public interest concepts not only cause tensions between journalists and governments, but also

divide reporters, which again, threatens the existence of a stable and united journalistic interpretive community.

Another potential source of division among Sub-Saharan journalists' interpretive communities is that their role orientations are connected to power (Berger, 2008). As political influences have greater impact in less democratic countries (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011), this has led to a scenario where role conceptualization depends on where a reporter works (Rodny-Gumede, 2015). This has created two groups of journalists: one that advocates for traditional liberal Western journalistic roles like investigative and watchdog journalism, holding the powerful to account (Mwesige, 2004; Tiako, 2015) and those who question where to draw the line between Fourth Estate reporting and jeopardizing governance (Lohner et al., 2019; Rodny-Gumede, 2014). The latter group define their roles as neither watchdogs nor lapdogs (Rodny-Gumede, 2014), but base their functions on competing imperatives such as promoting national unity, reconciliation and socio-economic development (McIntyre & Sobel, 2018; Mwesige, 2004; Tiako, 2015). These latter roles are mainly motivated by historical experiences such as ethnic clashes in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, another source of division among Sub-Saharan Africa's journalists is that even questionable ethical practices are sometimes justifiable because of context. For instance, ethical practices like deception and trickery are justifiable in young democracies due to lack of information access and high prevalence of crimes like corruption, which cannot be easily exposed (Rodny-Gumede & Chasi, 2016). However, some journalists still find full-blown undercover projects to be unnecessary. This is noted in how journalists from liberal Western democracies favor ethical absolutism while those from the Global

South prefer ethical subjectivism (Ramaprasad et al., 2019). While at a global level, ethical orientations seem to show this absolutist versus subjectivist ethical orientations, on the ground the situation is much more complicated. The journalistic paradigm in Sub-Saharan Africa is too uncertain and variegated to form a community of believers (Berger, 2008). Unlike journalists in the liberal West, reporters in the Global South lack consensus over principles like objectivity and source confidentiality (Zirugo, 2021b). While some journalists argue that source confidentiality should be absolute, others argue that it should be based on whether the source fulfilled the public interest. Even Ubuntu, the supposed ethical guiding principle in Africa, is also questioned by Sub-Saharan journalists who argue that it is usually brought up to control journalists (Rodny-Gumede, 2015).

Thus, Sub-Saharan Africa's transitional post-colonial situation is still undergoing democratization amidst unresolved colonial legacies, which creates a precarious context for the existence of stable journalistic interpretive communities. This context is characterized by press freedom suppression, lack of information access, and political, socio-economic, and unequal development issues. In many respects, Zimbabwe mirrors this context, making it an important case to explore how interpretive communities operate as fractured under transitional contexts. The sections below make an argument for this fracturing, which will be explored in chapters five through nine. Starting with the following section, it explores how historically the Zimbabwean political authorities have interfered with the country's journalistic environment, setting it up for not only a polarized news media landscape, but a fractured journalistic interpretive community through the establishment of a patrimonial, captured news media landscape.

### **Zimbabwe's independence and the birth of a polarized journalistic field.**

At independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) emerged as the dominant majority party without much political opposition to challenge its legitimacy. There were no presidential term limits to the country's constitution and the land question had not been resolved (McCandless, 2011). The new government also inherited repressive news media laws under which news organizations critical of the colonial government were shut down and their journalists harassed (Chuma, 2003; Moyo, 2003). In their fight against colonialism, the new government in 1980 had employed nationalist rhetoric underpinned by ideologies of nation building and the integration project as well as establishment of a command economy and one-party-state (Nyahunzvi, 2007; Ranger, 2005). This rhetoric and unresolved colonial legacies were to influence Zimbabwe's news media during the country's democratization process from the 1990s (Mazango, 2005). This background influenced the country's journalistic culture in many ways when it was confronted by forces of democratization.

The democratization phase of the 1990s, underpinned by liberalism following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Sørensen, 2006), coupled with an economic crisis, revelations of government scandals, and declining social services served to undermine ZANU PF's rhetoric and plans for a one-party state (Dorman, 2003; Mazango, 2005). Liberalism had brought with it its values of freedom, justice, tolerance, equality of opportunities, responsibility, which were claimed could be realized through constitutional democracy, the civil society, free market values, and private economic activities (Sørensen, 2006). It was within this context of liberalism that Zimbabweans, led by journalists and civil society organizations started calling for media reform to bring about media diversity and pluralism

(Saunders, 1999). This was coupled with calls for recognition of press freedom in Africa by African journalists following the Windhoek declaration in 1991 which led to the current World Press Freedom Day celebrated on May 3<sup>rd</sup> of each year (Berger, 2011). It was within this context of liberalism that privately controlled newspapers critical of the state in the form of the *Zimbabwe Independent* (1996), *The Standard* (1997), and the *Daily News* (1999) were established challenging the hegemony of the state-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Limited (Zimpapers) (Mazango, 2005; Saunders, 1999). These papers brought a new journalistic culture that was critical of the state that surpassed previous watchdog journalism practices by a huge margin.

On the political front, liberalism also saw the emergence of civil society organizations like the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) calling for constitutional reform to bring about presidential term limits and other changes as part of efforts to consolidate constitutional democracy in the country (Dorman, 2003). The ruling party had to hijack this constitutional reform agenda from the civil society in a bid to control the political narrative, setting itself up in confrontation not only with the NCA, according to Dorman, but also the newly formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) political party established in 1999. Courtesy of this confrontation, which marked part of the beginning of political polarization in Zimbabwe, the ruling party went on to lose the country's constitutional referendum held in 2000 (Dorman, 2003; McCandless, 2011; Mutsvairo & Muneri, 2020) as the MDC and other civil society organizations campaigned for a NO vote.

In reaction to this defeat, the ruling party embarked on a Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) to address colonial land imbalances in the country whereby few



members of the White community occupied much of the fertile land while the Black majority were in regions of poor soils where they had been pushed into during the colonial period (Mutanda, 2013; Sachikonye, 2003). It is however notable that after independence, the ruling party was reluctant to address the land question till its waning popularity evidenced by its defeat in the 2000 referendum (Mutanda, 2013), which it blamed on White Zimbabweans and all other urban dwellers (Dorman, 2003). This timing of the land reform thus further polarized Zimbabweans as some insisted that it was insincere but a ploy to punish White farmers whom the government accused not only of its constitutional referendum defeat, but of sponsoring the newly formed MDC party (Mlambo, 2005). This was compounded by the fact that the ruling party had done nothing serious to redistribute the land equally since 1980 till its constitutional referendum defeat (Mlambo, 2005; Mutanda, 2013). As expected of the news media in such transitional contests (Lohner et al., 2019), Zimbabwean journalists were swept up in this political and social polarization.

The Zimbabwean journalistic community got implicated in the above polarization due to the government's reactions to the constitutional referendum loss and waning popularity that extended to news media interference. To maintain ZANU PF's political legitimacy and contain political opposition, the Zimbabwean government resorted to controlling both publicly and privately controlled news media (Mazango, 2005). As part of its survival strategy, the ZANU PF government mobilized its 1960s liberation war nationalistic rhetoric (Nyahunzvi, 2007; Ranger, 2005) to construct an alternative national solidarity discourse and rhetoric based on resolving colonial legacies such as land imbalance (Mazango, 2005). As part of this strategy, the government resorted to controlling the publicly controlled news media by centralizing the Information Ministry in the

president's office. The government issued direct threats to editors, forced resignations, dismissed or eliminated them by promotion in order to make sure the publicly controlled news media preached the government message and shut out the opposition from the political communication space (Chuma, 2003; 2004; 2005; Moyo, 2003; Nyahunzvi, 2007; Rønning & Kupe, 2000). The opposition MDC had to find space in the newly formed *Daily News* thereby marking the birth of news media polarization in the country (Mangena, 2014).

To contain the privately controlled press, the Zimbabwean government created repressive laws undermining press freedom, freedom of expression, and opposition politics by controlling access to government information, news media licensing, journalistic accreditation, and ownership (Chitando, 2005; Mukasa, 2003). These laws, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 7 as an illustration of how news media polarization and journalistic community fracture hamper professionalization, included the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) (2001), the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (2002) (Chuma, 2004). POSA criminalized publication of false statements prejudicial to the state while AIPPA provided for the registration of journalists and made majority foreign media ownership illegal. Under these laws, private newspapers like the *Daily News* and its sister paper, the *Daily News on Sunday* were banned in September 2003 (discussed in detail as a case study in chapter 8) as well as *Tribune* in May 2004 (Chitando, 2005; Chuma, 2003; 2004; 2005; Moyo, 2005). Beyond these laws, the government also employed extra-legal tactics to control the news media.

Blackmail, slander, and detention of journalists who were accused of producing unpatriotic, hostile, embarrassing and offensive stories were employed (Chuma, 2003;

2004; 2005; Nyahunzvi, 2007). Between 2000 and 2002, the *Daily News*' offices and its printing press were petrol bombed before the paper's shut down (Chuma, 2005; Moyo, 2005; Moyo, 2003; Ruhanya, 2014). Remaining private newspapers were rhetorically attacked for being unpatriotic (Chitando, 2005). Local journalists were detained or received death threats in the form of bullets while foreign journalists were deported for aligning with opposition interests (Moyo, 2005; Moyo, 2003; Mutsvairo, 2013; Ruhanya, 2014). Journalists accused of being a threat to national security and out to see ZANU PF removed from power were tortured (Rønning, 2003; Rønning & Kupe, 2000). The government also starved privately controlled newspapers critical of its operations of advertising revenue (Mlotshwa, 2019). The government was not alone in this.

Private press owners also created anti-press freedom, ruthless and vindictive media regimes under which journalists are forced to change stories or fabricate facts (Mano, 2005). It has been documented that anyone who joins privately controlled papers like Alpha Media Holdings as a reporter is not expected to write anything positive about the ZANU PF government. According to Mano, this has resulted in a lack of balance and fairness in press reports from the privately controlled news media. He further argues that this is facilitated by making new recruits to privately controlled newspapers undergo a thorough ideological reorientation to understand the owners' editorial policies.

The effect of the above has been news media polarization whereby publicly and privately controlled newspapers write two different versions of the same reality to such an extent that reading one paper would not give a true story (Mangena, 2014; Mazango, 2005). This has manifested in a bifurcated coverage of the national debate as the news media adopted partisan and polarized anti or pro-government positions (Chuma, 2003; Rønning

& Kupe, 2000; Ruhanya, 2014). In the public press, patriotic journalism – whose roots can be traced back to the rhetoric of nationalist division in the 1960s – took hold (Ranger, 2005) while the private press fell prey to partisan opposition interests (Chari, 2013). National issues, like returning of land to Black Zimbabweans (Chari, 2010, 2013; Willems, 2004), were covered in a simplistic, selective and self-serving discourse (e.g., private press described it as a political gimmick, while the public press framed it as correction of colonial imbalances) (Chari, 2010). This situation created a news media environment directly at odds with the liberal news media landscape in the Western context of North America and Western Europe which facilitates the existence of a united journalistic interpretive community.

Based on the foregoing, the turn of events from the year 2000 created a polarized journalistic environment characterized by news media instrumentalization, political clientelism/patrimonialism, lacking a strong rational-legal authority (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Waisbord, 2013). Instrumentalization was seen in how political players turned the press into tools for political contests while clientelism was also seen in how, especially the government deprived the press of information access and advertising revenue coupled by lack of a strong rational-legal authority (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Mabweazara et al., 2020). Lack of a rational-legal authority was seen in how the government employed repressive laws, as well as extra-judicial means to suppress the press. Government heavy-handedness is a phenomenon that is not limited to Zimbabwe alone, but has also been witnessed in various parts of Africa even in government dealings with foreign correspondents (see Savelsberg, 2019). All this served to exacerbate news media polarization. While polarization can work to deepen democracy (Somer & McCoy, 2018),

it can also harm it when it becomes too pernicious by dividing people into two camps suspicious of each other (McCoy & Somer, 2021). In the Zimbabwean context, polarization did not only divide the country's population into two suspicious camps, but also journalists themselves. As discussed below, this polarization was too toxic for the existence of a united journalistic interpretive community.

### **Zimbabwean media landscape too polarized for a united journalistic interpretive community**

Perhaps nowhere in Sub-Saharan Africa is it difficult to imagine existence of a united journalistic interpretive community other than Zimbabwe. While in other countries there is contestation over the definition of press freedom, journalistic roles, and ethical orientations, it is debatable if they display the levels of hostility between independent and publicly controlled news media as happens in Zimbabwe (Mazango, 2005). As literature demonstrates, the two news media groups see different Zimbabwean realities. This polarization, as has been discussed in the preceding paragraphs, can be traced back to contests over the 1990s democratization processes and unresolved colonial issues as well as emergent socio-economic challenges. Some of the contentious issues were constitutional reform, land reform program, and Western imposed sanctions (McCandless, 2011). As news media groups aligned with political groups, it led to a situation where the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community became ideologically heterogeneous in terms of editorial orientation and press freedom conceptualization (Mlotshwa, 2019). As Mlotshwa shows, the conceptualization of these issues became contingent on journalists' political beliefs, personal conviction, and the prevailing political condition as reflected in their reportage. As has been argued in the introduction to this study, while much has been

written about Zimbabwean journalists' bifurcated reportage of the Zimbabwean crisis, little has been done to examine how they conceptualize their roles, press freedom, and their level of trust in public institutions. Even as efforts are currently underway to reform the country's news media landscape to eradicate news media polarization and democratize it (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020), it is yet to be ascertained if this will see the country's journalists have a shared understanding of their journalistic culture. Zimbabwe is a typical post-colonial country undergoing democratization under difficult circumstances, some of which emanate from its colonial legacy. It is this background that creates a volatile background too precarious for the constitution of a stable journalistic interpretive community. Beyond the colonial legacy and democratization disruptions, the Zimbabwean news media system is structured in a way that also exposes it to a fractured journalistic interpretive community. One problematic issue is the government's involvement in public news media ownership, which brings the Zimbabwean journalistic field too close to centers of power as discussed below.

### **Too close to the centers of power: Zimbabwean news media environment as a polarized field**

Unlike the liberal journalistic fields of Western Europe and North America, where the journalistic field is closer to the economic field but distant from the political one (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), in Zimbabwe, it is the opposite. The Zimbabwean news media environment is highly polarized and too close to both the political and economic fields. This can be put into perspective by first looking at the country's news media structure.

The Zimbabwean press can be divided into two groups, which is also mirrored in its polarization since the early 2000: state versus privately controlled outlets (Zirima,

2020). This polarization followed the introduction of the privately controlled *Daily News* and its sister paper, *Daily News on Sunday* (published by the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe – ANZ) in 1999 (Chuma, 2003; Rønning & Kupe, 2000; Ruhanya, 2014). Together with other privately controlled newspapers, *Financial Gazette* (published by Modus Publications), *The Independent* and *The Standard*, and later the *NewsDay* – launched in 2010 (published by Alpha Media), they challenged the hegemony of government-controlled Zimpapers publications. Zimpapers’ leading publications include *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *The Chronicle*, and *The Sunday News*, among others. Table 1 illustrates this division.

**Table 1.1**  
*Zimbabwe’s leading print newspapers*

State Controlled News Media		Privately controlled news media	
Parent Company	Publications	Parent Company	Publications
<b>Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Limited (Zimpapers)</b>	<i>The Herald</i>	<b>Alpha Media</b>	<i>NewsDay</i>
	<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	<b>Holdings (AMH)</b>	<i>The Standard</i>
	<i>The Chronicle</i>		<i>The Zimbabwe Independent</i>
	<i>The Sunday News</i>	<b>Modus Publications</b>	<i>The Financial Gazette</i>
	<i>The Manica Post</i>	<b>Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ)</b>	<i>The Daily News</i>
	<i>B-Metro</i>		<i>The Daily News on Sunday</i>
	<i>H-Metro</i>		

The above structure is mainly along ownership and funding patterns. Zimpapers is 51.09% owned by the Zimbabwean government through the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) (Zirima, 2020). It is a Zimbabwe Stock Exchange listed public/state media entity partly owned by other private players that include Old Mutual Life Assurance Company Zimbabwe Limited (10.24%), Hamilton and Hamilton Trustees Ltd (5.46%) and Hotair Investments (4.72%) etc. AMH operates as a private, commercial media company with Vusumuzi Investments (Pvt) Ltd – Trevor Ncube’s (former journalist and Zimbabwean media entrepreneur) family trust – as the major shareholder after Media Development Loan Fund (Zirima, 2020). Recently, this structure got complicated after the President’s Son-in-Law Gerald Mlotshwa acquired 39% of the shares in AMH (Guma, 2023). Individuals behind Modus Publications cannot be identified, but ANZ is 77% owned by Jester Media P/L, and 23% by TD Holdings. While Zimpapers is a publicly listed company, Zimbabwe’s private press partly relies on international donor funding due to economic challenges in the country (Ruhanya, 2018; Zirima, 2020). These patterns have been crucial to the way the newspapers have covered Zimbabwe’s topical issues since 2000. But before delving into that, it is important to acknowledge at this point that *The Daily News* is no longer as critical of the government as it used to be before it was banned in 2003. After the 2003 ban, it returned to the streets in 2010. There are accusations of state capture (Tshabangu & Salawu, 2022).

While much has been written about news media capture and polarization in Zimbabwe, little has been done to interrogate if it translates to different journalistic cultures in terms of press freedom and journalistic role conceptualization as well as journalistic trust



in public institutions (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019). This can be done by exploring press freedom and related debates such as media law reform as a form of metajournalistic discourse used by Zimbabwean journalists to (re)articulate their journalistic values, norms, and practices during the struggle for news media reform in the country from early 2000 to the present.

### **Press freedom debates as metajournalistic discourse to understand how the Zimbabwean journalists operate as an interpretive community**

By only focusing on Zimbabwean news media polarization reflected in the coverage of the country's national debate, researchers might have missed an opportunity to interrogate the country's journalistic culture, which will give insights into how its journalistic interpretive communities operate. This is because Zimbabwean journalists have not only been polarized in covering the national debate, they have also displayed a polarized understanding of press freedom (Mlotshwa, 2019). To date, much focus has also been on the division between the ruling ZANU PF and journalists when it comes to press freedom. Mlotshwa argues that the government has accused media activists agitating for press freedom of pushing a Western imperial agenda, while journalists in return have accused the government of being a news media hangman, the late Robert Mugabe in particular. While this research is invaluable, it also points to an opportunity to understand Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities by focusing on press freedom debates.

Press freedom debates are key to understanding journalistic cultures because they are used to negotiate journalistic roles (Fourie, 2002; Wasserman & de Beer, 2006). Even though Mlotshwa (2019) did not focus on how Zimbabwe's journalistic interpretive communities operate, he acknowledged that press freedom debates in Zimbabwe shed light

on journalistic role conceptualizations. In the Western context, and its journalism history, press autonomy has been regarded as a central idea of professional journalism (Hanitzsch & Mellado, 2011). This is because of several reasons: first, autonomy is central to professional journalism because it is key to boundary control; second, autonomy is regarded as a key requirement if the press is to play its role as a Fourth Estate and meaningfully contribute to democracy (Waisbord, 2013). The media's Fourth Estate role involves holding the elite, especially the government to account (Christians et al., 2009a). This is complicated in transitional societies considering that roles such as holding the government to account and being a watchdog have been questioned in places like South Africa where journalists emphasize the public interest function (Rodny-Gumede, 2014, 2015). South African journalists express reservations about watchdog journalism for fear of destabilizing their young democracy. All these are questions that can be understood using the theory of metajournalistic discourse to understand how Zimbabwean journalists engage in discursive articulation of their journalistic culture.

### ***Metajournalistic discourse as a lens to understand journalistic culture***

How interpretive communities operate can be understood by looking at the discourse they generate around key events in the history of journalism (Zelizer, 1993), in this case press freedom debates, obituaries, anniversary articles as well as disruptive cases of media repression such as newspaper closures and journalistic arrests. In line with the tenets of the metajournalistic discourse theory (Carlson, 2016) as explained in Chapter Two, these press freedom debates emanating from the World Press Freedom Day commemorations, media law reform debates, obituaries and anniversary articles are treated as a form of discourse to unite or divide the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive

community (Zelizer, 1993). The discourse is also taken as a form of boundary making and journalism definition, setting appropriate parameters of journalistic freedom, autonomy, standards of practice as well as articulating press roles. Furthermore, the discourse is taken from both journalistic and non-journalistic actors in Zimbabwe speaking through the public and privately controlled press as their discursive platform. Non-journalistic actors in this case include government officials, pro-state actors, press freedom activists, academics etc. Guided by the theory's assumption that discourse varies in space and time, and is contextual, the study pays close attention to the Zimbabwean political and economic context as part of the geographic and cultural power dynamics that shapes it. In short, the dissertation is looking at Zimbabwean journalistic discourse as a pre-constrained conversation restricted by political and economic interests of various players who seek to shape the country's journalistic culture in a manner that safeguards their power.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how the Zimbabwean news media landscape differs as a field from the liberal news media systems of North America and Western Europe that are conducive for a unitary journalistic interpretive community. The Zimbabwean news media system is not only polarized, but also dominated with traits of clientelism/patrimonialism, lack of a strong rational-legal authority, as well as highly instrumentalized on the backdrop of heavy state intervention. This context does not offer a conducive environment for journalistic professionalization as they cannot have a shared journalistic project. This context motivates the need to interrogate how journalistic interpretive communities operate under this environment. As such, the study explores not only how journalistic cultures are conceptualized differently beyond the liberal Western

democracies, but also the forces that shape their institutionalization. In this case, the study goes beyond news media polarization in Zimbabwe by using it as a pedestal to understand the country's journalistic culture. More so, the study also shows how pernicious polarization can distort a country's journalistic culture, which is particularly important at this point as even stable Western democracies grapple with the rise of political polarization (see McCoy & Somer, 2021; Somer & McCoy, 2018; Thompson, 2021). The study also adds to Berger's (2008) call to modify Western theoretical concepts when applying them in the Global South by showing how the concept of journalistic interpretive community can be conceptualized as fractured under polarized, politically charged and contested environments. To do so, the study employs a discursive approach informed by the theory of metajournalistic discourse, contextualized using the post-colonial theory. In the next chapter, the study outlines the qualitative approach employed for this study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

This chapter explains the mixed method data collection approach combined with textual analysis and interviews applied in carrying out this study. This approach was used to build confidence in the data gathered through textual analysis as well as bring more voices (Alexander et al., 2016) to understand the phenomenon of a fractured journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe. Three reasons motivated this approach. First, the research sought to understand the effects of media polarization on journalistic interpretive community structures in Zimbabwe. Since Zimbabwe's polarization dates back to early 2000 (Mazango, 2005; McCandless, 2011), it was important to understand if the phenomenon is still in existence considering current government and journalistic efforts to reform the Zimbabwean news media, including eradicating polarization (see Alfandika, 2019; Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020). Second, eradicating news media polarization does not necessarily mean journalists will now operate as a united journalistic interpretive community. Therefore, it was important to talk to various stakeholders to understand the extent to which they share similar notions of press freedom, journalistic roles, and trust in public news media institutions. These are key elements of the journalistic culture that if journalists cannot share them, they cannot claim to belong to the same interpretive community (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2017). Third, the voices that normally appear in news media are not necessarily representative of all stakeholders since

not everyone shares their opinions. Therefore, it was important to talk to other stakeholders that include academics, press freedom activists and government officials. Thus, interviews were used to complement the textual analysis method applied in this study.

Textual analysis methods are applied on press freedom, news media law reform debates, obituaries, anniversary articles, reactions to the *Daily News* closure and the arrest of investigative journalist Hopewell Chin'ono for inciting public violence after he exposed a corruption scandal. Interviews are used to make follow-ups with Zimbabwean journalists, academics, government officials and press freedom activists to answer questions that could not be settled through textual data alone. The first part of this chapter looks at the data sample analyzed before turning to the textual analysis method employed in this study, followed by a justification for the interview method that supported it.

### **Data Sample**

Since this dissertation uses multiple sources of data, below are five sections describing and explaining all of them. These include press freedom debates, press law reform debates, obituaries, and anniversary articles, two cases of the *Daily News* closure and investigative journalist Hopewell Chin'ono's arrest, and lastly the interviews applied. Focus is on the number of texts and interviewees engaged with as well as how they were selected. Generally though, since the dissertation is focused on understanding Zimbabwe's journalistic culture from press freedom and news media law reform debates, as well as obituaries, anniversary articles, and reactions to controversial journalistic moments, the texts were chosen using the purposive sampling method (David & Sutton, 2011). Thus, the articles were selected for specifically focusing on the debates that force journalists to (re)articulate their professional identity.

## Press Freedom Debates

The first set of texts is drawn from editorial, opinion and analytical articles reflecting on press freedom published during the World Press Freedom Day on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. Focus is on articles generated from 1993 to 2023. The year 1993 was selected because it marks the year when the UN General Assembly declared May 3<sup>rd</sup> as the World Press Freedom Day, while 2023 marks the day's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Berger, 2011). In the Zimbabwean context, 1993 also marks about two years before Zimbabwean journalists, civil society organizations, supported by the country's citizens started formal conversations with the government to reform the country's news media (Saunders, 1999). The year 2023 also marks six years after the new Zimbabwean government that overthrew Robert Mugabe in 2017 came in promising to reform the country's news media as well as eradicate news media polarization (Alfandika, 2019; Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020).

Texts focusing on press freedom were selected using both online and offline methods. These texts were gathered from Zimpapers's *Herald* (daily paper: 39 articles), *The Sunday Mail* (weekly paper: six articles), representing publicly controlled news media and AMH's *NewsDay* (daily paper: 24 articles), *The Standard* (weekly paper: 35 articles), representing the privately controlled press. These make up a total of 104 articles. Also included are general press freedom debates from *The Sunday Mail* (50 articles), *The Herald* (60 articles), *The Standard* (19 articles), and *The NewsDay* (nine articles). Articles from outside the World Press Freedom Days were selected because due to news media repression in the country (Chuma, 2004, 2005; Mazango, 2005), press freedom debates have not been limited to a single event, but have been ongoing as part of efforts to reform the country's news media industry (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020; Chuma, 2018). The chosen four

newspapers were also selected because they are leading daily and weekly Sunday papers (*Zimbabwe All Media & Products Survey 2019 First Half Final Report*, 2019; Zirima, 2020).

In gathering the texts, articles written between 2011 and 2023 in *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail* were gathered online through Factiva and related databases accessible through the University of Minnesota Library using different search terms like “World Press Freedom” and “press freedom.” Selection was limited to long-form articles that were at least 800 words long (except for editorial comments) focusing on press freedom. Articles written between 1993 and 2010, before the newspapers went online, were gathered by visiting the Zimbabwe National Archives, Zimpapers’, and the Munhumutapa Building (which accommodates the president’s office) libraries, for newspaper bound volumes for these years. Since *The NewsDay* and *The Standard* articles are accessed online from 2003-2023, (*NewsDay*, 2010-2023), they were accessed using the University of Minnesota Online Library. Those produced in *The Standard* from 1996 when the paper was launched were gathered by visiting physical library archives. Online texts were gathered using different search terms from “press freedom” to “World Press Freedom Day”, and “press Freedom Day commemorations/celebrations” etc. Hard copy articles, gathered from the Zimbabwe National Archives during the summer of 2022 were digitized using a cellphone camera to analyze them using NVivo. Focus was on editorial, analytical, and opinion pieces at least 800 words long (except for editorial comments).

### **Press law and press reform debates**

The study also traced debates around introduction and passing of the following laws: Broadcasting Services Act, 2001 (BSA); Access to Information and Protection of



Privacy Act, 2002 (AIPPA); Public Order and Security Act, 2002 (POSA); the Criminal Law, (Codification and Reform) Act, 2004; and the Interception of Communications Act, 2007. Research also traced articles about the repeal of these laws from 2017 to 2023 focusing on the debates around the Freedom of Information Act, 2020 (FOIA), Zimbabwe Media Commission Act, 2020 (ZMCA), Data Protection Act, 2021 (DPA), Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act, 2023, and the Media Practitioners' Bill. Debate about these laws started when they were proposed as bills. These laws also divided the Zimbabwean journalists as some argued they were repressive while others argued they were necessary to ensure journalistic responsibility. The same division was also witnessed from social interlocutors commenting on these bills. Such debate is again important to understanding how journalism is positioned in Zimbabwe. The breakdown of media law reform articles is as follows: *The Herald* (55), *The Sunday Mail* (7), *NewsDay* (10), *The Standard* (69). Opinion and analytical pieces that were at least 800 words long (except for editorial comments) discussing these laws were gathered online and offline purposively (David & Sutton, 2011). Online pieces were gathered using the Acts' and Bills' titles as search terms online while those gathered offline were selected by going through the editorial, analytical and opinion pages of the papers for each day during the summer of 2022 at the Zimbabwe National Archives, Zimpapers, and Munhumutapa Building libraries. Hard copy articles were scanned using a cellphone camera to digitize them for NVivo analysis.

### **Obituaries and anniversary articles**

The study also analyzes obituaries written following the deaths of Zimbabwe's veteran journalists. These were gathered online through Factiva. In total, I gathered 65

articles: *The Herald* (11 obituaries), *The Sunday Mail* (eight obituaries), *The NewsDay* (four obituaries), *The Standard* (18 articles). Moments of death are interesting to find out how veteran journalists who have worked under conditions of media repression are memorialized. Focus was on those journalists who were designated the status of veteran, legend, or had risen at least to the position of an editor during their career. All the obituaries were gathered using the AllAfrica.com database accessible via the University of Minnesota online library.

Regarding anniversary journalism, the study also considers how *The Standard* remembered its 5-year and 20-year journey in 2002 and 2017 after it began publishing in May 1997. The paper commemorated their anniversary by publishing selected stories dating back to 1997 (“The Standard: 20 Years and Not Out,” 2017). I gathered these stories to see how the paper positions itself under conditions of media repression. Memorialization discourse is important for building journalistic authority (Kitch, 2002). The study also examines how the *NewsDay* positions itself during its 2020 10-year anniversary. Also included is how *The Herald* traced its 35-year journey in 2015 since 1980 during Zimbabwe’s independence celebrations. The memorialization discourse examined here is also important in understanding how Zimbabwean journalism is positioned in the country.

### **The Daily News Closure and Digital journalism debates after Hopewell Chin’ono’s arrest**

Journalistic responses to disruptive moments of repression or threats against their profession such as suggestions for statutory regulation are good signs to show the extent to which they operate as a united journalistic interpretive community (see Berkowitz & Eko, 2007; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014). When journalists operate as a united interpretive

community, sharing a common journalistic culture, they respond in solidarity through paradigm repair strategies (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). But when they are divided, they will respond in a fragmented manner which undermines their ability to set their boundaries of autonomy, what Waisbord (2013) calls professionalization failure. Thus, to see the extent to which Zimbabwean journalists operate as a united interpretive community, the study employs two cases: one involving the shutdown of the *Daily News* by the government back in September 2003 for failure to comply with the country's registration requirements, and the arrest of investigative journalist Hopewell Chin'ono in 2020 for inciting public violence after exposing a corruption scandal.

In the first case, the study uses 34 articles focusing on the *Daily News*' closure: *The Sunday Mail* (one), *The Herald* (12), *The Standard* (21). All the articles were gathered using the AllAfrica.com database accessible through the University of Minnesota online library using different combinations of search terms such as “the Daily News Closure,” “the Daily News shutdown” etc. Using the purposive sampling technique (David & Sutton, 2011), focus was on editorial, opinion, and analytical articles at least 800 words long (except for editorial pieces) and specifically focusing on the *Daily News*'s closure. As noted earlier on that technology has opened new tasks for non-conventional forms of journalism in the digital spaces (Abbott, 1988), the second case examines boundary debates between conventional news media and digital journalists. For this aspect, the study examines controversy around Hopewell Chin'ono, a Zimbabwean journalist who exposed a COVID-19 scandal in 2020. He spent several months in prison as the state accused him of inciting public violence. To understand digital journalism boundary debates, 98 news articles, including opinion pieces, were gathered from *The Herald* (40) and *NewsDay* (48)

between July 20, 2020 when Chin'ono was arrested and September 2, 2020 when he was released. In addition, 367 tweets were also gathered using Google Sheets that Chin'ono shared between June and July 20 when he was arrested. Focus was on how he positioned himself and his work through his Twitter profile and the tweets that he shared. All the material from this aspect were also purposively selected (David & Sutton, 2011) as the search was on articles that could answer boundary questions about whether Chin'ono is regarded as a journalist or not.

### **Interviews**

The study also backs up data from textual analysis with semi-structured in-depth interviews (David & Sutton, 2011) with both journalists and non-journalists. Semi-structured interviews are like ordinary conversations initiated by the interviewer, allowing the interviewee to answer in their own words (Halperin & Heath, 2020). According to Halperin and Heath, one advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they allow asking follow-up questions, which makes the interview richer. This was important in this research as it goes beyond the journalistic and social polarization to understand the basis of the divergence as well as the challenges it poses to professionalization of journalism in the country. In as much as these interviews were semi-structured, they also proffered questions in a particular order: rapport establishing warm-up questions, then key questions that were followed by clarifying questions before eliciting demographic data about the interviewees' sex, gender, education, job profile, and political affiliation. A list of the preplanned questions is provided in Appendix One. Out of all the rapport establishing questions asked, as the interviews progressed, the first question asking if polarization is real in Zimbabwe also became key in making interviewees relax and think about how they see the country's

news media landscape. Out of all the interviews conducted, 48 interviewees confirmed that news media polarization is real in Zimbabwe. Theme based questions centered around key elements of the journalistic culture were used (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). That is what the interviewees think about the country's state of press freedom and its boundaries, what should be the ideal journalistic roles, as well as the current media reform agenda.

The interviews were conducted with Zimbabwean journalists, academics, press freedom activists, and government officials between December 12, 2022, and January 20, 2023. Forty of the interviews were conducted in Harare in person while 10 were done via the phone with those outside the capital. All interviews were captured using a Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication (HSJMC) tape recorder. Both in person and telephone interviews lasted between 25 minutes and one hour. Courtesy of a Michael H. Anderson Fellowship, which was also used to cover travel expenses, each interviewee received a \$10 appreciation fee at the end of the interview (even though some declined it saying it is part of the job). Also, courtesy of another Kriss Grant fellowship, the interview audios were transcribed using [Rev.com](https://www.rev.com). The transcriptions were again read alongside the original audios to correct for any grammatical errors before they could be coded.

In total, the 50 interviews conducted for this study can be broken down as follows: public press journalists (12); private press journalists (11); government officials (4); civil society organizations (11); academics (12). At first, purposive sampling (David & Sutton, 2011) targeted individuals who had participated in press freedom and news media law reform debates. This method was also used in searching for individuals in leading positions such as faculty heads, news editors and their editors, leaders in civil society organizations. In some instances, snowball sampling (David & Sutton, 2011) was also used to identify

individuals who may be willing to talk, especially to balance gender voices. In terms of gender, a total of 44 men were interviewed against 6 women. It was challenging to convince women to engage in interviews. The few this researcher spoke to complained that women are hesitant to talk to protect their various social and professional roles. All the interviewed individuals were granted anonymity as some of them gave sensitive information about how their editorial contracts are structured to hamstring their editorial autonomy. As such, all interviewees are identified using a combination of alphabetical letters and numbers. Appendix Two gives a brief description of each interviewee's profile. The interviews were conducted with CEOs, editors, sub-editors, news-editors, senior academics as well as junior members.

Non-journalists interviewed to understand the challenges they face in professionalizing Zimbabwean journalism were drawn from the following civil society organizations: the Media Institute of Southern Africa – Zimbabwe Chapter (MISA Zimbabwe), Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ), Voluntary Media Council of Zimbabwe (VMCZ), the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC), and the Media Monitors, formerly Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ). As noted by Waisbord (2013) these types of organizations are heavily involved in the press freedom struggles in the Global South through different initiatives. These initiatives include campaigning against repressive media laws, crafting ethical codes, monitoring journalistic safety, and supporting training.

The civil society organizations represented in this study play several roles in the professionalization of journalism in Zimbabwe. MISA Zimbabwe is one of the 11 chapters aimed at promoting press freedom and freedom of expression in Southern Africa. It was

registered in the country as a trust on August 27, 1995. The organization has been involved in the fight for self-regulation, campaigning against repressive laws, representing arrested journalists. ZUJ is a grouping of Zimbabwean journalists that represents the interests of reporters, involved in advocating for press freedom and representing their members in times of harassment. It has its roots in the country's Guild of Journalists established in the 1950s. The organization has also issued statements to condemn the arrest of journalists, advocating for ethical journalistic practice, advocating for self-regulation among other press freedom related initiatives. Established in 2007, VMCZ's mission is to promote ethical journalism, self-regulation, and handle complaints against the news media. This is the organization that has been at the forefront of advocating for self-regulation. However, in its initial stages, state-controlled news media organizations refused to be affiliated with it. ZMC is a statutory body set up by the government to register news media organizations in the country and accredit journalists. It lists some of its goals as promoting freedom of expression, free and responsible media. Media Monitors analyzes media trends in the country. It has been involved in this since 1999. Its vision is to see an informed citizenry with access to quality information, participating in the country's democratic processes. The institution has overseen the banning of news media organizations, denial, or suspension of journalists' accreditation.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher engages in qualitative axial textual coding (David & Sutton, 2011) of press freedom debates, obituaries and anniversary articles, digital journalism news story contests, as well as interview transcripts using NVivo. According to David and Sutton, axial codes are words representing broader themes in the texts under which there are lower-

level themes or codes. While the study focuses on three components: press freedom, journalistic roles, and journalistic trust in public institutions, it takes the approach of axial coding to be open minded to relevant issues that may arise in the texts or interview data. To be accurate about these codes, the researcher also engaged colleagues and made follow-up interviews to be sure if the codes were not off the mark as recommended by David and Sutton. Axial coding also has the advantage that it helps to connect various themes at different levels in a coherent manner (Charmaz, 2006). Analysis focuses on identifying material that define press freedom in Zimbabwe, including issues of news media regulation, appropriate journalistic roles, ethical standards, including related norms and values. The articles come from both journalists and non-journalists. This is because the legitimacy of whatever roles, norms and values journalists construct for themselves depend on the perceptions of social interlocutors (Vos, 2016). Also, as highlighted earlier, for journalists' ability to successfully claim their jurisdiction, there is need for higher social and journalistic consensus (Waisbord, 2013).

### **Positionality**

As a US based researcher, who obtained a Masters from Europe and studied for a PhD from the US, it is important to reflect on my hybrid background in terms of how it affects my positionality, that is my worldview (Holmes, 2020) regarding how the news media should be organized and what social roles journalism should play. As someone who has been educated using a Western modeled journalism curriculum in Zimbabwe, and then proceeded to advance my studies in liberal Western nations, my views on news media operations are liberal. At the same time, news media polarization is a phenomenon I witnessed first-hand as it played out in the early 2000s. As such, I do have the advantage



of cultural and political familiarity with the topic. I have also carried out previous studies exploring how journalism operates in the Zimbabwean context, some of them related to news media polarization (Zirugo, 2021a). My hybrid background is the reason I took a discursive approach to de-essentialize journalism understanding (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) and focus on how Zimbabwean journalistic and non-journalistic actors conceptualize the meaning of press freedom and its boundaries, as well as journalistic roles within the Zimbabwean context.

### **Conclusion**

This study's mixed method approach was key in building confidence about findings from textual analysis conducted for this research. As the reader may notice, some of the texts analyzed for this study date back to pre- and early 2000. A lot has changed over the years in Zimbabwe, including the removal of Robert Mugabe and the new government's calls to reform the country's news media sector. It was thus imperative to understand if news media polarization is still a problem in Zimbabwe. Whether polarization has ended or not, it was also important to ascertain the extent to which the country's journalists share the same journalistic culture in terms of press freedom and journalistic role conceptualizations, in addition to trust in public institutions' involvement in news media regulation. As the next chapters will show, even though polarization has receded as compared to the era of Robert Mugabe, there are still varying views about what press freedom means in Zimbabwe, and the roles that journalists should play. This is also reflected in current press freedom debates, journalistic responses to controversial moments of their profession, as well as through collective memory work.

## **Part 1**

### **What does it take to make a journalistic interpretive community? – Geographic culture and power structure effects**

Whether journalists can be seen as a united interpretive community or not depends on the extent to which they share a common journalistic culture (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019; Zelizer, 1993). That is, the extent to which they are engaged in common activities, share a common purpose, and a similar frame of reference (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). Sharing a common journalistic culture allows journalists to share a unifying discourse that binds them into a common interpretive community because they would share a common frame of reference (Zelizer, 1993). In reverse, journalists' failure to share a common journalistic culture means they are prone to sharing dividing discourse which fragments them into fractured interpretive communities. For the purposes of this dissertation, a frame of reference hereby refers to the national ideology or philosophy that dominates in any country. That is whether it is a liberal democracy, socialist or authoritarian state which leads to the existence of any of the following press systems: a libertarian, authoritarian, Soviet, and responsibility press system (Siebert et al., 1963). On the other hand, journalistic purpose, for the purpose of this dissertation, refers to journalistic role conceptualizations which are dependent on their frame of reference (Fourie, 2002; Wasserman & de Beer, 2006). Thus, while journalists may be engaged in common reporting activities, their purpose may be different, if their ideological orientation is divergent, which militates against establishment of a common journalistic interpretive community. In Western democracies, where there is a high level of consensus over liberal ideals of democracy and modernity, journalistic discourse has brought unity among journalistic interpretive

communities (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). This has been understood by taking a discursive approach to examine how Western journalists reinterpret their journalistic culture during moments of political, economic, technological, and legal disruptions (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019), or what Zelizer (1993) would call critical incidents.

Zimbabwe's two-decade long tentional relationship of irreconcilable differences between the government and the news media over press freedom (Mlotshwa, 2019) and journalistic roles inspired by a series of economic crises and political instability (Petricia, 2023) amidst digital changes and Western sanctions leading to repressive laws presents a moment of political, economic, technological and legal disruptions to understand journalistic culture in a non-Western context. Since 2000, when the Robert Mugabe regime's hold onto power came under threat from the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), amidst allegations of human rights abuses and a controversial Fast Track Land Reform program and a rising critical press, it resorted to unorthodox means to control the country's narrative in the press. The regime resorted to enacting repressive laws to arrest, detain and torture journalists from the local private press. Some private press publications were also banned while foreign news media reporters were deported amidst state use of blackmail and slander to smear journalists (Chitando, 2005; Chuma, 2004, 2005, 2003; Moyo, 2005; Rønning, 2003; Rønning & Kupe, 2000). The public press was also not spared as its editors were threatened, forced to resign, and eliminated through promotions<sup>1</sup> for failure to operate in line with the nationalistic rhetoric

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<sup>1</sup> Firing editors by promotion, commonly known as demotion by promotion or being fired upstairs, is a Zimbabwean government's strategy to control the public press whereby they promote an unwanted editor into an uninfluential position. That is, one can be promoted from Editor to Editor at Large or Public Relations Officer, to make sure they do not have any editorial control.

(Chuma, 2004, 2003; Nyahunzvi, 2007; Ranger, 2005; Rønning & Kupe, 2000). This background led to fierce debates over press freedom between the government and state-controlled media (Zimpapers 1980 Limited) on one hand, and the private press (Alpha Media Holdings; Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe) and press freedom activists (e.g., Media Institute of Southern Africa) on the other hand. May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the World Press Freedom Day, became the main focal point around which Zimbabwean journalists debated the meaning of press freedom and what that meant for their conceptualization of journalistic roles.

Focusing on press freedom debates emanating from the May 3<sup>rd</sup> World Press Freedom Day commemorations in Zimbabwe between 1995 and 2023, the chapters in Part 1 examine how the polarized Zimbabwean press (publicly controlled versus privately controlled) differentially conceptualized press freedom and journalistic role conceptualizations. The World Press Freedom Day has its roots in the African-journalists led Windhoek Declaration of 1991 that called for press freedom, media pluralism, diversity, and independence the world over (UNESCO, 1992). With its liberal ideas of press freedom, free expression, the Declaration challenged socialist and Marxist political systems like Zimbabwe's that had entertained one-party state ideas by opening them up for free expression. This is why May 3<sup>rd</sup>, officially declared World Press Freedom Day became a moment when not only journalistic but also non-journalistic actors engaged in debates over what press freedom is. For obvious reasons, non-journalistic actors in the form of pro-state actors, government officials participated in this debate to protect their own interests. As such, May 3<sup>rd</sup> provides a convenient opportunity to understand how ideological ambivalence and contestation in post-colonial societies following the fall of the Eastern

Block undermines journalistic abilities to unite themselves into a common journalistic interpretive community.

In Southern Africa, these press freedom debates are theoretically considered opportune moments to rethink journalistic roles in the region (Fourie, 2002; Wasserman & de Beer, 2006). This is because to be granted press freedom, journalists and related stakeholders must make a case for it. Articulating how journalistic roles serve broader social goals like transparency, accountability, democracy is one strategy that can be used to legitimize calls for press freedom. In line with the split in the Zimbabwean news media between the public and private press, Part I is organized into two chapters. First, chapter 5 focuses on how the public press' nationalistic conceptualization of press freedom has led to the formulation of its Fourth Estate role as a government partner. Chapter 6 follows up with a focus on how the private press' liberal conceptualization of press freedom leads to the formulation of its Fourth Estate role as a government watchdog, adversary, and public sphere. This is achieved by analyzing editorial, opinion, and analytical pieces focusing on the meaning of press freedom in the Zimbabwean context. Findings from analysis of these texts is also supported with interview data gathered from conversations with Zimbabwean journalists, academics, government officials, and press freedom activists. This Part I is thus an eagle's eye into the broader ideological differences between the publicly controlled and the privately controlled press. This is nuanced in Part II, which demonstrates how the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities have gone through different phases: from a united interpretive community fighting for self-regulation in the liberal period of 1995-1999; to a polarized one in the controversial era of 2000-2017; and back to a relatively depolarized one in Emmerson Mnangagwa's new dispensation from 2017-2023.

When the Emmerson Mnangagwa regime took over from Robert Mugabe in 2017, it promised citizens a new dispensation reorienting the country towards democracy through different reforms that include democratizing and depolarizing the news media. This raises the question of whether this marks a move towards a united journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe.

In conclusion, the Zimbabwean case broadly brings into perspective the question: what does it take to make a journalistic interpretive community? Previously, discourse has been regarded as the central element in solidifying journalists into a common interpretive community (Carlson, 2016; Zelizer, 1993). But taking a leaf from Berkowitz and TerKeursts' (1999) argument that journalistic interpretive communities are constituted into geographic zones within which they operate, this dissertation argues that there is need to rethink how, in contested communities, both discourse and hard actions by non-journalistic actors matter in shaping the structure of journalistic interpretive communities. That is, to understand how journalistic interpretive communities come into being, there is need to look beyond just discourse. It is important to also consider each context's geographic culture and power structures. Geographic culture, for the purposes of this dissertation, means the shared national ideology in any context as well as beliefs about press freedom and freedom of expression rights. By power structures, the dissertation refers to the relationship between the political and journalistic fields (Bourdieu, 2005); how politically secure is the leadership in the context under examination, as well as how much power does it wield in the system of international relations. Depending on context, journalistic interpretive communities can be sensitive or immune to changes in these factors. This Part 1 shows

how changing political temperatures fragmented Zimbabwean journalists into different camps operating from different cultural perspectives.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Press freedom and role conceptualization in the Zimbabwean public press: A nationalistic perspective**

Divided into two main parts, this first chapter to Part II examines the public press' frame of reference through an examination of its press freedom conceptualizations. This is followed with an analysis of how this conceptualization leads to a nationalistic role formulation at variance with the usual Western Fourth Estate role perspective focused on holding the powerful accountable. What emerges is a nationalistic perspective of press freedom that leads to what the public press calls patriotic roles to defend the country's national interest, national sovereignty, and national security. Since role conceptualization is dependent on journalists' frame of reference, the chapter starts off by looking at the public press' nationalistic conceptualization of press freedom before looking at its role conceptualizations.

#### **The public press' nationalistic conceptualization of press freedom**

Two themes inform the public press' nationalistic frame of reference: press freedom must be contextualized, and press freedom must be limited based on the fears of real and imagined enemies from within and from without. Discussion in this section is thus centered on these two themes, beginning with arguments to contextualize press freedom within Zimbabwe as set out below.

#### **Press freedom must be locally contextualized**

Even though the public press does not wholly reject the idea of press freedom, it foregrounds the argument that it must be contextualized within Zimbabwe's philosophical,



historical, and current circumstances. These arguments form the basis for calls for a localized version of press freedom that rejects or downplays the significance of key press freedom ideals such as pluralism, diversity, and press autonomy.

In calling for the contextualization of press freedom, the public press argues that it must be informed by the thinking or philosophies of communities where it is being applied. One philosophical principle that came out in both interviews and texts is that Zimbabwe is a communitarian society. In an interview with D1, a veteran journalist who has worked in both broadcast and print media industry in Zimbabwe, he said our “societies are communitarian in nature. That means, here, there is more emphasis on the rights of society than there is on the rights of the individual. So, there are certain things that really are not done.” This position means the journalist’s right as an individual cannot override community rights. This also means journalists must respect community elders, which in a sense is ironic as community elders are not regarded as individuals. The logic though is that these elders are an embodiment of community interests and rights, and therefore must be respected. As Zambian scholar Kasoma (1996) has argued, in the African context youngsters have limited rights to counsel their elders.

The above communitarian thinking informs the public press’ argument that press freedom is a tool to build community relationships. Subsequently, press freedom is also considered subservient to these community relations which are regarded as foundational to its existence as a right. This argument has been advanced by Tafataona. Mahoso (2006), former Media and Information Commission Chairman, a statutory body now named

Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC)<sup>2</sup>. Mahoso was an ardent Robert Mugabe follower and interpreter, disciple and teacher of Pan-Africanism partly through his *Sunday Mail* column “African Focus” (Ranger, 2004; Vengeyi, 2012). Even though there is academic controversy about how to define Pan-Africanism, it can generally be understood conceptually as unified resistance by African people both in Africa and the diaspora against foreign aggression, invasion, exploitation to attain total liberation under African communalism (Nantambu, 1998). Guided by this notion of Pan-Africanism and nationalism, Mahoso (2006), writing in *The Sunday Mail* argued that press freedom means fostering relationships that make press freedom possible. He argued:

...the media themselves must recognize that Press freedom is not merely a matter of demanding the rights of the publisher to publish and the rights of the journalist to gather, frame, and present news based on access to information. Press freedom first and foremost means recognizing, promoting, and safeguarding the relationships which make Press freedom possible and real in the first place.

Mahoso (2006) further argued that relationships come before individual rights. For this, he cited section 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which says: “Everyone has duties to the community in which the free and full development of his (her) personality is possible.” The goal here is to promote an anti-individualism Ubuntu value based on the principle of “*Ubuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*” which means a person is a person through other persons (Mokgoro, 1998). Relating it to Merrill's (1989) argument that

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<sup>2</sup> The Zimbabwe Media Commission is a statutory body responsible for regulating operations of the media in Zimbabwe. Above other things, it is responsible for promoting good practices and ethics in the news media. The Commission is also responsible for accrediting journalists, and licensing news media organizations.

freedom lies in one of three places: the state, the press or the individual, the public press emphasizes the community. This community based philosophical thinking forms a unique frame of reference for the public press that downplays the rights of journalists as compared to liberal ideals that promote individual rights of free expression and press freedom. The spread of liberal ideas in the 1990s, as well as training of African journalists using a liberal curricular means that fractured journalistic interpretive communities are inevitable in post-independence African states. Especially those states that try to deviate from liberal ideals as they face resistance from their people and journalists.

In addition, the public press' contextualization arguments also call for the recognition that African societies, Zimbabwe in this case, have their own communication systems. Mahoso (1996), argued that "Africa always had free expression procedures and structures, including a vibrant civil society among rural Zimbabweans which is ignored by press freedom proponents." He further argued that African communities' strong and well-developed structures and procedures ensured "individual and collective freedom of expression." These African procedures of expression here are based in the African communitarian thinking mentioned above, which according to D1 is based on the principle that "*vakuru havatukwe, vakuru havatadze* (elders are never rebuked, elders are always right). D1 illustrated this with an example: "if your father does something that's wrong, you can't exactly go on and say to him, old man, that's not it." His point here is that to tell your father that he has done something wrong, you must find a diplomatic way to do so. He emphasized that "if you try to behave as if you are in a cosmopolitan society, when you are in a communitarian society, you are most likely to hit the wrong nail." The argument here is one that has been emphasized by Kasoma (1996), who has argued that based on

African values, young people have no right to counsel their elders. To do so, they must find other elders to do it on their behalf. The challenge here is how to operationalize this value as a journalistic principle. As mentioned earlier, African journalism students are trained in the Western journalistic norms to hold the government accountable. Any suggestion that is otherwise only but raises suspicions of elites trying to hide something. Thus, the challenge in reconciling such values as respect for the elders against holding them accountable is what leads to journalistic community fractures.

Contextualization of press freedom in African communication procedures as outlined above motivates resistance to be measured using foreign standards. In fact, it motivates calls for press freedom advocates to consult African people on what they consider to be appropriate human rights. Mahoso (1996) criticized civil society organizations for imposing their notions of human rights on African societies, arguing that they “do not bother to go to African people and find out what they consider to be civil life.” Repeating reference to sections 28 and 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which he argued give contextual and historical meaning to Article 19, Mahoso (2006) bemoaned that “because the statements and analyses offered by journalists’ unions on World Press Freedom Day are mostly cliches and imitations imported from donors and sponsors, they routinely exclude section 29 of the same UDHR.” This argument was echoed in an interview with one senior media scholar C who queried why we should be judged by standards that were designed before Africans were even considered human:

[L]ook here I was a colony yesterday...who were we yesterday? We probably were not even human when people cobbled up a set of rights, which they named human rights, universal human rights, whatever it is. The time when these were being

written down, some sections of humanity had not arrived at the point of the human, they did not qualify as human at that time. Now we can just jump and say we're also entitled to this before we are human. Are we human in the first place?

This position questions the whole discourse about human rights based on previous racial relations. It is informed by mistrust in the sincerity of the human rights agenda. Whereas previous studies have interrogated journalists' trust in state institutions as part of journalistic culture (e.g., Van Dalen et al., 2019), what emerges here is that trust in international institutions also matters, particularly in the postcolonial context due to a suspicion of the motives of these institutions. What emerges here specifically is a lack of trust in principles of human rights advanced by such international institutions as UNESCO. Generally, the ruling party is suspicious that the human rights cause is part of an international regime change agenda to unseat the ruling party in Zimbabwe. The chapter returns to this argument in the next section where Mahoso (2009) argued that instruments like the Windhoek Declaration are models to unseat unwanted governments by the West. This lack of trust in international principles means that not all social actors are going to start from the same basic normative position, which leads to fractured journalistic interpretive communities. In this case, it is partly Zimbabweans, largely connected to the ruling party, who oppose such liberal principles as press freedom based on a fundamental distrust of liberalism as a universalizing ideology. Instead of a broad normative framework, they promote a vision of the journalistic interpretive community borne out of localized norms.

The public press, in eschewing universalizing normative frameworks, also calls for the scholarly interrogation of press freedom from a localized perspective. In another

interview with a public press senior editor F1, he argued that the problem is press freedom is not fully interrogated in Zimbabwe because Western experience frames it. He argued that “I look forward to a period where we would be able to quote...Danford in terms of scholarship or journalism and give their own personal experience about doing journalism in Africa or in Zimbabwe.” F1 argued that his main problem with press freedom “is the West writing about us and telling us that we have no freedom.” Thus, he argued that “we must be able to develop our scholarship that interrogate[s] press freedom in Africa and what it entails.” On one hand, this can be viewed as an African aspiration for authenticity, but, at the same time, it betrays a sinister agenda to hide the government’s hidden interests and corruption. The problem with localization is that, after decades of colonialism and contact with the outside world, Africa cannot go back to its default settings. Thus, these calls for a localized version of press freedom also form another basis for tension especially with those who perceive human rights as universal. The country’s journalistic interpretive community thus ends up torn between those who advocate for a universal conceptualization of press freedom, and those who advocate for a localized version of the same.

In calling for press freedom contextualization, the public press also urges for consideration of African people’s history of dispossession and economic inequalities that they endured under the colonial system. According to *The Sunday Mail*, in its article, “Diverse Views on Freedom of Press” (1995) press freedom must be contextualized in Africa by “taking account of both the people’s historical circumstances and their disadvantaged economic status.” This preoccupation with a post-colonial history of economic inequalities as indicated above manifests in how pro-government non-journalistic actors attach a material definition to press freedom whereby, they argue that

freedom of expression detached from ownership of natural resources is not freedom. Godwills Masimirembwa (2007), a member of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) political party, prioritized ownership of natural resources ahead of press pluralism by arguing that real freedom “does not lie in the plurality of newspapers, radio, and television stations, magazines, or access to the Internet. Real freedom lies in the control of natural resources, control of the land, control of the real economy.” Making a material definition of press freedom was basically motivated by an attempt to convince the press to support the government’s land reform program and other affirmative action activities. However, this should not only be viewed as an economic or political activity. What is important is the implication of such activities on the structure of journalistic interpretive communities. Because the land reform program itself was controversial, news stories that aided its execution were also set to be controversial, leading to polarization.

Pro-state non-journalistic actors also dismiss press freedom ideals that are not tied to material resources as Eurocentric and limiting. Mahoso (1999) argued that this freedom of expression only grants access to “columns, pages, and microphones” but “excludes the importance of land in guaranteeing freedom of expression.” This argument was echoed by one government official Y, who argued that the problem with press freedom is that those who advocate for the right do not want it extended to other sectors such as the economy. He argued that if we liberalize the media sector, then we should do the same with other sectors. He thus bemoaned that “yet when you say, we want to also liberate the land from White monopoly, oligopoly capital, then no, no, no, no, no. It's human rights violations.” This was also echoed in an interview with another former senior editor with the public

press, C1. He argued that if “I own my own piece of land, my own means of production, I can be truly independent.” This was also echoed by Zimpapers Editor F1 who argued that “land defines who you are. The land is the means of production. Your kids are going to inherit the land. They're not going to inherit your job.” This argument by the public press and the government is a post-colonial approach that acknowledges how African communities have been historically disempowered through colonial exploitation. Their claim, hence, is that the priority is to address those colonial imbalances or colonial legacies before talking about press freedom ideas. These arguments are informed by liberatory language derived from Africa’s fight for independence. According to *The Sunday Mail*, in its article, “Diverse Views on Freedom of Press” (1995), understood from an African perspective, press freedom “has, since the advent of colonialism, been founded on the overriding objective of freeing our continent from colonial rule, apartheid and foreign domination.” This means colonial legacies remain a challenge to press freedom in post-colonial Africa. In addition, this colonial legacy also has a bearing on the evolution of journalistic culture and its associated interpretive communities in post-independence contexts. This is because whereas liberation movements still regard themselves as victims, the ground has shifted. Now they are the ones who critics regard as exploiters of the very people they liberated and now they must be held accountable. Unless this change in status is acknowledged, press freedom and journalistic roles will remain a divisive issue.

Another contextualization argument is also that press freedom arguments must consider African people’s present circumstances characterized by poverty and social inequalities. Stanley Ruzvidzo Mupfudza (1995), former journalist with the Zimbabwe



Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), argued that press freedom must be “reflective of people’s thinking,” that is, their concern. The following illustrates what he meant by this:

In an age when the so-called globalization of the Press is becoming concentrated in the hands of a few media moguls, and when capitalist interests have greater influence in what appears in mainstream papers, we, here in Zimbabwe where the majority of the people are workers and peasants, semi-literate or downright illiterate, our definition of a free press will have to be broader and more reflective of those people’s fears, aspirations, and desires for shelter, food, and clothing in the most decent manner conceivable.

Mupfudza's (1995) broader argument was that press freedom should serve everyone’s interests, not only be concerned with the elites. This egalitarian perspective is not surprising in a context whereby the history of colonial dispossession leads to fears of the same happening under post-colonial leaders in independent Zimbabwe.

Arguments to contextualize press freedom by grounding it in African philosophical ideas, attaching material definitions, is not only tied to the notion that no one can fight to improve African people’s rights but Africans themselves, but is consequential on journalistic autonomy and rights. Mahoso (n.d.) in analyzing the connection between Western sanctions on Zimbabwe and the demand for media freedom argued that only Africans can improve their entitlement to human rights, freedom of expression and information. He argued that it “is all the people, all the communities, of these countries. It has always been the people.” This foregrounding of community interests and power in shaping their own destiny has led to the argument that there is nothing special about journalists that warrants them being granted rights above any other citizen. According to

George Charamba (1999), former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information from 2000 - 2017 and now Deputy Chief Secretary-Presidential Communications in the office of the President, making a general reference to communication models which feature the sender, the message and the receiver, argued that press freedom rights cannot be accorded to journalists, for journalists are just messengers. In his view, the place of journalists in this model is that of the messenger. He said that “Society...is both the sender and the receiver and the newsman/woman is a messenger from society, sent by society, back to itself as the only reader.” He thus argued that conceding rights to journalists makes them the messenger, which is not stipulated in any communication model. He further argued that powerful journalists do not mean a powerful society and “explains the current paradox where we have a cabal of powerful journalists in a society of a powerless majority.” This argument is linked to Mahoso's (1996) argument that what is more important is a free society and not press freedom. These arguments from Charamba and Mahoso matter a lot as at the time, they were key figures in determining the fate of the press in Zimbabwe.

The limitation on press freedom, evidenced in denying journalists any special rights in favor of the community, illustrate this dissertation's argument as indicated in the introduction to this section that it takes more than discourse to create a journalistic interpretive community. While discourse is a central element in shaping journalistic interpretive communities as has been proven by Zelizer (1993), it is fundamental to consider the geographic locations where these interpretive communities are located. This is because contextual factors play a pre-determination role to shape journalistic discourse in ways that can either fracture or unite journalistic interpretive communities. This argument is tied to Berkowitz and TerKeurst's (1999, p. 127) argument that “interpretive

communities are characterized not just by the socio-economic background of their members, but by the common modes of interpretation of their social world.” Key to this argument is their argument that journalist’s community occurrences are interpreted using shared community experiences. This section has demonstrated how Zimbabwe’s perceived philosophical background, history of colonial dispossession, current social and economic inequalities, are part and parcel of community occurrences within this geographic space shaping how the country’s journalists interpret who they are and the rights they think they deserve. While this section has argued how philosophical contextual factors influence and shape how journalistic interpretive communities perceive themselves, the next section investigates how this background inspires fears and insecurities that further motivate arguments to limit press freedom.

### **Shadows everywhere: Zimbabwean regime’s insecurities, fear of the unknown and press freedom limitations**

The Robert Mugabe led Zimbabwean regime that ended in 2017 was described as paranoid over its fears to be removed from power as displayed through various media laws it enacted (see Chuma, 2004). The current Emmerson Mnangagwa regime, which came under the mantra of the new dispensation when it succeeded Mugabe’s rulership, has continued to display similar tendencies of paranoia. Jeffrey Moyo, an International Zimbabwean correspondent for the *New York Times* described the current government as a “regime that sees shadows everywhere around itself,” in an article, “Zimbabwe’s press freedom, one step forward, three steps backward” (Bafana, 2022). Moyo had been arrested on allegations of obtaining accreditation for *New York Times* journalists, Christina Goldbaum and Joao Silva through false representations to immigration officials. He was

considered a threat to national security and denied bail for 21 days. It is these fears by the Zimbabwean government that inform the public press' press freedom debates. Top of the list is the argument that press freedom considerations must consider that the country is still a fragile democracy which exposes it to a lot of risks. These risks include having its sovereignty undermined through internal disturbances that can lead to domination and exploitation by foreign powers.

The first perception of weakness from the Zimbabwean public press is that the country has not been able to fully develop into a strong state, hence press freedom considerations must be sensitive to the fact that it is still a fragile democracy. In an interview with G1, one of Zimpapers' former editors, he argued that Zimbabwe remains fragile because "it is a state that has not really had an opportunity to establish itself robustly since independence." He cites different challenges that the country has encountered including Gukurahundi (a tribal war that some define as a genocide, and some, particularly the ruling party and those pro-establishment only describe as a moment of madness) in the 1980s; economic difficulties that followed economic liberalization in the early 1990s; late 1990s political upheavals as well as Western sanctions imposed on the country's leadership in early 2000. These arguments pose a challenge for a united journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe because they are interpreted differently. Some describe Gukurahundi as a genocide against the Ndebele people, while the public media is generally silent on this issue (see Mpofu, 2016). The same applies to the effect of structural adjustment programs of the early 1990s, as well as sanctions of early 2000. For instance, one argument that has divided the Zimbabwean media landscape is that the public media claims the country is under sanctions from the West, while the privately controlled press

argues that the sanctions are targeted (see Jaeger, 2016). Thus, by default, the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community is bound to be fragmented due to these different points of disagreement.

The public press' fragile democracy concerns are also based on the idea that the country is a weaker member of the international community of nations, hence press freedom concerns must consider that geopolitical positioning. A good example here is how Zimbabwe's economic woes and tentional relations with Western countries are used as evidence to oppose media liberalization arguing that it increases the country's national security risk from misinformation. Here, the fear is that misinformation could easily be used to cause civil strife or even civil war in Zimbabwe due to economic hardships that the country has been facing since 2000. Mahoso (n.d.) argued that with Zimbabwe under sanctions, foreign media will get an upper hand over the local media. His reasoning was that due to sanctions, local media "have been denied the most up-to-date technology" hence the call for opening of media space is part of the scheme to successfully effect regime change. He explained that Zimbabwe is susceptible to information warfare and civil strife because "illegal sanctions have made the country and the people vulnerable to manipulation and destabilization through the latest technologies because the current established media have been starved of the latest technologies..." In an interview with academic C, he argued that "...our situation should take on board such nuances. To say we cannot be a Sweden...by dint of how we are located in the geopolitical system." Thus, in considering how journalistic interpretive communities come into being, or fail to do so, it is important to consider such geopolitical factors that can shape journalistic discourse with the effect of either uniting or fragmenting journalistic interpretive communities.

The public press' press freedom debates are also driven by fear of foreign domination through regime change. This is evidenced by conspiracies that free media are part of a scheme to effect regime change in Zimbabwe. Mahoso (2009) branded Zimbabwe's privately controlled press as regime change media that have "campaigned for the imposition of illegal sanctions on Zimbabwe in support of the then opposition parties." On the grounds of this, he delegitimized their claim that they are independent and free. In the same article, he also argued that both the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), a civil society organization that fights for press freedom, and the Windhoek Declaration, "are manifestations of a Cold War regime change model transplanted from the US experience in destabilizing Europe." This was also backed by commentators like the late Panganai Kahuni (2012), liberation war fighter and Zimbabwe National Army Colonel who argued that "atrocities that have happened in East Timor, Chile, Cuba ... speak volumes of how America views democracy and freedom of speech in relation to its national interests." In the Zimbabwean context, according to veteran public media journalist J1, regime change is more than the change of government. He defined regime change as an overhaul of a country's value system: "...power can transition from one to the other. And it (country) remains what it is, but when it becomes regime change, it means whatever you represented..." Even though the geographic space is important in shaping journalistic interpretive communities, that space's geographic position in the international system of nations is an important element to consider as well.

Zimbabwe's self-perceived weakness in international relations as expressed through the public press is also used to argue that press freedom might expose the country to exploitation by global powers. Kahuni (2012) is on record arguing that calls for

democracy, freedom of speech and rights are part of the West and Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Zimbabwe's main opposition political party then) plot to enhance "the West's plunder of our natural resources and regime change." The argument here is that this plunder will be achieved through the spread of Western propaganda facilitated by press freedom. This is why Mahoso (1996) has argued that the "so-called free flow of information is the free flow of Western propaganda." This propaganda, according to Kahuni (2012) is meant to ensure American hegemony that facilitates exploitation of smaller countries. He drives this argument home by giving the example of how the US, in the 1800s, "implemented the Monroe Doctrine, pushing out European powers and establishing US hegemony over resources and labor in Latin American Nations." Based on this Mahoso (1996) argued that "we should be able to understand where global media owners and communicators are coming from, we should be able to put them in their proper place and perspective, only if we first and foremost know and have our own ground, our own place, our own people." This last quotation marks language of mobilization against international news organizations which are implicitly perceived as agents to spread Western hegemony to facilitate exploitation of smaller nations. In addition to a country's geopolitical positioning and relations with other nations as a factor to consider in the structuring of journalistic interpretive communities, it is also important to consider levels of trust between the host nation and other countries.

The above fears have led to calls for different strategies and approaches contrary to press freedom principles. Fear of exploitation of smaller nations leads to calls to first indigenize the news media, prioritize the national interest, and challenge global information flows before calling for press freedom. The public press explicitly argues that the first step

before having press freedom as a right is to have local news media ownership. According to senior editor F1, national interests refer to existential questions about Zimbabwe. This was supported by C1, former editor with Zimpapers who argued that “the national interest is paramount because that is the reason for our existence as a geopolitical state called Zimbabwe. All other freedoms should subordinate to the national interest.” This means rights like press freedom come after the national interest. Combined with the fact that Zimbabweans don’t agree on what is the national interest, and how to attain it, this leads to divisions among reporters. Caesar Zvayi (2006), former *Herald* Editor, has argued that unlike journalists from liberal Western countries who have since dealt with issues of media ownership and made the national interest a priority, local journalists cannot have that luxury. He went on to ask: “Today Africa calls for freedom, in whose media?” He also argued that calls for press freedom cannot be made before resuscitation of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debate. The NWICO debate of the 1970s and 1980s was a call through UNESCO by 55 developing nations that called themselves the Non-Aligned Movement for a reversal of one-way global information flow from the Global North to the Global South (Buchanan, 2015). Going back to the earlier argument that it takes more than discourse to structure journalistic interpretive communities, here the public press arguments show how fears in a nation can lead to concrete actions with consequences for reporters.

The perception that Zimbabwe is a fragile democracy has also led to calls to change standards used to measure levels of press freedom that in the eyes of the public press should not be signified by attacking the government of the day. Ruling party ZANU PF official Masimirembwa (2007) has argued for the rejection of “the concept of Press Freedom being



imported into Zimbabwe by the so-called independent media houses from the West...that it is only when the media attacks the Government that it can truly be called independent.” Albert Nhamoyebonde (2011), a social commentator, thus wondered “Why the Press would find it interesting to demean the leadership of political parties in our fragile democracy...” In an interview with veteran journalist J1, now occupying a leading position in the Zimbabwean media landscape, he argued that press freedom measured by government attacks is an attempt to undermine the country’s sovereignty. He questioned: “What is it that you are defending or attacking? That's where Zimbabwe's whole issue is muddled up. Uh, our economics, our ideology, our legal system, it is all just currently jumbled up.” These notions have led Nomsa Nkala (2011), general manager for Zimpapers’ Zimbabwe Television Network (ZTN), to argue that press freedom must consider local realities. She explained this by arguing that “instead of adopting what is portrayed to be the democratic ways of managing the media, developing nations should explore their own democratic models that best serve their own interests and encourage responsible media operations.” Efforts to redefine the meaning of independent journalism as well as calls to adopt models that work in the African context again serve as a reminder to how context informs journalistic discourse which ultimately structures journalistic interpretive communities.

The call for models that suit the African context include arguments against what the public press refers to as unfair application of the press independence test. Zimpapers has argued that the West selectively applies press freedom principles. The argument here is that when the press takes a stance against the government, it is regarded as press independence only in reference “to the Third World in general and Africa in particular” (“Let’s Celebrate the Diversity of Media,” 1999). This unfair application of principles is

also noted in press self-regulation arguments. Zimpapers has pointed out that calls for an unregulated media environment is a yardstick “meant for other countries and never for Western nations who regularly breach this media benchmark without qualms” (“Western Hypocrisy and Media Freedom,” 2011). To this end, Zimpapers has argued that Western nations are hypocritical because while “they are feverishly pushing for media self-regulation in Zimbabwe, Western countries are busy whipping their media organizations into line.” During interviews, this argument was supported by the view that press freedom does not exist anywhere. In an interview, one former Zimpapers editor, I1, said press freedom is a fallacy and went on to make the following claim: “I’ve worked in the media for the whole of my life, something like now 30 or so years. There is nothing called press freedom. It’s a fallacy.” This was also supported by J1 who argued that in “America, you can’t talk about and promote communism...there is a line...even for the sake of press freedom.” Another senior editor with Zimpapers, F1 also bemoaned that “young journalists that are being churned from journalism schools...come to the newsroom with this idea that there is this thing called the free press...Yet...this free press does not exist anywhere.” Thus, perception of what happens in liberal Western countries, also matters in how journalistic interpretive communities interpret their culture.

The public press cites different examples to illustrate the West’s double standards when it comes to press freedom principles. Zivisai Chigaka (2008), a journalist writing for the public press, argued that the West’s double standards are exposed by the EU “which, on one hand, talks of the rule of law, democracy and freedom of the Press, yet they are, on the other, putting a journalist under sanctions.” He called this media muzzling. Another Zimpapers correspondent Tafara Shumba (2022), argued that the West is always quick to

criticize ZANU PF but never the opposition in Zimbabwe when it comes to the violation of press freedom principles. On the other hand, Tichaona Zindoga (2015), former *Herald* editor, argued that while the West is quick to rebuke any antisemitic sentiments, “countries in Europe and America do not feel obliged to outlaw ‘extreme speech’ and punish Islamophobic offenders.” Zimbabwe’s public media journalists who have been put under sanctions also use that as an example of how the West and their counterparts in the private press are insincere about the whole press freedom issue. In an interview with veteran journalist K1, he said their counterparts in the private press should have condemned the sanctions if they believed in press freedom. “I’m one of the few journalists on sanctions imposed by the Americans in this country. Authored by Zimbabweans... And the so-called independent journalists have never condemned that there is a Zimbabwean journalist on sanctions.” The sanctions example here further illustrate that the structure of journalistic interpretive communities is not only dependent on local power structures. Geopolitical power dynamics also come into play.

In pushing the above narrative, the public press attempts to delegitimize the news outlets that criticize the Zimbabwean leadership in its fragile democratic state. This begins with Nhamoyebonde (2011), who attempted to delegitimize press freedom by arguing that in many countries, it means licensing the gutter press. Even though he does not define it, the Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (Bob, 2005) conceptualizes it as publications that promote sensationalist reportage focusing on the private lives of public figures. Charamba (1999), delegitimized such gutter press using McLuhan’s theory that the medium is the message. He argued that McLuhan’s thesis – the medium is the message – was a complaint against such gutter press “which capture and recast original messages,

which play ‘noise’ in the communication model to the extent that they interfere with the transfer messages.” The argument here is thus more than just a call for adaptation of press freedom to African realities, but an attempt to reconceptualize and re-define existing theoretical models to suit particular agendas. In addition, criticism of attacking the government as not a sign of press freedom is rebuttal of agitational forms of reporting which Kasoma (1996) argued is against Afriethics. Kasoma defines Afriethics as a communal approach to resolve ethical journalistic dilemmas whereby reporters take a collective approach in counseling each other instead of using individualistic mechanisms.

Given the above fears over press freedom, it is not surprising that public press journalists are self-paternalistic, calling for government intervention. It is beyond the scope of this research to determine if this self-paternalism is a sign of influence from the non-journalistic community, or a mere convergence of ideas. Nonetheless, this convergence is achieved first by arguing that “No press is absolutely free” (“Let’s Celebrate the Diversity of Media,” 1999). Nkala (2011), argued that absolute freedom is a double-edged sword which can create “an undesirable platform that encourages going beyond the need for reasonably informing and sharing information to outright endangering a nation’s interests, value systems and sovereignty.” Based on this, she is self-paternalistic by calling for government intervention as a necessity in developing countries. She calls it “limited interference that goes beyond administrative processes...because developing nations are still vulnerable and in a sensitive nature.” Another justification given in favor of government intervention is that it will stop the press from spreading untruths. To this end, Caesar Zyayi (2004), former editor with *The Herald*, argued that “if press freedom is misconstrued as freedom to lie with impunity, then it becomes a threat to democracy as a

whole as it becomes nothing short of media terrorism.” Thus, for the sake of bigger goals such as national interest, sovereignty, and security, the public press is willing to have limited journalistic autonomy.

Whereas the first theme made a case for how contextual factors shape discourse which in turn structures journalistic interpretive communities, this section argues that global power structures should also be considered when thinking about factors that shape journalistic interpretive communities. As has been shown in this section, arguments driving the public press’ press freedom debates are driven by fear of neo-colonialism, foreign sponsored internal destabilization, and foreign domination through regime change. All these are fears grounded in international relations and politics. Furthermore, these fears prove to be key in negotiating journalistic culture, particularly its opportunity structure which determines conditions under which journalists operate. At the same time, however, these arguments are also key in shaping the intrinsic aspect of journalistic culture, especially journalistic roles. This is the subject matter of the next section.

### **In defense of the national interest: The public press’s journalistic role conceptualization**

As an intrinsic dimension of the journalistic culture (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), journalistic role conceptualizations are integral to the existence of either a united or fragmented journalistic interpretive community. Out of the three elements that make up journalistic interpretive communities – people engaged in common activities, with a common purpose and employing a common frame of reference (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999) – journalistic role conceptualizations reflect the second dimension. Journalistic failure to share a common purpose means they cannot be a united community because they

do not share the same assumptions rooted in a common frame of reference. This is summed up in Hanitzsch et al.'s (2019) argument that journalists who share similar professional views in the form of assumptions, beliefs, and work conditions, form journalistic milieus. This dissertation argues that Zimbabwean journalists in the public press are a journalistic milieu of their own by virtue of sharing different professional views as compared to those uniting journalists in the private press (discussed in the next chapter). While they surely share similar professional views courtesy of their training and profession, this sharing does not materialize in practice due to different political economic forces that result in diverging role conceptions.

Zimbabwe's public press journalists form a separate professional milieu united and driven by its conception of the national interest. In an interview with one veteran public news media journalist, L1, he clearly stated that "the public media, they're supposed to push the national interest, national agenda." Compared to Western norms, this is somewhat of an anomaly because journalistic roles are not divided according to news media types, even where there may be different conceptualizations. This is the source of the fracture between the public press and the private press. This fracture was made clear by another former public press editor who said the public and private press play different roles. Former editor G1 said, "different media houses have different roles...that is the beauty of plurality," before adding:

It would be a gross disservice to the public if all media houses pursued the same objective interests. For the public media, I would believe their primary role should be to promote the national interest. And for the private media, their primary role

should be to advance accountability, to pursue that investigative story that helps to create more robust institutions and more robust systems.

However, the difference is not as simple as stated here. Public press journalists still believe that the private press in pursuing their accountability roles are still pursuing the national interest. What differs is the *modus operandi*. In an interview with another veteran public press journalist, B1, he said “some would think confronting the government is the way whilst others would think it’ll be better to engage the government in a friendly way.” The public press takes this national interest idea as both a role and guiding conceptual framework. As a frame of reference, it leads to four dominant roles in the public press’s redefinition of what being the Fourth Estate means. These new Fourth Estate roles are: being a government partner promoting its policies and programs; acting as a nation building ideological state apparatus; advancing sustainable development; and a conflicted accountability role. However, before looking at these roles in detail, it may be imperative to first understand how this idea of national interest is defined.

### **Defining the national interest**

In defining the national interest, the public press often refers to Section 3 of the country’s constitution. In an interview with former Zimpapers editor Brezhnev Malaba (2013), Jonathan Moyo, former Minister of Information and Publicity in Robert Mugabe’s government said nine principles listed in the Zimbabwean constitution define the national interest: acceptance of good governance principles; acceptance of Zimbabwe’s diverse values; primacy of the constitution; recognition of gender equality; respect for the liberation struggle; respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms; respect for the rule of law; respect of equality; respect of human dignity. He went on to claim that it is the duty

of every Zimbabwean to define the national interest. While these ideals enshrined in the constitution are, on the surface, laudable, the challenge that remains, as the next chapter will show, is that it is difficult to reach consensus on how to define the principles listed here. For instance, respect for the liberation struggle means different things to different people. As a result, they can be wielded as justifications to act against journalistic independence.

During interviews, public press journalists repeated this similar definition. In an interview with former editor C1, he said that “national interest is basically the reason for the existence of this state called Zimbabwe...it is supposed to be home, home to Zimbabweans.” He added:

So, anything that threatens the material existence of Zimbabweans, control of their resources, their right to govern themselves, their right to determine their future, their destiny, it threatens the national interest.

Thus, one thing central to the idea of national interest is control of natural resources, which, as will be shown in the next chapter, is divisive because the private press prefers separating that from news media issues. Senior public press editor F1 also said they are guided by this national interest, which he defines as things that are existential, “you talk about security...How does our foreign policy spare our development.” B1, another senior editor with the state broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) added that national interest means celebrating the country’s victories and not wishing it ill. It is this framework that defines how public press journalists define their roles. Closely linked to this idea of national interest is the public interest concept which Masimirembwa (2007a) argued must be defined by the government. He argued that the “media do not derive their authority from



the public...They are not established through elections or a referendum...Therefore it is the duty of the government to define what public interest means.” This represents the rationale for a very close relationship between the political and the journalistic fields in Zimbabwe. The challenge with this is it makes journalism too vulnerable to political developments as reporters lack autonomy. The ultimate effect being that journalists find it difficult to structure their own interpretive communities on their own terms.

In the sections below, this chapter looks at how the public press promotes these roles of being a government partner, contributing to nation building, being an ideological state apparatus, as well as advancing development. These roles came out from editorial, analytical, and opinion pieces reflecting on the concept of press freedom published around World Press Freedom Days between 1993 and 2023 as part of the public press’ goals to advance the national interest which former Zimpapers editor C1 said is paramount over and above any other journalistic roles.

#### **Fourth Estate Role redefined: The public press as a government partner**

In Western democracies, the press is generally regarded as a Fourth Estate of the realm. That means its role is to hold the powerful to account, making sure they do not abuse their power, as well as raising criticism (see Christians et al., 2009; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018). In the Zimbabwean context, this role is inverted especially by non-journalistic actors to mean the role of the news media as the Fourth Estate is being a government partner. This means various roles outlined by the public press are couched within this idea of the press as a government partner and here these roles are presented as such.

The role of the press as a government partner means being a promoter of state interests. This was stated by Masimirembwa (2007b) when he argued that the press “is not

an adversary of the government. It is a partner in promoting and protecting the interests of the state.” Through interviews, this researcher established that what the public press means by promoting state interests is supporting the present government. Public press journalists do not necessarily need to share these interests because the public press is structurally designed and mandated to do so. Editors are specifically made to sign contracts stipulating this mandate. In an interview with E1, another top public press editor, he said: “Editors at Zimpapers sign five-year contracts. And their contracts state exactly what they should do...the simple things in that contract are that one, Zimpapers will serve the government of the day.” E1 said Zimpapers has performed this role since 1890 when it was established by the colonial government. It is thus important that in analyzing journalistic interpretive communities, history is taken into consideration, particularly in post-independence states. In this case, a pro-colonial journalistic culture was inherited without modifications.

Defending and promoting state interests also means the public press must defend the country’s national sovereignty, independence, right to natural resources, cultural values, promote local languages, right to self-determination, creativity, and cultural excellence. Christopher Mushohwe, (2017) former information minister in Robert Mugabe’s government, in an article, “National interest paramount” argued that “if our media keeps these values and principles uppermost on their minds, media polarization would die a natural death.” Masimirembwa, (2007b) also illustrated this by arguing how the British press “decidedly remains British, defending the British position and even make heroes out of their villainous soldiers.” A veteran journalist with the public press, J1, reiterated that sovereignty is about who we are as a people. He went on to explain that sovereignty became an issue “because we had taken land away, which our people went to

the struggle for. So, it goes back to who we are as a people, dispossessed, and now we possess back, and then we have ideological differences around it.” It is programs like the land reform program which motivated the debate that the news media should defend the national agenda at both national and African continental levels. Pro-state officials like Masimirembwa (2007b) are adamant that the press should defend the national agenda and illustrates this with how the French “require that 60 percent of material broadcast must cover the social, political and economic realities and aspirations of the people of the European Union.” What is important here, as also shown in different parts of this chapter, is that the involvement of non-journalistic actors has serious implications on journalistic culture depending on how close they are to the news media.

Promoting government interests also means promoting government policies and programs. According to Masimirembwa (2007b), for “a government, the media’s role would be that of articulating and disseminating information on government policy, educating the public on government programs.” In an interview, senior editor F1 echoed this and said, “public media...is more motivated by its mandate to promote government policy.” Another public media editor E1 echoed the same and said Zimpapers supports the government whether it’s good or bad because “government policy is not there to please you.” He said:

If you are in your house and your mother is cooking *sadza* (traditional Zimbabwean meal) and vegetables, you might be excited by the smell from next door of chicken, but at the end of the day you eat your vegetables from your mother. So, we are saying the government is the mother. Whatever excites you in America or wherever does not change much.

This position is also extended to being cognizant of the country's foreign policy. E1 added that editors' contracts signed at Zimpapers means "you must be conscious that we have a Look East Policy. The Chinese and the Russians are our best friends. So whatever story you carry, you must be cognizant of that." If the press is to criticize or attempt to influence government policy, they are required to do so within a national framework. According to Charamba (2006), this is the founding mission of the media, "not to win elections on behalf of foreign surrogates, subvert or attempt to unseat governments to appease a bitter foreign power..." In addition, the public press is required to give a narrative of successful developmental projects carried by the government. According to Masimirembwa (2007b), this includes highlighting government "failures and the reasons thereof, particularly having regard to illegal sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by the West." Reference to national framework in influencing government policy, as well as use of sanctions to explain failure of government programs can only be best interpreted as public press attempts to shape interpretive frames that the public press journalists can use in covering the country's story.

The contracts that public media journalists are made to sign, requiring them to promote the government of the day, its policies (foreign and domestic), and programs, indicates how political economy is an important element in structuring journalistic interpretive communities in material terms. In this case, the editors' contracts are powerful tools to restrict and constrain what editors can and cannot do. As will be shown later, this impacts journalistic practices in significant ways.

### **The public press as a nation building ideological state apparatus**

Apart from promoting government policies as discussed above, the public press is also tasked with the ideological role to inform people about the country's political, social,

and economic philosophies. According to Masimirembwa (2007b) these are the “philosophies upon which the country is built.” Other ideological values considered key here are nationalism, patriotism, and love for one’s country. Masimirembwa extended this to “promoting an understanding of world affairs, our friends and foes...to entertain the public...to gather, record, and disseminate news on the joys and tribulations of life.” Here, the public press has an active role in shaping readers’ views other than leaving them at the mercy of their own interpretations. According to another journalist, Clemence Amos Tashaya (1998) the press, “being a neutral channel can press upon their readers their own views instead of leaving them to work out conclusions for themselves.” Masimirembwa (2007a) further argued that this press’ self-fulfillment objective involves propagating and educating “the public on social, political, economic and ideological issues.” This ideological role, according to Nhamoyebonde (2011) is also extended to shaping “proper perceptions about a nation and its leadership.” This ideological role is not only limited to the local Zimbabwean context as the public press is also charged with a foreign ideological purpose. According to Masimirembwa (2007b), the press must “market the values of the country” in the same way the BBC World Service is involved in “promoting and marketing British values to the world.” In addition, this external ideological role also involves efforts to attract foreign investors. According to Bishow Parajuli (2018), the UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Zimbabwe, the “media also has a big role in sending positive and hopeful messages that outline a positive narrative of Zimbabwe as an investment destination.” Examination of the relationship between journalists and the state as the center of power is thus important here in considering how journalistic interpretive communities come into being. The government or those who are pro-state play

a pivotal role in defining the country's journalistic culture as seen here through definition of roles that the press should play.

The ideological roles mentioned above are expected to contribute to nation building by promoting peace, unity, justice, and the building of strong institutions. Mushohwe (2017) explained that the national interest is a call on the press “to play a very crucial role in promoting peace, unity and cohesion within our communities, within our nations, between nations and ultimately, the promotion of peace among countries of the world.” This was also echoed by Parajuli (2018) who connected this role to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are sets of targets to guide the world's 2030 development agenda adopted by UN member countries in September 2015 with support from the IMF (Colfer et al., 2020). Broader in scope and guided by the notion that development must be sustainable socially, economically, and environmentally, the SDGs replaced the Millennium Development Goals. Parajuli argued that the news media play a role in the advancement of SDGs, such as SDG 16 “which promotes peace, justice, and building strong institutions.” This is supported by the argument that whatever is reported should not compromise national security. According to Masimirembwa (2007b) what “is reported must advance the cause of peace, progress, and justice.” Promoting national unity is thus not only a role, but also a national interest inspired news value to guide how the public press covers tribal issues. However, this also sows seeds of interpretive community division because approaches to post-conflict national healing are different with some calling for open dialogue instead of silence over past atrocities. Generally, the public press is silent about the Gukurahundi conflict while some argue that there is need for open discussion and acknowledgement to achieve national healing (see Murambadoro, 2015).

Promoting national peace and unity was also repeated as a journalistic role in interviews for this research. In an interview with public press editor E1, he mentioned that as editors, when “you sign your contract, you know that Matabeleland<sup>3</sup> is a very sensitive issue, part of our history. So, you will not carry a story that would divide the Shonas and the Ndebele.” The Shonas and the Ndebele people are the two dominant tribal groups in Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe, a Shona president, was accused of tribalism following the death of Ndebele people in the 1980s at the hands of the Fifth Brigade. This similar argument was also repeated by government official X who argued that the government is “advocating for journalism which builds peace because we know that in our environment in Africa, journalism can be used to destroy society...if you are not sensitive to nation building.” Government official X also added that the state is pushing for solutions journalism, a form of reporting that focuses on how people deal with social problems (McIntyre & Lough, 2021) as a way of addressing news media polarization in the country. He said the government is asking for journalism that does not only look at “how bad things are and paint them ugly and leave people without options. We are saying our journalism must be able to provide people with solutions and where to get them.” He said solutions journalism will be key in moments of crisis:

So, if there is a Cholera outbreak, we're not looking at journalists who just go there and show people who are dying...they write that story and leave. No, we are looking for journalists who go and search for information from The World Health

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<sup>3</sup> Matabeleland is Zimbabwe's southwestern region founded by the Ndebele people, who are the second largest tribal group in the country. A lot of Ndebele people were killed by the Robert Mugabe regime in the 1980s over power struggles between the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) which had also participated in the war of liberation.

Organization, from the Ministry of Health, from scientists, what people can do immediately to resolve the situation. This is solutions journalism, not just gloom and doom.

Ideologically, the public press is also tasked with the goal to give expression to the spirit of national identity. Former information minister Jonathan Moyo is on record saying the “spirit of sovereign control over national resources...must surely find expression in the media industry by which we express our collective self-consciousness, identity, and preoccupations as a people” (Magwaza, 2002). Masimirembwa (2007b) legitimizes this role by referring to how “the Canadian Broadcasting system...provides, through its programming, a public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty.” The public press journalists thus become a community identified and united by their ideological nation building role through promotion of peace, unity, national identity, and the country’s values both at home and abroad.

What this means is that it is not just journalistic roles that are context based. The whole journalistic culture is also context based, which means the same for journalistic interpretive communities. Broadly, this means journalistic interpretive communities must be placed within their socio-political and historical context to understand the fears and concerns that drive how they negotiate and shape their journalistic culture.

### **The public press as an agent of change: advancing development**

In relation to development, which in this case is largely couched within the discourse of sustainable development, the public press prioritizes three journalistic functions: acting as an agent of social change; acting as a mobilizer; and acting as a bridge between the government and the people. As an agent of social change, the press is urged



to create a sense of urgency for change around social and environmental issues (Parajuli, 2018). The public press also advocates for the news media to challenge stereotypes, and conservative norms to transform beliefs and attitudes. According to Muwanigwa (2015) the “media provides an effective opportunity to address conservative norms and standards that have made meeting the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) targets difficult.” The media can achieve this, according to Conrad Mupesa (2021) *The Herald’s* Mashonaland West Bureau, by exposing gender abuses such as violence, rape and early child marriages. Former information minister, Webster Shamu (2009) once reiterated this by arguing that journalism has a role in “serving our societies with vital information and values necessary to save and improve them.” It must be noted, however, that this is one of the few roles in Zimbabwe that do not engender controversy as compared to the ideological ones mentioned above.

The press is also tasked with playing a mobilization role to enhance public participation and engagement in Zimbabwe’s development processes through ensuring free circulation of ideas. Parajuli (2018) urged the press to “mobilize the people to participate in development discourse.” Current Minister of Information Monica Mutsvangwa (2019) argued that the press has a “democratic role in ensuring free circulation of ideas that stimulate robust discussion of various initiatives by the government, to ensure that everyone participates.” According to Tashaya (1998), information about ideas and events helps the people to make rational judgements. In the public press, however, this role is still couched within the national interest. According to Masimirembwa (2007b), the “public will meaningfully participate in decision making when the Press reports true facts, when editorials promote the national interest.” Herein however lie the other problem which

divides the Zimbabwean journalists and even the public press journalists acknowledge the challenges associated with defining the national interest as government officials tend to hide their selfish interests behind the concept. In an interview, former Zimpapers editor G1 argued that the problem in Zimbabwe is that of strong men and weaker institutions which he said differentiates it from organizations like the BBC. He said with institutions like the BBC, they “draw lines where individuals mess up; that has nothing to do with the national interest.” Here is a reminder again, that local power dynamics between the journalistic institution and the state is crucial in understanding the structure, shape, and orientation of journalistic interpretive communities.

In addition, the public press also prioritizes being a bridge between the government and the people. That is, being a channel between politicians and the public as argued by Tashaya, (1998). Stephen Mpofo (2017) former Zimpapers editor, also added that this bridging role suggests that “journalists pass as the eyes and ears of governments on one side of the isle and of the general public.” Parajuli (2018) also added that the “media must ensure coverage on the outstanding work of rural and urban communities and women, even their daily challenges.” Based on covering rural areas, the public press even goes on to justify government involvement in media ownership. In an interview, B1 argued that “if the government is involved, we have to go...to every part of the country and see the needs of the people, project them to the same government...” Due to the history of state media manipulation by the state however, government involvement in public news media remains a controversial topic in Zimbabwe but here, its involvement is justified on the basis of ensuring equal access to everyone.

A country's state of economic development, combined with local power dynamics, as well as goals of international institutions is also an important factor in shaping the shape and orientation of journalistic interpretive communities. In economically advanced liberal Western countries, development journalism is never up for consideration. In the Global South, it is thus important to take this as a crucial element. Most importantly, it will be crucial to understand how it is defined by different players.

### **Public press ambivalence over holding the government accountable**

Despite prioritization of the national interest role in the public press, there are also attempts to advance the watchdog role in its typical Fourth Estate concept of holding the government accountable and checking on its abuse of power. However, a disjuncture between pronouncements in the press and what this researcher gathered through interviews point to some form of dissonance. In the texts analyzed for this research, the public press made efforts to emphasize its watchdog role in exposing corruption, watching over democratic elections. Stephen Mpofu (2017), former Zimpapers editor, has urged that “African governments should not listen only to what titillates their ear, while dismissing out of hand press reports that throw light on wrong doings of some of their leaders as exposed by the press.” He was talking about incidents when the press exposes such wrongdoings as corruption, which may bring their downfall. The public press's watchdog role is also extended to being a watchdog over elections. *The Herald's* features writer, Beaven Dhliwayo (2019), in arguing that “a democratic election with no media freedom or stifled media freedom would be a contradiction,” points out that “media acts as a crucial watchdog to democratic elections, safeguarding the transparency of the process.” However, this is different from views gathered through interviews.

Both current and former public press editors emphasized that there is a difference between stated roles and what happens in real practice. According to former Zimpapers editor C1, structurally, the public press cannot hold the government accountable:

There are stated roles. But when you go to praxis now...the private media will not see anything wrong with the opposition. They will always see something wrong with the ruling party. The same with the public media. They won't see anything wrong with the government. They will see everything wrong with the opposition. So, there's a dichotomy...between the stated editorial objectives and praxis. And this is influenced by politics. Because the society itself is divided.

Political affiliation here plays a crucial role as the public press aligns with the ruling party while the privately controlled press aligns with the opposition political party. This was summed up by former Zimpapers News Editor E who said at his former employer "if you... write a story that undermines or degrades the political and economic standing of ZANU PF, if that story sees the light of the day, it'll be by accident. And when that accident happens, you are fired." Former Zimpapers editor C1 also argued that the problem is structural: "It'll be a cold day in hell for a public media editor to expose corruption involving a government minister without...a buffer." That is a buffer to protect them from government control. A former public press editor Q1, now plying his trade in the private press, argued that if the public press is to expose corruption, they will need government greenlight first. He said, "if you look at how corruption is covered in the public media, the agenda is set by the government, by the people that should be held to account." It is thus clear from these two preceding paragraphs that to a certain extent, journalists across the divide share similar ideals, but they cannot action them due to media capture.

Apart from these signs of capture through contracts and direct intervention from the state, some public press journalists drive the national interest in the manner prescribed above to advance their own interests. Public press editor E1 argued that journalism in Zimbabwe is now much more complicated:

When you talk of journalists, journalism is no longer as simple as it was in the past. Journalists in Zimbabwe are now businesspeople...farmers. So, the journalist who is also a farmer will defend the land reform. Huh? The journalist, who is a businessman will defend the government because the government is saying where the White person was making money the Black person must go in and make money. But our colleagues (journalists from the private press) are making money from the Westerners. They don't need to go farming, they don't have to go to the farms.

The above quotation, as editor editor E1 further explained, motivates public press journalists to defend the government from outside attacks as per the government's argument. He said, "Those in public media perceive themselves as the defenders of the state of Zimbabwe, which is under attack from the Americans and the British." This is mainly out of the feud between the Zimbabwean regime and the West over the land reform program. Beyond political economy, political interests, affiliations, and commitment by both reporters from the privately and publicly controlled press also influence the journalistic culture in Zimbabwe. Former Zimpapers News Editor E said that in 2018, "...journalists from the state-controlled media...went out there and campaigned in ZANU PF elections and some were even beaten at national level campaigning to be legislators. So, it's not just an issue of issue of ownership." This shows that some Zimbabwean reporters are in it for more than just journalism. The significance of this is that when

thinking about how journalistic interpretive communities come into being, the political economy of the mass media must be considered. Beyond that, local politics and race and international relations also matter. Patrimonialism, as argued by Waisbord (2013) is thus one of the biggest challenges to the existence of a united journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe because public press journalists, as well as the private press reporters, have more incentives in being divided than being united.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the above arguments, the public press reporters present themselves as what Ranger (2005) called patriotic journalists. Patriotic journalism is largely “national interest” driven, which is hereby given as the public press’ guiding frame of reference. This is noted from how the public press skirts around holding the government accountable, demanding transparency, challenging the government, checking the government’s abuse of power. These roles are not highlighted as the public press seeks to derive its authority from nationalistic roles that it considers good for the country by preserving the country’s fragile democracy. Connecting press freedom debates made here, the roles that the public press advocates typify what they consider as *press freedom for*. This is couched in how public press journalists express a duty to advance the country’s national interest, contribute to nation-building, conscientize citizens to be patriotic and guard against the machinations of neo-colonialists. This is connected to the public press journalists’ aims to defend the country’s national sovereignty and national security.

Connecting above debates to conceptualization of interpretive communities as a group of people engaged in common activities, with a common purpose, and a common frame of reference (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999), public press journalists are a separate

professional milieu (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019). It is a community whose goal is to advance the country's "national interest" while, at the same time, is guided by the same professional framework. This also means this group has a nationalistic guided intrinsic journalistic culture demonstrated by its dominant purpose to advance the country's national interest. On one hand, while this close affinity between public press journalists and state actors may signal their trust in state institutions, a closer look shows a group that has strategically surrendered to the whims and desires of the state (Lowrey & Sherrill, 2020). As has been demonstrated in this chapter, public press journalists have a unique journalistic culture demonstrated by a repressive but normalized opportunity structure (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) characterized by government's heavy handedness and interference. This can be understood from how the voices of pro-state non-journalistic actors have dominated the press freedom debates. These actors must be understood as socializing agents out to orient journalists to what they consider appropriate perceptions of press freedom and journalistic roles. This is a form of soft power that, when it fails, leads to other mechanisms like making editors sign contracts stipulating that their role is to support the government of the day. The discourse from pro-state non-journalistic actors can thus be understood as a form of hegemonic soft power, while the contracts are a form of hard power instruments. This is also facilitated by the fact that some journalists are also calculative as they seek to benefit from the system either as politicians or by harvesting various fringe benefits. This has implications on how we think about journalistic interpretive communities.

Instead of only focusing on how journalistic discourse operates to unite journalists into an interpretive community, it is important to consider the role of various forces in influencing this structuring discourse. The chapter has shown how political economy is a

stronger factor in shaping the discourse that informs journalistic interpretive communities. At the same time, context, in the form of a geographic place's power structures, philosophies, history, and present circumstances must be considered. This must be considered in conjunction with each nation's fears and concerns and its place within the community of nations. This is an extension of Carlson's (2016) argument that discourse is contextual, by adding that depending on local geographic cultures and power dynamics, it can also be fragmented, leading to the creation of fractured journalistic interpretive communities.

What this means is, in the same way it has been accepted that the press is shaped by the context within which it operates (Siebert et al., 1963), it is hereby argued that journalistic interpretive communities also take the coloration of the political and social structures within which they operate. This chapter has thus shown that under contested polarized societies, journalistic interpretive communities also tend to be fractured. As noted by Berkowitz and TerKeurst (1999), even though journalistic interpretive communities are not geographically bound, they are also by and large constituent elements of the context within which they exist. Within these contexts, there are different interests that can be advanced or threatened by journalistic operations. This is how Zimbabwean players' political interests have had an impact on journalistic interpretive communities.

In the next Chapter, the dissertation turns to how the private press developed a vision of itself as a separate interpretive community grounded in a liberal frame of reference that conceptualized their Fourth Estate role as a typical watchdog as understood in the Western context.





## Chapter 6

### **Press freedom and role conceptualization in the Zimbabwean private press: A liberal perspective**

The previous Chapter 5 has shown how the public press stands out as a separate interpretive community that, due to its nationalistic press freedom notions, conceptualizes its roles as patriotic journalism. Accordingly, it is self-paternalistic and is willing to relax boundaries of journalistic autonomy for the sake of the country's national interest. As this chapter will show, this stands in sharp contrast to how the privately controlled press, grounded in a liberal Western approach, makes an extended conceptualization of the Fourth Estate role to include advocacy, that is going beyond merely holding the government/elites accountable. For the sake of this role, the privately controlled press engages in autonomy protection boundary work to fend off non-journalists from controlling the press (Carlson, 2015). By adopting an autonomy protection boundary work strategy, which is about fending off encroachment onto its field by non-journalistic actors, the private press is by default reactive. This reactive nature means the private press does not have the same opportunity as the public press to proactively formulate norms that define press freedom in line with its context or Western liberal ideas, but instead is forced into being defensive of its position. This approach puts the private press in a weaker position in debating press freedom issues as the public press is soundly grounded in a particular ideology of its own. The private press' power or advantage only derives from advancing conceptualizations that have since been normalized and generally accepted around the world (Vos & Moore, 2020). This appeal to liberal press values provides the private press with a normative foundation and a source of resilience as it seeks to co-exist with its powerful public press counterparts.

To demonstrate how the private press in Zimbabwe conceptualizes press freedom and journalistic roles, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the private press' liberal press freedom conceptualization, showing how it is based on the principles enshrined in the Windhoek Declaration as its frame of reference. The second section analyzes its extended Fourth Estate role conceptualization, which goes beyond the usual expectation to hold the elites accountable. The section below starts off by giving an outline of the themes that make up the first section to this chapter.

### **The private press' liberal and universal conceptualization of press freedom**

As this section will show, those who advocate for press freedom through the privately controlled press define it as *freedom from* the government and state control (Merrill, 1989). This is based first on the private press' liberal notions of press freedom, but also its reactive approach to government attempts to control and muzzle the press. Below, this section explores how this idea of press *freedom from* governmental control is advanced through opinion, analytical, and editorial pieces published in the private press. Just like in Chapter 5, most of these pieces were written around World Press Freedom days, though a few come from different dates when the concept of press freedom came under contestation. Textual data in the section is also combined with views gathered from interviews with Zimbabwean journalists, academics, press freedom activists, and government officials on their conceptualization of press freedom. Three themes emerge from this analysis. One is a concept-oriented theme focused on making a universal definition of press freedom, based on liberal values as espoused in the Windhoek Declaration. The second theme examines the private press' arguments against press freedom contextualization as argued by the public press. The third theme is an examination

of the private press' autonomy protection boundary work strategies to fend off government encroachment onto the news media sector by allaying any fears the government may have about press freedom. The section starts by looking at the universal definition of press freedom, based on liberal values, and ends with the private press' autonomy protection boundary work strategies.

### **The Windhoek Declaration and the private press' liberal conceptualization of press freedom**

Even though liberalism tends to be defined or applied in different forms (see Bell, 2014), the concept carries “Freedom, responsibility, tolerance, social justice, and equality of opportunity” as its central values (Sørensen, 2006). According to Sørensen, these liberal values can be realized in different ways: through the civil society, constitutional democracy, free market rules, private economic activities etc. These ideas found their way into Africa when at the end of the Cold War, liberalism rose to prominence as the dominant global ideology, replacing communism and socialism (Sørensen, 2006). Within this moment of global ideological change, UNESCO emerged out of the Cold War with a new communication agenda emphasizing freedom of expression and media development (Berger, 2011). It was in this spirit that the international organization convened a journalistic conference in Windhoek in 1991 exploring the role of an independent, free, and pluralistic press. Out of this conference, African journalists produced the Windhoek Declaration which Berger (2011) calls an African gift to the world that was later adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1991, and the UNESCO's General Assembly in 1995. The UN General Assembly adoption gave birth to the declaration of May 3<sup>rd</sup> as the World Press

Freedom Day commemorated around the globe every year as a reminder of journalistic sacrifices and significance of press freedom.

Born amidst liberalism's sweep across the globe, the Windhoek Declaration's press freedom principles are as liberal as they come. For instance, according to UNESCO (1992), a pluralistic press means "the end of monopolies of any kind and the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, magazines and periodicals reflecting the widest possible range of opinion within the community," a principle that echoes liberalism's free market and equal opportunity ideals (Sørensen, 2006). Coming on the backdrop of centralized and powerful authoritarian regimes that dominated Africa prior to the 1990s (Berger, 2011), this declaration was disruptive to the African journalistic culture and the field's relationship to politics. It is this Windhoek Declaration that forms the basis upon which the private press defends press freedom leading to its liberal conceptualization of the concept as will be shown in this section.

Based on the Windhoek Declaration's liberal principles of press pluralism, the private press calls for the liberalization of the news media sector, which is contrary to the public press' stance that freedom is not pluralism. In its call for the liberalization of the news media sector, the private press makes open reference to the Windhoek Declaration. For instance, *The Standard*, in its article, "World Press Freedom Day 2012" (2012) reiterated that the "Windhoek Declaration called to establish, maintain and foster an independent, pluralistic and free press." The private press' reference to the Windhoek Declaration as advanced by UNESCO shows its grounding in the liberal idea that international institutions are key as forums for negotiation in realizing liberal values (Sørensen, 2006). This position contrasts with the public press' argument that press

freedom is a Western plot to destabilize other nations. This is an illustration of how different frames of reference between the public and the private press have fractured the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities. These different frames are based on different forms of trust in relation to international and local institutions. While the public press expresses high levels of trust in local institutions, the privately controlled press trusts international organizations like UNESCO.

In line with free market ideals, the private press also defends the role of private capital in the news media business. Unlike the public press' argument that private ownership does not mean press freedom, the private press defends the role of private players on economic grounds. Rashweert Mukundu (2009), journalist, media, and human rights activist argued that there is nothing wrong with the press being part of the corporate sector as all "modern states are developed as a result of personal/group enterprise." He backed up his argument by arguing that the news media need investment as news writing is an industrial process. He thus argued that just like any other economic sectors, "modern media cannot exist without investment in machinery, training, among other things." Privatization is rooted in ideals of a free market economy as compared to a command one that Zimbabwe pursued at independence till the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) of the 1990s (Masaka, 2011). Despite the SAPS, the government remained unwilling to liberalize the media field, especially broadcasting, and let alone allow private capital, particularly foreign investment (Chuma, 2004; Moyo, 2004). It is also this selective application of ideas that breeds conflict between the state and journalistic communities.

The private press' calls for private players in the news media is partly motivated by financial challenges the press faces in Zimbabwe. In an interview with one press freedom

activist, U, he said economic challenges are now the biggest threat to press freedom more than government repression:

The state of press freedom in Zimbabwe is precarious. Not necessarily because the government is being repressive, but because it is unsustainable, the press is broke...it's facing...an existential threat. They don't have money. No one is investing in the media anymore.

This situation has also exposed newly licensed community radio stations to manipulation by state-connected individuals, as revealed in an interview with another press freedom activist, T, who gave the example of a community radio station in Zimbabwe's Manicaland Province that is using premises donated by a ruling party MP which has impacted the station's editorial independence: "So, when you then look at the level of critique or the content that they're going to be publishing, they have to be sensitive to the powers that be...So the lack of resources has actually exposed these platforms to manipulation." Thus, the challenge to Zimbabwe's press autonomy comes from two angles: one is the threat of government control and the other one is financial even though the private press does not usually interrogate this question. In this regard, the Zimbabwean journalistic field, out of circumstances, is close to both the political and business fields (Bourdieu, 2005). This is the other source of interpretive community fracture in Zimbabwe again. In the previous section, the public press argued that private capital dominates private press interests.

Beyond economic liberalism, the private press touted press freedom as the ability to communicate ideas freely. Responding to fears of unchecked press freedom peddled by Tafataona Mahoso, the former Media and Information Commission Chairman (see chapter 5), Mukundu (2009) argued that this is simply because Mahoso does not support free

thinking. He explicitly argued that “Mahoso does not believe in free thinking hence his support for the ban of foreign journalists.” He also criticized Mahoso of being in a “personal, ideological, and professional wilderness” as evidenced by his continued support of “media repression by promoting an unfounded fear of the free press.” To this end, Mukundu accused Mahoso of writing for his selfish interests as well as unjustifiably branding news media criticism of the state as a regime change agenda:

More than writing about the “dangers” of the free press, we also need to understand that Mahoso writes for himself, seeking reassurance for his fears, both professional and personal.

What emerges here – which also comes up in other parts of this chapter – is a lack of trust between the civil society, private press and those who are pro-state. In this instance, Mahoso is accused of writing for his own personal interests. This is what fractures the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community further, especially when it comes to defining the country’s national interests. The private press suspects that the moment this is mentioned, there is a hidden selfish agenda.

Three ideas thus indicate the private press’ liberal stance on press freedom. These are liberalization, privatization, and free-thinking. These ideas are at loggerheads with the public press’ nationalistic conceptualization of press freedom. The public press argues that this does not mean real freedom which comes from ownership of natural resources (as explained in chapter 5). Since 2000, these positions have been irreconcilable in Zimbabwe.

### **Press freedom contextualization is a tired argument: a private press perspective**

In line with its reactive approach, the private press often countered the public press’ position that press freedom should be contextualized. The private press rebuts this



argument by taking a universal approach arguing that press freedom is a right for everyone, whatever the context. This also involves arguing that the right has African roots, positioning it as inalienable while connecting it to other rights, as well as arguing that everyone naturally feels the urge to express themselves.

The private press dismisses calls to contextualize press freedom as an outdated view and points out how the concept has its roots in Africa. *The Standard* has argued that it is a tired argument that “African human rights and standards should have an African context so that they are not merely an expression of norms divorced from bread and butter issues” (“More Needs to Be Done on Human Rights,” 2004). *The Standard’s* position here is, the argument that press freedom is a Western idea does not apply. This argument is dismissed by tracing the Windhoek Declaration to a UNESCO sponsored conference by journalists in Namibia as explained above. Sten Rylander (2009), then Swedish Ambassador to Zimbabwe, disputed the argument that press freedom is a Western concept and was not externally imposed. Courtesy of the Windhoek Declaration, he argued that press freedom “has strong roots in Southern Africa – with one of the best media guidelines having been produced in Namibia almost 20 years ago.” To further dismiss any connections with Western ideas of press freedom, the private press also dismisses the drawing of equivalences between Zimbabwe and the US by the public press. Joram Nyathi (2004), a veteran journalist who has worked in both the public and the private press institutions, argued that press freedom in Zimbabwe has to be about the interests and preferences of Zimbabweans and not what the US chooses to do. Nyathi argued thus:

Press freedom need not necessarily be about comparisons. It is our freedom as citizens of an independent Zimbabwe. If the US government chooses to close down

newspapers using the Patriot Act — which needless to say it cannot do — it should not expect to get any support from us. But that is not the point.

These philosophical differences between the public and the private press show why it is important to always consider ideological differences seriously as a significant aspect that can either unite or fracture journalistic interpretive communities, particularly where there is lack of trust between a government and its citizens. And the biggest issue here fracturing the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community is the colonial legacy of social and economic imbalances in terms of resource distribution. This forces one group to prioritize economic affirmative actions above press freedom rights.

Interviews with various stakeholders on press freedom repeated the same argument that efforts to contextualize press freedom are undermined by lack of trust from Zimbabwean citizens. One media academic G claimed that calls to contextualize press freedom smacks of underlying interests. She asked: “What are we defining as African when we are saying this is African and this is Western...it brings in that issue of a hidden agenda by the government.” Besides suspicions of a hidden agenda, questioning what is defined as African shows challenges of the colonial legacy again, as well as globalization. After years of colonialism and contact with the outside world, it is hard to define something as purely African because the continent does not exist in isolation. This results in a challenging issue of identity crisis. The civil society also dismissed press freedom contextualization arguments as political gimmicks because Zimbabwe is already a signatory to various international conventions on press freedom and freedom of expression. One press freedom activist N said, “I think for political posturing, that's when they come up with these ideals which are not applicable ... outside of a normal world.” Even the

argument to contextualize press freedom based on Zimbabwe being a young democracy was also dismissed as a dictatorial attempt. In an interview, a private press journalist P1 argued that "...we have a tendency in Africa at large, maybe except South Africa and a few, but in Zimbabwe we have a president who doesn't want to leave power. And then hides behind the discourse that I'm still building." The young democracy argument is also dismissed on the basis that Zimbabwe has been independent for more than four decades now. Another private press journalist, U1, said "we've been independent for...more than 40 years, since 1980. I don't think it's really a young democracy." Power succession and hidden political agendas bordering on suspicions of corruption thus undermine trust between journalists and the state in Zimbabwe, thereby causing a journalistic fracture. This is because the private press can afford to distrust the government and show it, but structurally, the public press has no option to do so. This creates two interpretive communities with different journalistic cultures based on whether they trust the state or not.

The private press also rejects press freedom contextualization by universalizing it as fundamental to all other human rights, like access to information and human dignity. In its article, "Strong Media Crucial for Development" (2018), *The NewsDay* argued that "Freedom of expression is the mother of all freedoms," whose importance goes beyond allowing free thinking, investigation, opinion holding or disagreement. The paper argued that freedom of expression is the "mother of all freedoms" because it provides the public with "information to, among other things, help them make critical life decisions." Nhlanhla Ngwenya (2018), freedom of expression activist and media consultant, has also argued that "free expression is a just struggle not only anchored on what is constitutionally due to them,

but also predicated on the centrality of this fundamental freedom to human dignity.” Following the private press’ position that press freedom allows freedom of expression at an individual level, it universalizes the right by applying it to everyone. *The Standard*, in its article, “Moyo: An Assassin of Press Freedom” (2004), argued that among human beings’ natural urges, “is the will to express.” The paper went on to argue how experience “has shown through history that governments which trample on Press freedom pay a price in the end. It is folly to take people for granted. People are not stupid.” Here, the private press’ conceptualization of press freedom differs from that of the public press in two respects. The first is that contrary to subordination of press freedom to other rights, the public press foregrounds it as foundational. Also contrary to the public press’ communal approach, the private press emphasizes the rights of the individual. This is the challenge of journalistic interpretive communities in post-colonial societies: either to go conservative, wishing to be grounded in the pre-colonial traditional culture, or pick up from where the world is and move ahead.

Linked to the private press’ argument against press freedom contextualization is the position that the right is applicable to any modern society. Writing back in 2004, at the height of press freedom debates in Zimbabwe, *The Standard* argued that press freedom is one of those fundamental rights that “fall in the class of inalienable rights in any civilized society. There is no excuse for derogation” (“More Needs to Be Done on Human Rights,” 2004). This was also part of its argument that press freedom is a right to be claimed and not something to be enjoyed at the benevolence of those in power. Also linked to the applicability of press freedom to civilized societies is the connection the private press makes between the right and democracy. Mukundu (2009), summed up this position in the

article: “Free Press no Threat to Democracy.” This is based on the private press and civil society’s argument that a “vibrant and critical media is the hallmark of any democratic society” as Misa Zimbabwe (2021) argued in a World Press Freedom Day article published by the *NewsDay*. A free press becomes a hallmark of democracy by allowing popular participation, which is the “essence of democracy” as once described by former Philippine President Corazon Aquino, cited in *The Standard’s* “World Press Freedom Day 2012” article. One way a free press allows popular participation is by giving people information, which, as argued by Charles Ray (2012), former US Ambassador to Zimbabwe, is powerful by allowing people to “hold their governments accountable, and educate their children.” What also furthers the fracture of journalistic interpretive communities in transitional and contested societies, as noted in Chapter 5, is that even such ideas as democracy are not yet fully accepted. In the previous chapter, the public press expressed suspicion on the calls for democracy as a ploy by Western nations to plunder the country’s resources. At the same time, the public press questioned the relationship between a free press and democracy, arguing that the former shackles the latter.

Fundamental to the contextualization debate is also how those who are pro-liberal conceptualization of press freedom consider it as already in sync with Zimbabwe’s history and culture. In an interview, press freedom activist V argued that to say press freedom is foreign is paradoxical because “will we say that the idea of liberation war was foreign because it was a quest for freedom?” This was buttressed by journalist U1’s claims that the private press is simply calling on the government to abide by the country’s liberation war principles. He argued that “Zimbabwe was born out of a liberation struggle with ideals that said no to corruption.” This is also supported by Zimbabwean media academic K who

argued that press freedom today “can be traced to the struggle for independence...and the role of the media was implicated in the liberation of this country.” Here is an attempt by the private press to outfox the state and the public press by taking their own arguments and turning them upside down. This interpretive difference has the potential of further strengthening this interpretive fracture even further due to malleability of the same concepts.

Universalization of press freedom shown here is a direct deviation from the public press’ contextualization approach. This is seen in how the private press foregrounds the rights of individual citizens above those of the community. It does not subordinate press freedom to any other right. In any event, the private press regards liberal press freedom as what will build better communities whereas the public press thinks that will endanger community relations. Thus, at the center of the concept of a fractured journalistic interpretive community is a divergence in values guiding different sectors of the society even within the same geographical setting.

### **Autonomy protection boundary work – dispelling press freedom fears**

Apart from merely engaging in a liberal conceptualization of press freedom, the private press engages in active efforts to fend off involvement of non-journalistic actors in the journalistic field. Theoretically, this has been conceptualized as autonomy protection boundary work (Carlson, 2015) whereby journalists defend their professional territory from outside control and the imposition of definitions of its work. In this endeavor, the private press employs various autonomy protection boundary work strategies that range from referencing legal instruments (local and international) that protect press freedom; making liberal definitions of press freedom; allaying fears that press freedom may cause

chaos; and denying accusations of promoting regime change. These strategies are part of a broader strategy by the private press to legitimize its journalistic authority as an interpretive community.

Zimbabwean constitutions, both the original one of 1979 and the current one of 2013, have been important instruments that the private press has used to legitimize its press freedom rights. In an article “Standing Together” (1999), *The Standard* argued that freedom of expression “is not a gift of a derelict regime. It was not ‘granted’ by ministers. It is enshrined in the Declaration of Rights in the country’s constitution. We claim it as a right.” Private news media journalists, as argued by veteran reporter Joram Nyathi (2004), actually argued that they find it debilitating that in Zimbabwe, the debate about press freedom is “framed as if we have to apologize for our liberty.” During this research, interviewees also cited these instruments in debunking efforts to make material definitions of press freedom as well as limiting it on the grounds of national interest, national security, and national sovereignty. Academic K argued that there is no need to connect press freedom to natural resources “because the issue of access to natural resources is well articulated in the Zimbabwean constitution separately from freedom of expression. Go to section 72 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe...” Press freedom activist N also argued that it is just “because ZANU PF has a challenge with the West over land ... over human rights, then you argue that there are no human rights applicable to Africans.” In relation to press freedom limitations, press freedom activist P further argued that the Zimbabwean 2013 constitution stipulates press freedom limitations and anything outside of that is an attempt at political control. “They're essentially saying leave us, don't report on our actions,” he said. This legal boundary work approach puts the public press in a fix as it cannot

necessarily deviate from what is written in the constitution. This then leads to a journalistic interpretive community fracture that is inspired by lack of constitutionalism as the state at times abandons the supreme law of the land and uses brute force against journalists. This has been well documented in the Zimbabwean story (see Chuma, 2004).

The private press also performs autonomy protection boundary work by making liberal definitions of press freedom. Two liberal definitions are made here: that press freedom is a situation whereby the press is subjected to restrictions that are reasonable within a democracy and that this freedom also includes the right to make mistakes. Writing for *The Standard* during the 2004 World Press Freedom Day commemorations, Chris Mhike (2004), former journalist and now legal practitioner specializing in media law and human rights with the law firm, Atherstone and Cook, argued that press freedom is a state whereby the press is not unreasonably restricted. That is, as he argued, a situation where the press is “not subject to draconian forms of interference such as unreasonable censorship or pre-publication/broadcasting espionage; and not subject to the imposition of pre-operational legal, political, or financial conditions by government or any regulatory authority.” Mhike has been consistent in his argument as witnessed in his 2015 argument that without “liberty for Media, Press Freedom means nothing.” The argument that press freedom is a state where the press is not unreasonably restricted, is stretched by the private press to mean not being punished for printing mistakes. Writing back in 2002, *The Standard* newspaper argued that “...press freedom includes the freedom to make mistakes. Freedom of the press means that people are free to print unwise, uncivil, nasty, and dangerous information. That’s the price of liberty...” The private press here echoes First Amendment arguments that free speech restrictions must be reasonable within a democracy



(see Franklin et al., 2016; Garvey & Schauer, 1996). In a society where the state actively avoids criticism on the grounds of national interest, the private press' argument that press freedom involves making mistakes has also created tension and fractured the country's journalistic interpretive community. The public press, in arguing that no country can sacrifice its sovereignty for the sake of press freedom, has resisted this position.

In addition, the private press also employs denial strategies to push back against accusations that they are political actors. These arguments have been made alongside denials of regime change agenda accusations. This was after Tafataona Mahoso, the MIC former chairman had, in the words of Mukundu (2009), a press freedom activist, accused the private press of being regime change agents. Mukundu (2009) argued that genuine "criticism of ZANU PF by a concerned citizenry through the media is, in Mahoso's scheme of things, regime change." He thus went on to argue that "Mahoso lies that the independent media first is a 'regime change media' and secondly supported the call for sanctions. We don't need to labor this argument other than say that Mahoso cannot produce a single story to support his statement." Denial is a paradigm repair strategy often used by media organizations to spruce up their images after journalistic malpractices (Hindman, 2005). This is almost the similar case here whereby the private press is sprucing up its image from accusations of being a regime change agent. It must be acknowledged that this tendency by the Zimbabwean regime to accuse the private press of being neo-colonial agents has contributed to fracturing the country's journalistic interpretive community by creating the dichotomy of a sellout press (the private press) and the patriotic press (public press). Members of the private press have been literally labeled a "THEM", the sellouts, agents of regime change, opposition agents versus the "US" the patriotic public press, defenders of

national interest as argued by veteran Zimbabwean journalist Bill Saidi (2010) in one of his memoirs, “How fear can kill freedom.”

The private press also employs different strategies to allay the public press’ fears that press freedom might lead to social chaos. This ranges from arguing that the press system has self-correcting mechanisms to noting that audiences are not blank slates that can be easily swayed by the press. Some of these strategies, especially the argument that the press system has a self-correcting mechanism, is a typical paradigm repair strategy used to prop up the objective news paradigm whenever it is brought into question due to deviant acts by journalists (see Hindman, 2005). Making reference to the free speech’s marketplace of ideas concept, Rashweet Mukundu (2009), journalist and press freedom activist, argued that a “free press has natural countervailing forces and hence no single idea or view is dominant or forced onto society as is the case in Zimbabwe.” This is because, as Mukundu argued, diverse voices balance different views. In addition, he applied paradigm repair (Bennet et al., 1985) arguments that media institutions have “systems that ensure fairness and balance.” These systems, according to Mukundu (2009) can be enforced by voluntary media councils and consumers. In addition, echoing limited media effects theories, Mukundu (2009) has also argued that media consumers are not “empty slates waiting to be informed by the media; they interrogate what they read, believe it or throw it away...” He illustrated this position by giving an example of how Zimbabwean urbanites have rejected public news media publications like *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail*. Thus, according to this debate, the journalistic objective news paradigm has enough mechanisms to justify self-regulation in a bid to ensure press freedom and journalistic autonomy. Theoretically, then the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities operate from different

standpoints on media effects. The public press operates from a dominant media effects perspective that sees Zimbabweans as an atomic mass prone to mass media manipulation to the point of threatening internal stability. On the other hand, the private press operates from a limited media effects perspective where Zimbabweans are not empty slates, but critical thinkers. This model has more trust in the news media system than does the public press.

The private press, alongside civil society organizations, thus paint the picture of a private press that is free from any form of governmental, political, or economic control. According to this sector, this free press is pluralistic and includes even freedom to make mistakes. In addition, press freedom is such a fundamental human right that cannot be derogated for whatever reason. In fact, they consider it foundational to any other human rights like economic freedom. Press freedom is hereby regarded as fundamental for democracy and economic development. The idea to contextualize press freedom is also rejected on the basis that it is a universal concept. The government does not have power to determine this form of press freedom and trust is put in the journalistic paradigm to ensure that it is not abused. It must however be noted that in its quest to be free from the government, the private press does not interrogate its relationship with private capital that can also be a form of economic control. This position fundamentally differs from that projected by the public press and has implications on how the private press, as a separate journalistic interpretive community conceptualizes its social roles as shown below.

## **In defense of the Fourth Estate Role: The private press' journalistic role conceptualization**

To be considered members of the same interpretive community, journalists must share a common purpose (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). That means, as per this dissertation's definition, they must share the same conceptualization of their journalistic roles, which is an intrinsic dimension of their journalistic culture (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019). The overarching argument guiding this dissertation is that journalistic failure to share common journalistic role conceptualizations means they do not share the same journalistic culture. Deductively, that means they are a divided community. This chapter thus assesses the extent to which private press journalists converge or diverge with their counterparts in the public press in their conceptualization of journalistic roles. Since this section is taking Fourie's (2002) as well as Wasserman and de Beer's (2006) approach to understand Southern Africa's journalistic role conceptualization based on the arguments they use to justify their calls for press freedom, the section also uses press freedom debates published between 1993 and 2023 during World Press Freedom Days by the private press. The difference is that this section is specifically focusing on role conceptualizations. The pieces analyzed here were written mainly by journalists and press freedom activists. Views from this textual analysis are combined with interview data gathered from conversations with private press journalists, academics, and press freedom activists. Broadly, the private press argues in defense of the Fourth Estate role. However, analysis shows that the private press has two different versions of the Fourth Estate role: the press as the government adversary, and the press as the public sphere. These different role conceptualizations are based on a different conceptualization of the national interest as compared to that of the public press.

As such, it is imperative to understand how this different conceptualization of the national interest forms a different basis for the formulation of a different set of journalistic roles.

### **Defining the national interest: a private press perspective**

The major problem with the conceptualization of “national interest” in Zimbabwe is there is no agreed definition of the concept. This is complicated with suspicions that government officials hide their selfish interests by invoking the idea of national interest to discredit legitimate journalistic roles. As Trevor Ncube (2013), news media entrepreneur, publisher, and former journalist, argued, “often what is in their (politicians) interests becomes conflated with the national interest.” In Ncube’s view, enhancing constitutionality is the only thing that Zimbabweans would agree is in the national interest. He thus argued that it “is our loyalty to the Constitution that must be defended, and not individuals.” This means, in his view, the news media’s role is to defend the constitution as a way of supporting journalistic legitimacy. These same sentiments were also echoed by private press journalists, academics, and civil society activists during interviews. In an interview with Q1, an editor with the private press, he said the idea of the national interest is contested: “some people might say don't attack corruption because you'll be vilifying the country. But is it in the national interest to steal money, to steal public resources...So, people are divided.” Again, as has been shown in other chapters, a lack of trust in the government’s sincerity in advancing the country’s national interest, as well as suspicions of the leadership’s selfish and corrupt agenda, contributes to divisions in the journalistic interpretive community. The private press is skeptical the moment the government claims commitments to advancing the national interest.

What also complicates the issue is that, in general, many Zimbabweans feel that they have been marginalized and subjected to the rulership of one political party for too long. Because of these widespread underlying disgruntlements, whatever the government suggests faces resistance. A news editor with the private press, S1 said “maybe there should be some discussion on what our national interest is...rather than for someone to impose that this is our national interest.” As noted by another media academic, L, the problem in Zimbabwe is that the country’s politics is dominated by one political party hence he said: “...people tend to resist it, even if it is something that could be very good.” The effect of this contestation over the meaning of national interest is that Zimbabweans lack a shared ideological framework. This lack of a shared ideological framework undermines journalists’ ability to have a shared frame of reference from which they can conceptualize shared journalistic roles, hence their interpretive community fracture. This is the same problem that also confronts patriotic journalism.

The challenge with patriotic journalism in the country is the perception that it is an attempt to suppress press roles such as criticizing the state and arm-twisting it to pay loyalty and allegiance to the ruling party and not the country. This has been the private press’ argument as *The Standard* has often argued that “it is ZANU PF’s perception (but theirs alone) that loyalty to the state means loyalty to Robert Mugabe and his party. That is not the case” (“We Will Deliver the News Fearlessly,” 2002). The paper thus argued that government criticism is not being disloyal. It justified its arguments on the basis that the country’s future is at stake due to vices like corruption and other criminal activities. Another problem connected to this is how the ruling party has monopolized the country’s liberation. It claims it as its own yet, as Ncube (2013) has argued, “...many Zimbabweans

contributed to our liberation.” As argued by one former public press journalist D, who is now an academic, “issues to do with patriotism have been hijacked by selfish people. Selfish and corrupt politicians who want to use that for their own benefit.” In another interview with a private press journalist, P1, he said “patriotic journalism is very important in any nation...But...it’s not something that has to be thrust upon journalists. Patriotism comes out naturally.” Another veteran journalist and news media entrepreneur, O1, also added that the fight starts when the government wants journalists to believe that “ZANU PF is the custodian of the country's history, the custodian of the national interest. No, no...” This is more of a fight to own the Zimbabwean story or narrative, a fight against the discourse of exclusion and monopolization of history. The press is attempting to assert its role as the first and last storytellers of history.

The above ideological differences are further complicated by the fact that, from a private press perspective, African leaders lack a fundamental understanding of the role of the news media. Private press journalists point out how some African leaders cannot differentiate hard news from columns, view the private press as enemies, and have a skewed understanding of news media roles. Ultimately, they argue that patriotic journalism will not fix Zimbabwe’s problems. Ncube (2013), Alpha Media Holdings founder, is one of those who “sometimes think the role of the media has not gained enough attention from Africa’s leaders and decision makers.” He regretted how “African leaders tend to view the media, particularly the private media, as if it is an enemy of the State.” This was supported by Geoff Nyarota (2017), a Zimbabwean veteran journalist and founding editor of the *Daily News* that was shut down by the government in 2003, who criticized former information minister Jonathan Moyo and his former Permanent Secretary

George Charamba for having a poor understanding of media roles. He went on to argue that for “all their erudition and eloquence, the understanding of these two men of the media’s role and function in a democracy was somewhat skewed.” Usually, these differences come up because the government wants the private press to exercise patriotic journalism, which *The Standard*, in its article “We Won’t Be Silenced” (2017), argued “will not fix Zimbabwe’s problems and those pushing the nefarious agenda will be judged harshly by history.” It is this lack of shared understanding of journalistic roles between the press and the elites, whether assumed, real, or a matter of state pretense, that contributes to widening the divide between the government and the private press, and ultimately the public press.

Given Zimbabwean journalists’ ideological split as shown by the national interest contestations, the sections below will show how the private press, grounded in a liberal ideology, presents itself as the alternative, filling a gap that was left by the public press. The private press argues that it aims to advance the same national interests as the public press, but through different means. It is more a question of a different medicine for the same disease. In other words, in their perception, the public press has the wrong concoction for the right disease. What is needed, in the view of the private press, is a journalistic role conception based on standing up to the state.

#### **The Fourth Estate Role extended: the private press as a government adversary**

In advancing its roles, the public press positions itself as a tool to criticize the government, hold it accountable, and expose corruption and greed. Bill Saidi (2006), Zimbabwe’s veteran journalist who for 60 years worked in both public and private press, argued that “African leaders, it would seem, want all their citizens, but particularly



journalists, to treat them as if they were God’s gift to their very existence.” According to the private press, this would be against their watchdog role, which is about holding the government accountable whatever the circumstances. In its article, “We Won’t Be Silenced” (2017), *The Standard* argued that its “role as the media is to hold leaders to account and no amount of lies and threats would hold us back from carrying out that duty.” This is because, as the paper has argued since the early 2000, “corruption and immense criminal activity have spawned a culture of violence, personal enrichment, bad governance and intolerance.” Perpetrators of these vices are the evil doers that Alpha Media journalist Marko Phiri (2003) argued “should be exposed for what they are, and that is the role of the press, both private and public.” (“We Will Deliver the News Fearlessly,” 2002). This typical Fourth Estate role to hold the government accountable will forever fracture the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community if the government continues to have control of Zimpapers through the Ministry of Information. As has been noted in chapter 5, Zimpapers editors sign contracts that obligates them to support the government of the day. As such, this is a role that can never be agreed on.

Legitimacy for the above roles, however, is further derived from their backing by the country’s civil society in the face of private press disagreements with the public press. During the World Press Freedom Day celebrations in 2016, Paul Kaseke (2016), legal advisor, commentator, analyst and sessional law lecturer with the Wits Law School in South Africa, positioned “The Press as an instrument of State accountability.” Kaseke pointed out that the power of good journalism lies in exposing corruption in budding democracies. This was supported by Tendai Ruben Mbofana (2021), former journalist, press freedom activist and now Communications Advisor at Anti-Corruption Trust of

Southern Africa, who argued that a “country’s development is premised on a vibrant media that keeps a vigilant eye on corruption, repression, and mismanagement of public resources.” Reflecting on Chapter 5 and claims of Zimbabwe being a young democracy as well as a communitarian society, watchdog journalism creates cultural dissonance where the leadership does not expect to be questioned. This leads to the interpretation of journalistic roles in holding the government accountable as attempts to subvert the country’s authority. Furthermore, the private press’ emphasis on exposing corruption in budding democracies to advance the country’s development, also goes against the public press’ argument that this might jeopardize the country’s internal peace and stability as a young democracy.

Apart from holding the government accountable, exposing corruption, the private press journalists also position themselves as challengers of the government, demanding transparency and asking unwanted questions as well as advancing the rule of law. Former *Zimbabwe Independent* editor, Iden Wetherell (2006) quotes a speaker addressing the Commonwealth Press Union in Sydney who said “the press had a tendency to challenge governments...This is what the Fourth Estate should be doing.” According to *The Standard’s* article, “We Will Deliver the News Fearlessly” (2002) their role is to ask uncomfortable questions that the public press cannot dare to ask. In a different article, “We Won’t Be Silenced” (2017), the paper argued that “Our duty as the media is to demand transparency, not to be attack dogs for an elite that is intent on plundering the country’s resources.” This is supported by Alpha Media Holdings’ founder, Ncube (2013) who argued that “Media cannot ignore and accept unconstitutional statements.” The source of fracture here is that while the private press is concerned with holding the government

accountable, the public press, as indicated in the previous chapter, is concerned with partnering with the government in stopping exploitation of the country's resources from powerful nations in ways that threaten Zimbabwe's autonomy. Furthermore, the public press' neglect of the role to hold the government accountable, demand transparency, and ask uncomfortable questions created a market gap for the private press, which ultimately led to a fracture in the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community.

Non-journalistic actors further back the above roles to hold the government accountable as well as challenge it by arguing that is what the public expects and what will push the country forward. Vusumuzi Sifile (2018), executive director for Panos Institute Southern Africa (an organization that seeks to empower communities to use information for their own development), argued that one observation from the World Press Freedom Day 2018 was that, the public appreciates “the role of the media in speaking truth to power, advancing good governance, transparency, accountability, justice and the rule of law.” He further argued that this is especially required in public resource management where accountability and transparency are needed. Nigel Nyamutumbu (2018), a media development practitioner and head of the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ)<sup>4</sup>, also positioned the news media as a tool to make sure the government does not abuse its authority with his article: “Keeping power in check: Media, justice and the rule of law.” The private press also claims that its checking role, encompassing reporting on abuse of power, exposing shoddiness and bad behavior is not limited to the government only, but extends to the opposition. In pursuing this role, the private press argues that there are no

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<sup>4</sup> MAZ is a network of nine media professional associations and support organizations focusing on freedom of expression, right to information, media freedom, as well as media law and policy.

sacred cows. In its article, “We Will Deliver the News Fearlessly” (2002) *The Standard* argued that it “will not ignore shoddiness and bad behavior in the opposition either.” While the private press’ claims to also hold the opposition political parties accountable is partly an attempt to differentiate itself as the balanced one, as compared to the public press that declares support for the government of the day, members of the civil society also contribute to shaping the structure of journalistic interpretive communities in Zimbabwe through discourse. Just like non-journalistic actors in the publicly controlled press, members of the civil society also act as socialization agents attempting to orient the press towards ideal journalistic roles as well as provide a support base for the private press journalists in holding the government accountable.

While the above roles refer to typical watchdog journalism, the private press extends the idea of the Fourth Estate to being the voice of the voiceless, speaking to their capacity for activism and framing political issues. This interpretation positions the press as an informal part of the political system that can take up opposition political roles in the absence of a viable opposition political party. Responding to Zimbabwe deputy information minister Kindness Paradza’s 2021 Press Freedom Day remarks that journalists should desist from being political activists, Mbofana (2021), argued that journalism and activism are inseparable. He claimed that “the concept of the Fourth Estate refers to the Press and news media in their explicit capacity of advocacy and implicit ability to frame political issues.” Mbofana further argued that the news “media is not there to complement government as some obedient and subservient poodle but is expected to be the voice of the voiceless and holds the ruling establishment accountable to the electorate.” Consequently, he argued that the news media is “expected to be the voice of the voiceless and holds the

ruling establishment accountable to the electorate.” He emphatically argued that the moment the news media stand with the elite, “as regime or ruling party publicity officers,” covering up their corruption, subjugation of the citizenry, and incompetence, they would be doing a “grave travesty of their mandate as the Fourth Estate.” Journalistic roles in Zimbabwe are thus framed in a binary way, thereby creating a dilemma for journalists. Either they must play supporting roles to the government of the day or oppose it. The challenge with this is that it makes fracture of the journalistic interpretive community inevitable.

The private press also takes it upon itself to promote democracy in Zimbabwe. In an article, “Media Freedom Still a Long Way” (2014), *The NewsDay* went at length to quote then Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) director, Andy Moyses arguing that the “media should continue promoting democracy in the country” in light of the disintegration of opposition political parties in Zimbabwe. Moyses also urged the press to continue reminding those in power that Zimbabwe is a democracy. In the same vein, Kaseke (2016) positioned the news media as gatekeepers of democracy, responsible for strengthening and supporting it. He stated that the “media is indeed the gatekeeper of democracy and the chief guarantor of accountability in its most basic form” (Kaseke, 2016). According to the article, “World Press Freedom Day 2012”, *The Standard* argued that the press is sometimes called the Fourth Pillar of Democracy “...because a free Press reports abuses of power by public officials.” It is this mission to promote democracy however, that has led the government to label private press journalists as political activists. The government’s position can be better understood by considering that at independence, the ruling party ZANU PF had ambitions to establish a one-party state (Shaw, 1986). It

only abandoned this project after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union, which saw liberalism spreading across the globe. As has been seen from the previous chapter, the public press, and the ruling ZANU PF party, never really accepted democracy and anyone openly advocating for it is regarded as an enemy of the state. Thus, any press role aiming to promote democracy leads to it being regarded as an enemy by the ruling party ZANU PF.

The private press' Fourth Estate role conceptualization as discussed above is motivated by Zimbabwe's post-independence disappointing disillusionments that manifested in economic inequalities, lack of opportunities, press freedom suppression, and the desire to fight for the poor and the marginalized. Saïdi (2006) traced the press' role to criticize the Zimbabwean government back to the liberation struggle where it stood for the "rights of the Africans, whose rights, at the time, were being blithely trampled underfoot by the colonialists." He wrote that this is what inspired their role, and not "some nebulous self-righteous urge to "promote" Western ideology, or the even more dubious desire to ape the Western press." He even traced this role beyond Zimbabwe's liberation to what inspired the very first journalists to stand for the rights of the underdogs so that they are not trampled upon by the elites. Saïdi argued that they never hoped for a classless society in the Marxian sense, but at the same time, they never thought the government would engineer economic inequalities, deny people basic rights:

There would be no free lunches for anybody. Yet there would be no action by the government to create poverty or a voiceless society by implementing policies which deprived one entire sector of the population of opportunities to better themselves,

while piling up wealth on another on the basis that they agreed with one party's policies.

He went on to argue that when the press criticizes the government it is in support of the country. In other words, criticizing the state is hereby regarded as patriotic as it is about standing up for the rights of the downtrodden to create an egalitarian society. He gave the example of Zimbabwean journalists who criticized both the colonial and post-independence regimes, arguing that their reasons for criticizing the government "had absolutely nothing to do with being pro-Western or pro-Eastern. In all cases, they were pro-country." One central debate is thus whether there is good and bad criticism. The public press stands for constructive criticism within the national framework, whatever that means, and the private press pushes for all forms of criticism as good for the country. Thus, the challenge in the conceptualization of journalistic roles here is relative use of terms. Terms like "constructive criticism" and "national framework" can be defined in different ways, which makes it difficult for journalists to formulate their journalistic roles with certainty and consistency.

The arguments given above are rooted in the private press' conceptualization of its role as the public interest. This is what came out in interviews with Zimbabwean journalists. Media entrepreneur and veteran journalist, O1, said journalists have debated this matter endlessly with the ruling party, government authorities, and their public relations officials and went on to say journalists don't frame their mandate as the national interest:

They frame their mandate as public interest driven... Naturally, it can also broadly mean also supporting the national interest... We know what we mean by the public

interest. We mean things that serve the common good, like pushing the government to supply consistent or reliable electricity. But when they seek to define the national interest, therein lies the problem. We don't agree... We will disagree forever... we don't want to be stampeded into supporting the national interest, simply collapsed to mean the narrow interest of a ruling party, which wants to perpetuate itself in power.

As argued in the previous paragraph, O1 is hereby attempting to avoid the lack of certainty that comes with the idea of the national interest. He finds it easy to define the public interest in concrete terms as it refers to what is in the “common good” such as having good roads, working hospitals etc. The national interest is not really despised, but O1 argues this can be better served indirectly through the public interest role. This was also echoed by N1, a veteran journalist who has worked with both local and international news media, who argued that asking journalists to drive the national interest, national sovereignty, and national security is to put them into a pigeonhole. He said the role of the news media is to be the watchdog and whether in that “watchdog role they then help to achieve peace, security and development is incidental.” Dismissing the idea of portraying the country in a positive light or writing about positives, M1, another veteran journalist with the private press, argued that such arguments are against the basic understanding of what a watchdog means. He said “if you look at the definition of a watchdog, what does the watchdog do? A watchdog only barks when there's something wrong...it'll not bark when everything is right...The media is the same. When there's something wrong, the media barks.” This, in a way, is also a matter of traditional news values emphasizing what is bizarre, conflict (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014), etc. as newsworthy versus recent calls by the public press



for positive and uplifting stories. Whether merited or not, these different orientations continue to fracture Zimbabwe's journalistic interpretive communities despite government efforts to deal with polarization.

The private press also dismissed attempts to make them portray a positive image of the country because journalists are simply there to report things as they are. In an interview with R1, a veteran journalist who has been an editor for the privately controlled press, he said asking journalists to push for anything will make them partisan. He said: "Journalists only work with facts on the ground. They should say it as it is." He even gave the example of how Western media have done a poor job in covering the Russian-Ukrainian war. He argued that "I think Western media, which we all thought was the standard, did a bad job in handling the Ukrainian war. The truth has suffered because people are taking sides." Here he took issue with Christiane Amanpour's description of Volodymyr Zelensky as the Winston Churchill of today arguing that as a reporter, that is beyond the type of conclusion she should make. This was also supported by M1 who argued that no journalist wakes up to say I want to go and write a positive or negative story about my country because the story speaks for itself whether the country has a positive image or not. Arguments here position the press as nothing but simply a messenger whose role is to deliver the story as it is. The arguments also echo attempts to limit the role of the press to objective reporting without commenting or analyzing, but simply acting as a neutral observer. This of course contradicts the earlier position that the role of the press as a Fourth Estate includes advocacy. Moreso, it contradicts with the public press' open call for the news media to promote positive stories as shown in the previous chapter.

This section demonstrates why the privately controlled press aspires to be free from the government. It wants the distance to be able to hold the government accountable, challenge it, and where need be, step in as the opposition as part of its journalistic roles. This is different from the public press' conceptualization of its journalistic roles as supporting nationalistic goals, the government of the day, defending national sovereignty, and being sensitive to national security, thereby creating two journalistic interpretive communities with different orientations.

### **The press as a public sphere**

Apart from describing the news media as a Fourth Estate for holding the government accountable, checking its power, advocacy, the private press extends the concept to its application as a journalistic role to provide a public sphere. As a public sphere provider, the press is expected to play a facilitation role that promotes conversations, vibrant and open discussions, and provoking debate. The Zimbabwe Association of Community Radios (Zacras) in a press freedom statement, “Zacras Belated Statement on World Press Freedom Day” (2017) described provoking debate as a Fourth Estate role of the news media. The organization argued that when the press plays this role, “even Government’s laws and policies are ultimately steered by the public discourse-both offline and online.” Former US Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Charles Ray (2011), also extended the role of provoking debate to the internet. He argued that this is because the internet is now the global gate as well as a connection catalyst. Thabani Nyoni (2010), a community organizer and activist, has argued that facilitating conversations is imperative “in the making or the breaking of the multiple healthy conversations and resultant relationships in any given prosperous or growing nation.” That robust discussions contribute to building

relationships in a nation differs from how the public press would want to achieve the same through their communitarian guided reporting practices. The public press limits this role to enabling discussions, influencing policy, and offering criticism within the national framework. The problem, of course, which leads to fracturing journalistic interpretive communities in Zimbabwe, is how to define what being in the national framework means.

This public sphere role is also extended to agenda setting, provoking debate on issues that are rarely discussed, providing cutting edge analysis of issues. Contributing to the press freedom debate during the 2020 season – under the COVID-19 pandemic – Sifile (2020), the executive director for Panos Institute Southern Africa, encouraged the news media to be on top of the situation. That is, “setting the agenda for debate and action, and debunking misinformation and fake news which have become so widespread during this pandemic.” This is also extended to urging the news media to be proactive and question problematic areas that are not so obvious to the naked eye. The private press also emphasizes analyzing beyond the national interest claims, going deeper into issues to create a credible narrative. Ncube (2013) argued that the press’ “role is to bring a coldly analytical eye and let the facts reveal beyond the claims of slogans such as national interest.” In its piece, “Zacras Belated Statement on World Press Freedom Day” (2017) the organization argued that “Zimbabwe is faced with a plethora of economic, political, and social challenges, hence the need for the media to harness critical thinking in order to foster solutions that will hopefully improve our situation.” This is again an attempt by the private press to reject the idea of fulfilling the national interest as a journalistic role or to use it as a guiding principle. Instead, the private press seeks to stick to facts in conceptualizing its journalistic roles.

In addition to the above public sphere roles, the private press also considers itself a provider of space to those whose voices are denied access in government-controlled channels. The private press argues that it provides access to those who the government does not agree with, “so that people have access to what is really happening in this troubled country” (“We Will Deliver the News Fearlessly,” 2002). Its goal here, as explained by Ncube (2013) is to create a marketplace of ideas “that drive competition and private enterprise.” This conceptualization is another source of difference with the government-controlled news media when it comes to the role of the public press. This is exemplified in *The Standard’s* article, “The Public Media Is for the Public” (2008). The paper disputed the government’s notions of public media’s role as a government partner. It argued that it is not the duty of the public media to highlight government programs, positively portray then President Robert Mugabe, teach the country’s history so people understand about sanctions as had been mentioned by the then information minister, Sikanyiso Ndlovu. *The Standard* considers this government thinking as worrying because the press can plant seeds of hatred, and Zimbabwe is still fragile and to let the government use the public media to further the interests of one political party may destabilize the country. In playing this role, including holding the government accountable as indicated in the previous section, the private press considers that, as argued by M1 in an interview, they are doing the public press’s role because they are not funded through taxpayers’ money:

The biggest problem that we have, even in the academia in Zimbabwe, which is very sad, is to try and equate state media and private media. This is actually very sad. Why am I saying that? Because private media is funded by private capital...so if I put my money, I’m allowed to do what I want with my money. But people must

be accountable with taxpayers' money. So, Trevor Ncube for instance, can actually open his newspaper and declare that my interest is to support a certain political party. And it's perfectly permissible.

This argument that the public press has a bigger obligation to hold the government accountable fractures the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community even further because structurally, it is impossible for the public press to hold the government accountable. As has been explained in Chapter 5, public press editors are hamstrung through employment contracts so much that they cannot dare criticize the state. This leaves the private press as the only alternative to try and hold the government accountable, which means as long as the state has control over the public press, the country's journalistic interpretive community will remain fractured.

Three sets of ideas define the journalistic role of providing the public sphere in the privately controlled press: promoting conversations, vibrant and open discussions, and providing debate; agenda setting, providing cutting edge analysis of issues; providing a platform to those who are denied space in the government-controlled press. It is easy to see why these roles are a source of journalistic interpretive community fracture in Zimbabwe. As noted in Chapter 5, the public press still considers Zimbabwe to be a fragile democracy. Therefore in its view, promoting vibrant and open discussions that would mean interrogating even issues such as Gukurahundi, an act of genocide that killed more than 20,000 Ndebele people, is regarded as risky to internal stability (see Dube, 2021). On the other hand, the privately controlled press considers such discussions to be crucial in the country's development.

## **Promoting development through watchdog journalism**

Both the public and private press in Zimbabwe recognize their role in promoting development to improve the nation. But they diverge in how they articulate this role: the public press sees itself as a partner working with the government to encourage development while the private press takes up a watchdog role that connects development goals with being appropriately critical of the government. This latter position is exemplified in the *NewsDay's* article: "Strong Media Crucial for Development" (2018), which argued a strong watchdog press role promotes development in the country by exposing "electoral violations, gender-based inequalities and human rights abuses, which undermine the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals." In another article, the "Media Not an Enemy, but a Valuable Partner" (2021), the *NewsDay* exemplified acceptance of the development role which is supported by Ncube (2013) who argued that they are "a partner in the development of Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole and not an enemy." The bone of contention though, which continues to undermine the existence of a common journalistic interpretive community, is how to define such terms as being a government partner. In the publicly controlled press, development journalism and being a government partner is limited to promoting government policies and programs without undermining them through criticism. According to M1, a veteran Zimbabwean journalist with the private press, even when the private press is exposing corruption, it is still a government partner:

...the media is a partner of any government that has interests in developing these people. So, when the media highlights corruption, it's not an adversary, it's a partner. But the government then looks at it as adversarial. That is the problem.

Q1, another editor with the private press, argued that the problem is that the government is averse to criticism. This was also echoed by news editor S1 who argued that “we are not against the government. But we are only highlighting some of the shortcomings of the government.” Thus, based on the above, arguments from the private press show their conceptualization of watchdog journalism as a form of development journalism that contributes to the country’s development beyond simply supporting and promoting government policies. This is the other reason for the division in the Zimbabwean press because watchdog journalism has always been downplayed when it comes to development journalism.

Even though the private press emphasizes holding the government accountable, it also accepts informational roles, especially the responsibilities to educate, inform, and entertain. Fighting for the information dissemination role, the *NewsDay*, in an article, “True Media Freedom Needed” (2011) argued that the “government must appreciate we have a duty to write what is happening so as to inform the public.” In another article, “Shamu’s Astounding Dereliction of Duty” (2010), *The Standard* argued that Zimbabwe “desperately needs more radio and television stations to educate, inform and entertain the public for the betterment of the nation.” This, according to the former *NewsDay* editor Wisdom Mudzungairi (2013), involves covering all issues that touch on the public, that include politics, social, business, or climate change. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the bone of contention is not a dispute about whether all these roles should not be played or not, the bigger debate is on how they should be performed. Writing during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sifile (2020) asked the press to ensure that “the COVID-19 response does not trample on the rights of any group or class of citizens, and that no one is left behind in the

development agenda.” Kaseke (2016) also presented the news media as a bridge between the government and the public arguing that without “the Press it would be impossible to find out what the government is doing. The distance between the State and its people is thus shortened because of the Press.” Even though these roles seem less controversial as they are also supported by the public press, the challenge is in how to perform them. The private press prefers to be strong so they can empower the masses. This is why it clamors for freedom from the government.

The private press’ conceptualization of its contribution to development journalism differs from that in the public press because the former considers watchdog journalism the best role that can contribute to the country’s development. Furthermore, the private press’ pro-development roles are not necessarily limited to sharing information about government policies, but covering what the government is doing, including communicating to the public instances when the government abuses its power and office.

### **Conclusion**

The private press’ press freedom and role conceptualizations position it as a unique interpretive community compared to the public press. Contrary to the public press’ nationalistic conceptualization of press freedom, the private press takes a liberal approach. This is seen from its calls for liberalization of the news media sector, defending the role of private capital in the news media industry, as well as supporting free thinking. The private press also opposes contextualization of press freedom as called for by the public press. Instead, based on the Windhoek Declaration, it contends that press freedom already has African roots. It also universalizes press freedom by promoting individual human rights over those of the community, arguing that it is applicable to any modern society.



Furthermore, the private press also lacks trust in state institutions, hence its opposition to contextualization of press freedom. It also attempts to allay fears that press freedom might cause social chaos, using different forms of autonomy protection boundary work and paradigm repair strategies. This includes denying any connection to the regime change agenda alleged by the public press. All these are positions widely different from the nationalistic views of the public press, which means the private press operates from a different frame of reference.

On the other hand, the private press' role conceptualization can be described in two forms: the first is that of a Fourth Estate and the second is that of development journalism. Two ideas define the private press' Fourth Estate Role conceptualization: being the government adversary and providing the public sphere. Being the government's adversary includes holding the government accountable, criticizing the state, exposing corruption and greediness, the usual Fourth Estate role. This also includes challenging the government, demanding transparency, and asking uncomfortable questions. At the same time, it also includes speaking truth to power, advancing good governance, transparency, accountability, justice, and the rule of law. This typical Fourth Estate role is also extended to being the voice of the voiceless, partaking in activism where necessary, and framing political issues, as well as promoting democracy. On the other hand, the private press' Fourth Estate role as a public sphere provider encompasses three different roles: promoting conversations, vibrant and open discussions, and provoking debate; agenda setting, providing cutting edge analysis of issues; providing a platform to those whose voices are denied a platform in the government-controlled press. The private press' development journalism role is conceptualized in terms of watchdog journalism. This is combined with

the roles to educate, inform, and entertain. These roles position the private press' role conceptualizations as different from those of the public press in many important respects, which means it has different purposes of its own.

Taken all together, private press journalists in Zimbabwe perceive themselves as the typical Fourth Estate institution with a mandate to hold the government accountable. In this sense, to hold the government accountable they advocate for press freedom. As seen in the previous chapter, the public press prioritizes promoting the government of the day as the central idea in the conceptualization of its journalistic roles. This means promoting government policies, whether good or bad. Relating this to Berkowitz and TerKeurst's (1999) definition of an interpretive community as people engaged in common activities, with a shared purpose, and a common frame of reference, it can be argued that both private and public press journalists are engaged in common activities and partly share their social purpose. However, they don't agree on how to achieve the shared purpose due to being grounded in different frames of reference. The implication of this is that to understand the structure of journalistic interpretive communities in contested societies, it is important to first consider the guiding national ideology. It is also important to consider both local and international cultures and power structures. Hanitzsch et al's (2019) discursive approach comes handy here as it gives different elements of the journalistic culture that journalistic discourse reflects on. These elements are expansive as they include levels of journalistic trust in governmental institutions. As has been shown in these two chapters, the public press has high trust in governmental institutions, while the private press lacks the same. This has implications on how journalistic interpretive communities fight for their professional turf as will be shown in the next two Chapters of Part 2 to this dissertation.

## Part 2

### **Divided in life and in death: Limitations of journalistic community building mechanisms in a polarized context**

Moments of political, economic, technological, and legal disruptions, among others, present journalists with an opportunity to reinterpret their journalistic boundaries (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Depending on context, it can be a moment of institutional solidarity whereby journalists reinforce their professional identity by (re)articulating norms, rules, conventions, and practices guiding their journalistic institution. In stable contexts, like Western democracies, this has presented moments of paradigm repair (Bennet et al., 1985). In transitional societies, however, where the journalistic paradigm is still in process characterized with hybridization of local and liberal Western journalistic cultures (Berger, 2008; Zirugo, 2021c), and political regimes are being undermined by political and economic challenges, journalists tend to respond in a fragmented manner (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019). This is because the journalistic culture, which makes up the journalistic institution also tends to be contested due to various forces, among them interference by the political elites fighting to maintain their hold onto power. The implication of this is that it undermines journalists' jurisdictional claims for professional zones of autonomy (Abbott, 1988; Waisbord, 2013).

After demonstrating how Zimbabwean journalists operate as fractured journalistic interpretive communities as demonstrated in Part 1, Part 2 illustrates how such ideological differences undermine journalistic efforts to speak with one voice when they are confronted with challenges such as media repression. Tracing Zimbabwean journalists' fight against repressive media laws between 1995 and 2023, Part 2 demonstrates how the government,

through coercion, can set up journalists against each other. After doing so, it can then take advantage of the divisions to maintain its hold onto power as journalists respond to state encroachment onto their profession with discord. At the same time, Part 2 also demonstrates how journalists are not just victims, but active agents who engage in active efforts to (re)build their community when under attack. However, Part 2 is cognizant to how journalists' efforts to (re)build their community can only happen to a limited extent due to challenges linked to state interference.

To put things into perspective, this introduction gives a brief background to the interplay between Zimbabwean politics and news media business in the country. It focuses on previous attempts and failures to reform the Zimbabwean news media landscape. This introduction explains the failure to reform the Zimbabwean news media industry in terms of the socio-economic and politics of the day. Specifically, the introduction explains how economic challenges and political instability of the early 2000s forced Robert Mugabe to be more media repressive in a bid to maintain his hold onto power. This background is crucial to make sense of Zimbabwean journalists' fragmented responses to the government's introduction of repressive media laws and why they resort to collective memorialization as an effort to (re)build their journalistic interpretive communities.

### **Struggle to reform the news media in Zimbabwe: Missed opportunities and political setbacks**

Zimbabwean journalists' fight, in conjunction with members of the civil society, to reform the country's national news media and its regulatory framework under a polarized environment, presents an opportunity to understand challenges that confront a divided journalistic interpretive community in professionalizing its industry. The struggle started

at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when, according to Saunders (1999), Zimbabweans led by journalists and members of the civil society realized that the news media that they had was not what they wanted. They wanted a news media sector that could help them build their young democracy. Accordingly, journalists from both the publicly and privately controlled press, under the Zimbabwe Media Council, and civil society organizations led by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), with support from ordinary Zimbabweans started conversations to reform the Zimbabwean news media industry. This reform was partly to focus on repealing repressive colonial news media laws such as the Law and Order Maintenance Act, 1960 (LOMA); Emergency Powers, 1964; Official Secrets Act, 1970 (OSA); Privileges, Immunities and Powers of Parliament Act, 1971; The Broadcasting Act, 1957 (BA); Laws on Civil and Criminal Defamation. Designed by the colonial government, these laws inherited at independence were meant to limit press freedom and the flow of objective, and free information by controlling and limiting what journalists do. The Robert Mugabe government adopted these laws and made no effort to reform them.

At the end of the 1990s, the Zimbabwean government verbally promised deep-cutting reforms to ensure media freedom (Saunders, 1999), but in action, went the opposite direction. Faced with popular discontent over deteriorating economic conditions (Chuma, 2004), the Robert Mugabe government backtracked on its media reform promises by harassing private press journalists, attacking the foreign press, and started designing broadcasting and telecommunications sector laws without consultation. Hence a promising reform conversation, as Saunders (1999) would describe it, turned out to be the worst era for the Zimbabwean journalism profession as Robert Mugabe's government replaced inherited anti-press freedom colonial laws with more repressive ones. The new repressive

laws came in the form of the Broadcasting Services Act, 2001 (BSA); Public Order and Security Act, 2002 (POSA); Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2002 (AIPPA); Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, 2004; and the Interception of Communications Act (ICA) (2007) (Chuma, 2004; Limpitlaw, 2013).

These laws represented change without change (Moyo, 2004), as they were just cosmetic modifications to the already repressive colonial era media policies, according to Chuma (2004). Instead of creating a liberated news media sector, the laws broadly limited it by allowing the harassment of journalists, deportation of foreign correspondents, shutting down of news media houses. The end of the 1990s thus turned out to be a decade of lost opportunities to reform the Zimbabwean news media industry. As a result, up to this day, pre- and post-independence Zimbabweans, both Black and White, have never experienced a professional news media that is uncensored and free due to interference by politicians and news media owners (Ruhanya, 2018; Saunders, 1999). So is the same with the country's journalists.

The background to this sad and unfortunate turn of events is that, faced with legitimacy crisis due to a series of economic crises, political instability and a negative record of human rights abuses (Petricia, 2023) threatening his presidency, Robert Mugabe cracked down on media freedom to preserve his political power by silencing dissent and criticism. Several events led to the crisis threatening Robert Mugabe's hold onto power. On November 14, 1997, popularly known as the country's Black Friday, the Zimbabwe dollar crashed, losing 72% of its value against the US dollar ("Black Friday 17th Anniversary," 2014). This followed unbudgeted payments of gratuities to the country's war veterans, amidst other wrong economic policies (Maclean, 2002; Makina, 2010). The

country's economic situation further worsened as Zimbabwe got involved in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) war in 1998 (Maclean, 2002). Subsequent harsh living conditions solidified student and urban activism, which became fuel for the emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 to challenge Robert Mugabe's twenty-year rule (Zeilig, 2008). In the same year, privately owned *Daily News* was also launched as the first competitive daily paper to challenge the state-controlled *Herald* which had since lost credibility due to government interference (Chuma, 2004). The *Daily News* became the platform where the opposition could raise criticism against the government, hence it was labeled an opposition paper. The MDC became so formidable that it went on to successfully campaign for a "no" vote in the country's 2000 constitutional referendum, marking the first time Robert Mugabe ever lost an election (McCandless, 2011). Agitated, in the same year of 2000, Robert Mugabe's government embarked on a controversial *Third Chimurenga* (Third War), popularly known as the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP), involving land redistribution from Whites to landless Blacks. The whole process was mired in allegations of human rights abuses leading to the imposition of sanctions by Western countries, prominent among them being the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act, 2001 (ZDERA) by the George W. Bush administration (Petricia, 2023).

Instead of acting as a restraint, the above developments made Mugabe even more undemocratic and anti-press freedom – hence the introduction of repressive news media laws (BSA; AIPPA; POSA, etc). The laws were meant to vanquish the opposition and punish the private press, which he accused of being unpatriotic and working in partnership with Western countries to effect regime change (Chuma, 2004). Mugabe's vitriol against

the private press marked the beginning of media polarization in the country. According to the government narrative, the private press became the unpatriotic regime change agents while the public press became the patriotic one working to defend the country's national interest. This explains how the promising discussions to reform the country's news media that had been started at the end of the 1990s decade suffered a miscarriage (Saunders, 1999). Till 2017, when Robert Mugabe was removed in a military coup by the current regime that came in promising to reorient the country towards democracy partly through reforming the country's media sector, Zimbabwean journalists have been involved in a bitter struggle to reform their industry. The new government has claimed commitment to reform the Zimbabwean news media industry. But the question is: is it Uhuru (freedom) as this is not the first time the Zimbabwean government has made such promises? At independence, the government restructured the country's media policy, an exercise which turned out to be an act of news media censorship. At the of the 1990s decade, as has been indicated above, the government made verbal promises of media reform not backed by action. In general, media reform in Zimbabwe has best been described as a case of one step forward, two or three steps backwards (Bafana, 2022; Saunders, 1999). This failure to reform can be understood in terms of the challenges that have confronted the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community as a fragmented one. This is the goal of Part 2 as explained below.

### **Tracing the origins of Zimbabwe's fractured journalistic interpretive community and its professionalization challenges**

Using the concept of fractured journalistic interpretive communities, the chapters in Part 2 trace challenges faced by a divided journalistic community fighting to claim their



professional jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). This is an illustration of the effects of a journalistic interpretive fracture because of ideological differences shown in Chapters 5 and 6. Thus, whereas Part 1 demonstrates the traits of a fractured journalistic interpretive community, Part 2 looks at the material consequences of such fragmentation. Part 2 argues that fragmentation in the journalistic interpretive community undermines journalistic abilities to professionalize their sector.

Chapter 7: Zimbabwe legal reform debate, 1995-2023 – News media dancing in and out of tune, a heading borrowed from Saunders' (1999) *Dancing Out of Tune* book title, illustrates journalists' professionalization challenges when divided by looking into how Zimbabwean reporters have failed to force or convince the government to reform the country's repressive media laws for the past two-decades. The chapter demonstrates how media reforms have been delayed as the public media danced in government's tune, while the private press danced out of state's tune. The chapter achieves this by examining texts focusing on media reform in the form of analytical, editorial, opinion pieces either critiquing or supporting the country's media laws. As the reader will notice, much of the debates are concentrated around early 2000. This is because the era was key in solidifying the split of the Zimbabwean journalistic sector: one pro-state and another, "anti-ruling party," as the government would want Zimbabweans to believe. Due to concentration of many texts in early 2000, interviews are also used to interrogate the state of Zimbabwe's journalistic interpretive community in relation to the current media reform agenda started in 2017.

Chapter 8, through case studies, also illustrates challenges confronting a divided journalistic interpretive community in fending off state encroachment onto its field. First,

the chapter explores journalistic responses to the *Daily News* closure by the state back in 2003 over failure to register in line with the country's AIPPA law. The public press celebrated the occasion while the private press criticized it. The second case examines how the same division has been transposed onto the digital era where the government takes advantage of news media polarization to harass journalists using platforms like Twitter accusing them of being political activists. Once again, the country's journalists respond in a fragmented manner. considers journalistic agency. This is followed with Chapter 9 that explores how, through collective memory, Zimbabwean journalists attempt and fail to (re)construct or (re)build themselves into a united journalistic interpretive community through memorialization discourse even during moments of death. The chapter achieves this by focusing on obituaries written following the death of veteran journalists as well as analyzing anniversary articles written when news media organizations achieve milestones in their operation.

The major premise guiding Part 2, based on this introduction, is that the structure of journalistic interpretive communities is dependent on the political and economic power structures within each locality. The effect of these power structures has material consequences on the extent to which journalists can be able to share a common journalistic project that can allow them to defend their professional autonomy.

## Chapter 7

### **Zimbabwe Media Law Reform Debates, 1995-2023 – News media dancing in and out of Government’s tune**

The struggle for news media reform in Zimbabwe can be categorized into three phases: the 1995-1999 era, a period of less pronounced political, social, economic, and media polarization; the 2000-2017 era, the period of massive news media repression under the Robert Mugabe government; and the era of the new dispensation, 2017 to current. The Robert Mugabe era witnessed both enactment of repressive news media laws in early 2000, as well as adoption of a new constitution guaranteeing freedom of the press and that of the media in 2013. The era is however known for the government’s lethargy in realigning the early 2000 repressive news media laws in line with the country’s new constitution – a Robert Mugabe legacy that the new government is claiming to fix. This story can best be understood by starting from 1995, itself not necessarily being the first attempt to reform the country’s media sector. Media reform in Zimbabwe started with government-led news media industry restructuring at independence in 1980 (see Chuma, 2004; Moyo, 2004; Saunders, 1999). The year 1995, however, is an important starting point because this marks the era at which Zimbabwean journalists, civil society organizations, with popular support from ordinary Zimbabweans started calling for various media reforms: repeal of repressive colonial news media laws inherited at independence, removing government control over public news media institution, redefining the role of the Ministry of Information from a government’s propaganda mouthpiece to one that can facilitate information flow (Saunders, 1999).

In the sections below, the chapter examines the above-mentioned epochs in detail, explaining how each era saw the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community fragment and begin to operate as enemies. This fragmentation disrupted efforts to make a unified jurisdictional claim of journalists' professional territory. Yet the current government, in the last six years, has made attempts to bring the two camps back together. The first section explores how politics dismantled a 1990s media reform agenda by journalists and the civil society, leaving journalists divided. The second section examines how this division worked against journalists as they could not speak with one voice against repressive news media laws that came in the early 2000. Lastly, the final section explores the current government's attempts at reforming the news media sector amidst enduring mistrust from private press journalists and members of the civil society. What emerges in this chapter is how politics is not only central to the survival of Zimbabwean journalists as claimed by Elias Rusike (1990) (while reflecting on his personal experiences as Zimpapers CEO in the 1980s), but actually central to the structure of the country's journalistic interpretive communities. Below, the chapter starts by examining the 1995-1999 era.

### **Media law reform and the genesis of a fractured journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe: 1995-1999**

The late 1990s witnessed the beginning of journalistic divisions in Zimbabwe, with the public press moving to collude with the state in castigating the private press (Saunders, 1999). However, at the formative stages of the media reform process in Zimbabwe – 1995 to around 1998 – both the public and private press were a united community calling for self-regulation. Even the government controlled *Herald* ran such articles as “Archaic Press Laws Must Go” (1996) and “Needed - Press Complaints Council” (1998). Their only

opponent then was the state as exemplified by pro-state non-journalistic actors opposing self-regulation. However, as the 1990s decade winded down, the private press is left alone to fight for press freedom, challenging repressive and unconstitutional laws in court. Thus this 1995-1999 section is made up of three parts: 1) how the public press led calls for self-regulation; 2) how and why pro-state non-journalistic actors opposed self-regulation; 3) how the private press was left alone to fight for press freedom.

### **Public press calls for self-regulation**

In 1995, with funding from the Danish Embassy, Zimbabwe's journalists established a Zimbabwe Media Council to self-regulate their operations (Mandava 1999). The establishment of this council was followed with a two-day Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ)-led National Conference on Media Law Reform held in Harare from November 21-22, 1996 (Mahoso, 1996b). The conference marked the beginning of formal government-press media law reform negotiations. However, the 1995 Zimbabwe Media Council suffered a stillbirth (Mandava, 1999). By July 1999, when Zimbabwean journalists held a Media Freedom Responsibility and Ethics workshop in Harare as a follow up to the 1996 Media Law Reform conference, it was so dormant that during the workshop, a task force was established to resuscitate it, according to Mandava. Prior to this workshop, the then Minister of Information, Posts and Telecommunications, Chen Chimutengwende, had announced that the government was intent on introducing laws to regulate operations of the private press (Bvuma, 1999). Why the government had chosen this path can be understood by looking at prior developments, again between 1995 and 1999.

In 1995, the same year when Zimbabwean journalists established the Zimbabwe Media Council, *The Financial Gazette* publisher, editor and deputy editor were arrested,

charged and convicted with criminal defamation for alleging that former President Robert Mugabe and Grace Marufu, later his wife, had conducted a secret wedding presided over by then High Court Judge Paddington Garwe (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020). This kind of investigative news coverage, daring to expose actions by government officials and the country's elites, was to become more common as the decade progressed. In 1996, the same year that Media Law Reform negotiations started, Trevor Ncube, former journalist and now a newspaper publisher, teamed up with his business partners, Clive Wilson and Clive Murphy, to establish the *Zimbabwe Independent*, a weekly Friday newspaper that took a critical stance against the government, before establishing another weekly Sunday paper, *The Standard* in 1997 (Chuma, 2005). The inaugural *Standard* editor Mark Chavhunduka and his reporter Ray Choto were arrested, tortured, and charged under LOMA with creating alarm and despondency in January 1999 for writing and publishing a news story alleging that 23 soldiers had attempted to overthrow Robert Mugabe's government in an unsuccessful coup attempt over deployment of their fellow soldiers in the DRC war (Chavunduka, 2002). Chavunduka narrated that they were subjected to electric shocks among other forms of torture as the military police that arrested them did not dispute the fact of the story but wanted to know their sources. The military police even defied a court order to release them. Also in 1999, the *Daily News* entered the streets of Harare as the only privately owned daily paper to compete with the state-controlled *Herald* (Chuma, 2005). In the same year again, an opposition political party – the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by former trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai – was launched to challenge the ruling ZANU PF (Mazango, 2005). These events had the effect of fracturing the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community between the private and public press

sectors as witnessed in how the debate for media law reform transformed between 1995 and the year 2000.

Prior to the formation of the MDC in 1999, the rise of the *Daily News*, and *The Standard's* coup story that led to the torture of Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto, Zimbabwean journalists stood together as an interpretive community as evidenced in how they fought collectively for self-regulation. This is what had motivated them to establish the Zimbabwe Media Council in 1995, which *The Herald* continued to call for as evidenced by its story: “Needed - Press Complaints Council” (1998) to facilitate self-regulation. With one voice, it called for the repeal of inherited colonial media laws, criminal defamation, and establishment of an independent press council during the 1996 Media Law Reform Conference. The public press led the pack calling for the repeal of OSA and BA which it argued made Zimbabwe trail behind other countries in the region democratically. In an editorial “Archaic Press Laws Must Go” (1996), *The Herald* argued that it is “inconceivable that such a progressive country should trail behind all the other countries south of the Sahara except Botswana.” Due to a shared liberal ideology of the time, which is understandable as this was a re/democratization era, the journalistic interpretive community could easily unite since they had one frame of reference: liberalism. Liberalism had emerged as the dominant ideology in the early 1990s, characterized by the spread of democratic approaches to governance across the world following the fall of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc (Mazango, 2005).

Even after members of the private press (*The Financial Gazette*) had been convicted of writing a defamatory story claiming that the then President Robert Mugabe had wedded secretly, the public press did not call for statutory regulation. Instead, it called

for a Press Complaints Council that would allow citizens to raise complaints against the press without seeking litigation through the courts as a solution. In an editorial, “Needed - Press Complaints Council” (1998), *The Herald* even posited that such a press council “would need to be independent and have widely representative membership.” Thus, during this late 1990s era, the public press, like their private press counterparts, also subscribed to ideas of self-regulation. One possible explanation for why the public press took this stance is that then its journalists still had room to negotiate for editorial autonomy. The government had not yet moved to take total control of the public press to the levels witnessed from the year 2000 (Chuma, 2005; Nyahunzvi, 2007) because then, it still felt secure in terms of its political legitimacy.

Key lessons from this era are that given necessary legal protections or at least some level of autonomy, even though it can never be 100%, in the form of limited government interference, or that of owners, journalists can easily coalesce into a common journalistic interpretive community. This speaks back to Berkowitz and TerKeurst's (1999) argument that journalistic interpretive communities are constituent elements of particular geographic communities. This means the geographic culture and power dynamics within each locality influence how journalistic interpretive communities operate. In this case, what impacted and fractured the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community was a lack of a democratic culture complicated by Robert Mugabe's political power insecurities as he felt threatened by the opposition and rising discontentment over deteriorating economic conditions.



### **Pro-state non-journalistic actors draw boundaries of permissible freedom**

As alluded above, calls for self-regulation by the Zimbabwean journalistic community did not go unnoticed by pro-state non-journalistic actors who quickly rose to action to challenge such an approach to media regulation. Leading the pack at this time, including during the 1996 Media Law Reform Conference discussed above, was Tafataona Mahoso, a ruling party sympathizer who later became the first Chairperson of the Media and Information Commission (MIC), now Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC). Mahoso was a frequent critic of Western-style press freedom, as seen in chapter 5. Mahoso opposed media positions that emerged from the 1996 Media Law Reform Conference. At the time, the only point that Mahoso (1996) agreed with journalists on was the need to repeal colonial media laws. He admitted that “both the Government and representatives of journalists and civil society organizations agreed that the majority of those Rhodesian laws should be repealed or amended.” However, the state disagreed with journalists’ calls to repeal criminal defamation. According to Mahoso, “the state argued that it would wait and see whether such a law becomes unnecessary before abolishing it.” While analysis of journalistic culture usually focuses on how much journalists trust government institutions (e.g., Van Dalen et al., 2019), arguments here show that how much trust the government and its sympathizers have in the press also impacts journalistic interpretive communities by either letting them operate organically, or interfering and fracturing them. Presence or lack of trust in the press can lead to state actions that can either unite or fracture journalistic interpretive communities. It is thus important to note Mahoso's (1996) expression of mistrust in the Zimbabwean press in general as a factor that had implications on journalistic autonomy in Zimbabwe.

Pro-government non-journalistic actors, again led by Mahoso, also advocated for a statutory media council against the non-statutory Zimbabwe Media Council established in 1995 that the country's journalists preferred. Mahoso argued that this media council was heavily influenced by White liberal ideals. He thus argued that "this relationship puts the two bodies in a liberal straight jacket, even though the majority of our communities and constituencies are not liberal." He also argued that a non-statutory media council is not desirable because it cannot enforce judgements when journalists violate their code of conduct or the law. Furthermore, Mahoso used rivalry among private media institutions to reject the idea of a non-statutory press council. He argued that "it cannot be maintained in the media council because there are wider divisions and more intense rivalries among the private media houses than between them and the state affiliated media." In addition, he also argued that reporters may not be able to direct a council with their employers, which can be contained by a statutory one. Thus, Mahoso used weaknesses of a non-statutory media council such as rivalry among news media houses and potential control from private news media owners to argue against it. By and large, his arguments here, especially emphasis on rivalry among the private press institutions than with the state media, confirm how the journalistic interpretive community at the time was united.

Beyond potential weaknesses of a non-statutory media council, pro-state non-journalistic actors also took a populist approach arguing that a statutory media council would protect the public interest. Defining the public interest as referring to how a media council must benefit the people, Mahoso (1996), writing in an opinion piece for *The Sunday Mail*, argued that what "the journalists and the people of Zimbabwe need to do is make sure that the public interest prevails" by introducing the changes strategically so that they

evolve their own identities in relation to communities they are supposed to serve. He also expressed fear that monopolies may undermine the public interest if they are allowed to prevail. Furthermore, he expressed fear that people and the public interest always disappear from press freedom debates. He argued that this is revealed in “articles on freedom of the Press in the ‘independent Press’ where society and people somehow disappear through the cracks between the tall hype, leaving only machinery, real estate, advertising accounts, capital, profits.” Mahoso's claim here then is that the public interest can only be ensured in a state-led media law reform process and a statutory form of media regulation, a populist argument usually made in the name of the people in press freedom debates (Merrill, 1989). While at this time, the only voices opposed to journalistic positions on media regulation were those of pro-government non-journalistic actors and the state itself, Mahoso's positions found sympathy in the public press from 1997 onwards.

Before moving to the section below, it is important to note here the significance of national ideology in shaping journalistic interpretive community discourses. To discredit calls for self-regulation through a non-statutory press council, Mahoso (1996) had to start off by delegitimizing liberalism as a colonial idea at odds with traditional Zimbabwean cultural norms. Also important is the conceptualization of such ideas as public interest. The way these ideas are applied shows that first they are applied in socializing journalists, which Mukasa (2003) argued as how Zimpapers' editors were indoctrinated with the ruling party's ideology. This makes the application of hegemonic ideas onto the populace the second stage after socializing journalists. Without establishing causality, the effect of this indoctrination of Zimpapers' editors with the ruling party ideology, among other measures, is seen in how the public press made a 180-degree U-turn to support statutory regulation.

## **The public press succumbs, colludes with the state in support of statutory regulation**

Even though the public press supported self-regulation, partaking in calls for a non-statutory media council, the moment the Zimbabwean government introduced the Public Order and Security Bill, later POSA, back in 1997, fractures began to emerge in the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community. The public press supported the act as deserving a chance. It emphasized balancing free expression and peace as well as the right to life. In an article, “New Bill Deserves to Pass, Become Law” (1997), *The Herald* argued that “the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly should not lead to violence, hatred, or gross inconvenience.” By 1999, the public press had shifted to the government corner in the media regulation debate, accusing journalists of indiscipline. Soon after information minister Chen Chimutengwende announced government plans to introduce legislation to regulate the private press, Thomas Bvuma (1999), then *Herald* Deputy Editor, supported this move arguing that the government can go it alone if negotiations fail. In a feature article, “Government can regulate media through legislation: If Press abdicates responsibility to negotiate” signaling a breakdown in government-press media regulation negotiations, he reported that the “private Press and civil society have abdicated their social responsibility to negotiate with the government.” He went on to argue that “when the media goes overboard and rejects the process of negotiation, the State can go it alone and regulate the media.” As mentioned earlier, one of the contextual developments to this public press shift to support statutory regulation was *The Standard’s* January 1999 coup story over the DRC war, formation of the MDC, and introduction of *The Daily News*. Also, as mentioned in the introduction to this Part Two, this was the time of protests from students and urban dwellers against the rising cost of living.

By mid-1999, the public press had quickly moved from just supporting statutory regulation, to justifying it based on suspicions that the private press had been captured by elites and its journalists had become undisciplined. Following a July 1999 Media Freedom Responsibility and Ethics workshop held in Harare, where a task force was established to resuscitate the journalists' dormant media council, the public press accused journalists of being corruptible, unethical, and unprincipled. Geoff Nyarota, then Editor in Chief of the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe, publishers of *The Daily News*, was quoted by Mandava (1999) claiming that the country's journalists had been captured by powerful elites. He said, "one of Harare's flamboyant businessmen boasted of having 'his' journalists in all newsrooms, including Nyarota's own newsroom." In the same article, Tim Nyahunzvi, a journalism trainer, was also quoted accusing journalists of being corrupt bootlickers worse than the politicians they cover, adding that "they are faultfinders, they are unpatriotic, they publish lies and half-truths." Zimbabwean journalists thus deserved to be subjected to statutory regulation because they had become bootlickers, lost journalistic ethics, and been captured.

It is indeed outside the scope of this study to examine if the discourse from non-journalistic actors was responsible for the public press' change of course in as far as self-regulation is concerned. However, it is significant to note here how Zimbabwe's journalistic interpretive community structures have been so dependent on the politics of the day. This structural sensitivity to the politics of the day is a function of context, determined by how much autonomy do journalists enjoy in each geographical set-up. Whether by force or by coercion, the private press was thus left alone to face the state.

### **Left alone: Private press faces the wrath of the state**

The fracture of the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community continued to become well-defined when the public press remained silent over the torture of *Standard* journalists, Mark Chavhunduka and Ray Choto by the Zimbabwe National Army. The two had reported about an attempted coup on Robert Mugabe's government by disgruntled army personnel over the country's involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo war in the late 1990s (Rønning & Kupe, 2000). Under LOMA, the two were charged with creating unnecessary alarm and despondency and they had to go it alone in challenging the Act's constitutionality. In the year 2000, they successfully challenged LOMA's criminal offense of causing alarm and despondency in the Supreme Court and got it struck off statute books. The full bench of the Supreme Court found this act's criminal offense to be overbroad, provided for a speculative offense, and infringed on freedom of expression. In what can be termed an example of freudenfreude, as opposed to schadenfreude, Zimbabwean journalists from *The Standard*, in the article "Victory for Press Freedom as Court Rules in Favor of Standard Journalists" (2000), celebrated this as a success for journalism in the country. It went at great length to cite liberal ideas given by the bench in defense of freedom of expression, including individual self-fulfillment, empowering individuals to participate in decision making, truth discovery, providing a mechanism to balance between stability and reasonable social change. These celebrations were however short-lived as the government quickly moved in to introduce various new pieces of legislation that were actually more draconian than the colonial ones (Chuma, 2004)—as discussed in the next section. The semblance of democratic judgements favorable to the press by the judiciary was also to change from the year 2000 when BSA, AIPPA, and

POSA were introduced. The public press also moved more and more to legitimize the position of the government on media laws.

To sum up, the above sections show how Zimbabwean journalists moved from a united interpretive community to a fragmented one around the issue of media regulation. The public press moved from supporting self-regulation through a non-statutory media council to defending the government's introduction of repressive press laws. What cannot be underestimated in this change is the role of pro-state non-journalistic actors who opposed self-regulation. At the same time, the government's control of Zimpapers through the Ministry of Information also cannot be ignored, in conjunction with changing political dynamics of the time, especially the rise of the opposition to challenge Robert Mugabe for power. This goes back to this dissertation's argument that in times of political instability, in contexts where the state is somehow connected to the press as the Zimbabwean case under discussion here, journalistic interpretive communities are vulnerable to manipulation and fracture. The developments above also deviate from Zelizer's (1993) argument that journalists tend to respond as a disunited community in durational mode of interpretation as opposed to the local mode of interpretation. Here Zimbabwean journalists are seen reacting as a non-unitary force as laws are being implemented. One government strategy that can explain the public press' change of course and tone creating a fragmented community was dismissal of unwanted editors who may have attempted to express independence. For example, in early 1998, Tommy Sithole, then *Herald Editor* was dismissed after publication of editorials criticizing police heavy handedness in quelling food riots in Harare (Mukasa, 2003). This move shows how journalistic interpretive communities can be engineered and remote controlled by the state. The following section

shows the effect of editorial shake-ups at Zimpapers. Basically, the public press somersaulted from supporting liberal ideals to defending statutory regulation in the name of defending the national interest.

### **Things fall apart - Repressive law making and fall of the media reform agenda: 2000 - 2017**

As alluded to earlier, the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was a very insecure moment for the Robert Mugabe regime. In 2000, the ruling party had lost a referendum to the opposition (McCandless, 2011), was put under sanctions by the West in 2001 (Petricia, 2023), and the economy started its journey to hyperinflation (Coomer & Gstraunthaler, 2011). At the same time, the government was facing increasing pressure from the opposition MDC which threatened to win the 2002 presidential elections. To secure his power, Robert Mugabe adopted a two-pronged approach: directly controlling who was hired and fired as editor at Zimpapers as well as crafting an arsenal of repressive laws to muzzle the private press (Chuma, 2004; Mukasa, 2003). The Robert Mugabe regime was preparing the groundwork for a hegemonic project to win the hearts and minds of the local populace and the international community.

The first approach saw several public press editors who tried to be critical and display some level of independence being dismissed. Tommy Sithole, then Zimpapers board chairperson, fell victim in March 2001 after Jonathan Moyo, as Minister of Information ordered that he should be fired for refusing to dismiss two editors of the group who were failing to portray a positive image of the country (Peta, 2001). Soon after Sithole's dismissal, *Herald* and *Sunday Mail* Editors Ray Mungoshi and Editor Funny Mushava were dismissed respectively for failure to portray the government in a positive



light since they had been appointed (Peta, 2001; “Two Editors Sacked in Zimbabwe Newspaper Purge,” 2001). Eight months prior to this, three Zimpapers Editors, Bornwell Chakaodza (*Herald* Editor); Thomas Bvuma (*Herald* Deputy Editor), and Pascal Mukondiwa (*Sunday Mail* Editor) had also been fired for failure to toe the government line (“Two Editors Sacked in Zimbabwe Newspaper Purge,” 2001). In a way, that strategy took care of the press by nipping any critical reporting at Zimpapers in the bud (Mukasa, 2003). To also silence the private press, the government enacted several laws such as BSA (2000), POSA (2002), AIPPA (2002), and ICA (2007) (Chuma, 2004; Limpitlaw, 2013). This marked the death of the late 1990s media reform agenda. The effect of this two-pronged approach was splitting of the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community with the public press standing on one side supporting government policies and the private press on the other criticizing the state. Public press support of government policies also meant defending the newly enacted media laws, abandoning the media reform agenda of the 1990s.

To examine the split that emerged among the Zimbabwean journalists in the 2000-2017 period, two sections below go into detail examining public press’ arguments in defense of statutory press laws and analyzing the private press’ arguments against the same. The first section, focusing on the public press, is divided into three subsections. The first subsection analyses the public press’ defense of the repressive laws in the name of nation-building. This is followed by an examination of its anti-Western approach in defense of repressive laws before the section concludes with a look at how the public press tried to normalize repression by comparing it to how the same happens even in the West. On the other hand, the section focusing on the private press is divided into two subsections. The

first subsection looks at the private press' use of liberal ideals to attack repressive news media laws, before turning to its arguments against the laws from a rule of law perspective. But first, attention is given to the public press' nationalistic rhetoric.

### **In defense of national sovereignty: public press' nationalistic rhetoric**

The ultimate fracture of the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community was witnessed in how the public press supported the newly introduced repressive laws, from 2000 – 2017, while the private press called for their reform. The section below looks at how the public press defended these laws in the name of national interest. As alluded to above, three themes characterize the public press' rhetoric in defense of the above laws: nation building, fighting Western hegemony, and normalizing the press laws through comparative analysis.

#### ***Nation-building as public press' rationale in defending repressive laws***

The public press defended the above media laws as tools for nation building as they would enhance nationhood. The laws were to facilitate nation building by providing the foundations for “patriotism, national sovereignty and self-determination,” according to Reverend Owen Matamisa (2004), head of the ZANU PF supported African Unity Church. Reverend Matamisa was writing in defense of POSA. The laws, particularly AIPPA and BSA, as the public press argued, were also to contribute to nation building through preservation of the country's sovereignty by providing the government with firm powers to control news media operations. Tatenda Chipungudzanye (2004), a veteran journalist then with *The Herald*, argued that media control would “preserve our own independence gains and people have to be made aware of the importance of controlling the operations of the media that, in turn, translates to sovereignty.” The public press also argued that the laws

would contribute to nation building by promoting national identity and the country's cultural destiny. In an article "Act Opens New Era in Broadcasting" (2001) published soon after signing of BSA into law, *The Herald* argued that the government had gone beyond empty words about cultural erosion. The paper argued that this piece of legislation gave "Zimbabweans ammunition to restore their values." Zimbabweans thus, according to the article, had a mandate "to take charge of our broadcasting systems to reclaim and assert our cultural and national identity." Ideals such as national sovereignty were nothing new but mere imitation of colonial justifications for repressive media laws. On one hand, this speaks to the effect of colonial legacy in shaping journalistic interpretive communities in post-independence states because what came at independence was nothing, but copies made from colonial regime prototypes. At the same time, this also speaks to the need to decolonize post-independence states if media reform is to be genuine which might give a chance to the emergence of spontaneous journalistic interpretive communities.

The new laws, according to the public press, would also contribute to nation building through promotion of religious, tribal, ethnic, and racial tolerance or peaceful co-existence. For the sake of this cause for peace, *The Herald*, in an article "New Bill Deserves to Pass, Become Law" (1997), written in support of the Public Order and Security Bill, later POSA, argued that freedom of expression can be limited. The paper wrote that freedom of expression "cannot be absolute if the freedom of others to live their lives in peace is also to be preserved. All democracies draw the line here." These new regulatory tools were also regarded as symbolical to evoking territorial control. According to Chipungudzanye (2004), BSA's "75 percentage provision on local programming in the broadcasting sector and other provisions on the operations of the media...evokes our

territorial control and population, which is the basis of sovereignty.” Arguing that national interest prevailed after the passing of BSA, *The Herald*, in the article “Act Opens New Era in Broadcasting” (2001), argued that our “values cannot continue to be eroded and rubbished in the name of democracy.” This argument ties in with Bvuma's (1999) argument that even though statutory regulation diminishes press freedom, it is “an evil found to be necessary to safeguard the interests of society and the State.” These interests are promoting nationhood through facilitation of social tolerance and peaceful co-existence, territorial control, and promoting the country’s values. The irony here is that the same state intolerant of criticism justified repressive news media laws in the name of facilitating social tolerance and peaceful co-existence. This is the journalistic challenge each time politicians are involved in news media control of any format.

According to the public press, new media laws, and statutory regulation of the news media in general was necessary to fend off counter-hegemonic struggles from Rhodesians who had been defeated in the liberation struggle that ended in 1980. According to Bvuma (1999), these Rhodesians had embarked on “a counter-hegemonic campaign aimed at frustrating the Government’s goal of establishing a socialist and one-party state.” Bvuma argued that working with Zimbabwe’s middle class, Black intellectuals, opposition parties and the civil society, these Rhodesians used the private press as a tool to remove the Black government led by ZANU PF. He argued that this was evidenced by how “the local private Press and some African intellectuals were tripping over each other as each claimed credit for the Zimbabwe Government’s abandonment of socialism and the one-party state” in the early 1990s. He viewed this as a success for the Rhodesians who, out of convenience, promoted ideas of democracy and free market – values which they violated during their

colonial reign. The sin of the private press, according to Bvuma (1999), was not just promotion of democracy and free market ideals, but openly declaring that "they see the overthrow of the Government as the solution to the country's problems." The new media laws then, were important as tools to manage the private press since it had become a tool to remove the Robert Mugabe government. Besides the Rhodesians, the government identified the West and globalization as a larger threat (see below).

The nation building theme as presented here is a manifestation of a paranoid state afraid of its own people, their diversity, as well as the international community. In other words, the Zimbabwean government at this time saw enemies from within and from without. The freedom of news media suffered for ZANU PF fears. This brings us back to the argument that the challenge with journalistic interpretive communities under unstable contexts is that both local and global power dynamics impact it. The change in the public press' stance also shows that a journalistic interpretive community is as good as the owners of the news media because where editors cannot be ideologically manipulated, they will have to be coerced and coaxed through threats and dismissals.

### ***Fighting Western Hegemony***

In defending the newly enacted press laws, the public press also adopted an anti-Western sentiment. The public press contextualized its stance within two historical developments: globalization and the fall of the Soviet Union, which it claimed required crafting of new press laws to fight the spread of Western hegemony. According to Clever Chirume (2005), a *Herald* correspondent, the historical fall of the Eastern Bloc occurred within larger processes of globalization. This development, he argued, "plunged the world into unipolarity, thus elevating liberalism to the position of absolute truth" and "the West

could now closely monitor and control events in most countries, which had thrived under the influences of the communist and socialist ideologies.” Thus, within these larger processes of globalization, and the fall of the Eastern Bloc, laws such as AIPPA were necessary to help countries like Zimbabwe fight Western hegemonic ideas including neoliberalism. The fact that the Zimbabwean public press cited global ideological changes shows that factors that influence the structure of journalistic interpretive communities are not limited to those from the local context alone. Global power dynamics also play an influential role.

From a public press perspective, the newly enacted news media laws were also important in challenging how Africa is portrayed in the Western news media, as part of the broader project to fight Western hegemony. According to Tatenda Chipungudzanye (2004), a veteran journalist with *The Herald*, besides the fall of the Eastern Bloc, another historical context behind the promulgation of new media regulations in Zimbabwe, is that “Third World countries felt marginalized by the concept of a global village that tended to be more of the First World in the Third World countries.” This, according to the public press, had also been evidenced by the West’s negative response towards the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The NWICO debate was a 1970s and 1980s call, through UNESCO, by 55 developing nations that called themselves the Non-Aligned Movement for a reversal of the one-way global information flow from the Global North to the Global South (Buchanan, 2015). According to Chipungudzanye (2004), the “US government and the industrialized world at large attacked the report by distorting its recommendations, saying they would threaten the free marketplace of ideas.” After the dismissal of NWICO by the West, according to these arguments, Third World Countries

felt marginalized by not being listened to by the powerful nations. Besides Third World countries' fight to be heard, there is also a material issue of how Africa is portrayed in the global news media that was used as justification for Zimbabwe's news media laws. According to Chipungudzanye there has been too much negative portrayal of the Third World as problem-ravaged, savage or radical necessitating such laws as AIPPA and BSA. He argued that "the First World generally portrays a negative picture of Africa – alleging that Africans are 'savages' who are generally 'uncivilized'." Thus, Zimbabwe's journalists became divided out of being assigned these different hegemonic roles to fight the powers from the West.

As the private press, in conjunction with civil society organizations, continued calling for the repeal of the early 2000 news media laws, the public press expanded its range of arguments. Beyond merely fighting Western hegemony; it defended the government's statutory laws to regulate the operations of the news media as tools to fight against cultural imperialism, a situation defined by Chipungudzanye (2004) as one whereby "one culture becomes a duplicate of the other." In his article, "Laws not meant to gag the press" he argued that the regulatory framework was "a way of doing away with the effects of cultural imperialism arising from media imperialism." This cultural imperialism, according to Chipungudzanye, was fast-tracked by liberalization that allowed foreign news media ownership and control. The new regulatory framework thus worked to stop cultural imperialism through enforcing strict media ownership laws such as BSA and AIPPA that did not allow foreign investment. According to Chipungudzanye, imposition of "stricter measures on electronic and print media ownership in Zimbabwe has, indeed, to a greater extent brought about sanity in promoting Zimbabwe's own media products." He also

argued that these laws undermined cultural imperialism by promoting local cultural industries and products, which ensured that the country's nationality and sovereignty in the global village "ceased to become a conflicted and contested principle." He thus pointed out that it was "by putting in place provisions like BSA and AIPPA that Zimbabwean cultural products started getting prominence abroad and even among its own people." This is once again a good sign to show how journalistic interpretive community discourse can easily be influenced by perceived global power struggles for hegemony between global powers and smaller nations. The public press journalists adopted a stance to fight Western hegemony, thereby deserting their private press counterparts, creating a fractured journalistic interpretive community in the process. But beyond this, there were also efforts to fight suspected Western meddling in the country's local political affairs.

The new media laws passed at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were defended as tools to fight Western attempts to remove liberation movements and install pro-Western rulers. In addition to the fall of the Eastern bloc, and marginalization of Africa in global affairs, the rise of trade unionism in Southern Africa was also given as another contextual factor that necessitated promulgation of laws like AIPPA. According to Chirume (2005) these movements "presented outside forces with a window of opportunity to replace liberation movements in the region with puppet regimes." He cited the success of Frederick Chiluba in getting political power in Zambia as one event that gave birth to "militant trade unionism, which has seen labor movements transforming into opposition political parties such as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Zimbabwe." Within this context, laws such



as the Interception of Communications Act<sup>5</sup> (ICA) were also defended as tools to target some online publications making claims of vote rigging in Zimbabwe. *Herald* columnist Knowledge Mushohwe (2007a), with reference to the ICA, argued that “content of some of the online papers made available on their sites, particularly political cartoons, strengthened the argument that some form of regulation, self or otherwise, would be needed...” This was after a political cartoon was published showing “President Mugabe receiving a briefing from a member of the army... The soldier’s mission, as made apparent by the text in the speech bubbles, was to ‘rig’ the elections by secretly filling ballot boxes with votes.” It is such arguments about fighting for political power, however, that gave the private press and civil society organizations room to criticize the new laws as tools to serve government officials’ selfish interests. The public press, however, was not deterred by such arguments as it also went to the extent of portraying the West as undemocratic.

The public press’ anti-Western approach in defense of statutory regulation also involved maligning leading Western countries such as Britain, the US, and France. The strategy here was to paint these countries as undemocratic and worse than Zimbabwe, hence for them to criticize the Southern African country was nothing but sheer hypocrisy. The first accusation was that Britain has more restrictive laws than Zimbabwe. According to Bright Matonga (2001), former deputy Minister of Information in Robert Mugabe’s government, “British journalists are victims of government censorship and the legal machinery of censorship is powerful.” The only difference, according to Lovemore Mataire (2002), one of the top editors with *The Herald*, is that “British journalists obey their

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<sup>5</sup> A law enacted in 2007 to allow for legal monitoring and interception of certain forms of communications during their transmission as well as establishment of a monitoring center among other provisions.

government's draconian laws and 'follow the flag' when framing major stories." Another argument made was that it was hypocritical for Western countries to criticize Zimbabwe's news media laws because they passed the same processes and tests of constitutionality and reasonableness. When the ICA was criticized, Sifelani Tsiko (2007), senior journalist with Zimpapers, argued that "privately owned papers and most on-line editions beaming to the Zimbabwean audience never raised much dust on Patriot Act" in the USA as well as other countries with similar spy laws. He even went further to argue that Western criticism of Zimbabwe's news media laws is selective since even Ethiopia had done worse than Zimbabwe after the country's leader, "Mr (Meles) Zenawi...blocked all the free Ethiopian news websites" yet the West did not criticize. In both Britain and the USA, according to Matonga (2001), journalists are harassed. He gave the example of Vanessa Legget who "spent two weeks in a Texas jail after refusing to turn over research materials about a high-profile murder case to federal prosecutors." On the other hand, the death of Nicolas Guidici, a 51-year-old French journalist was used by Matonga (2001) to show how the West not only harasses and censors journalists, but actually kills them. With this history, the West then, in the eyes of the public press had no legitimacy to criticize Zimbabwe's news media laws as draconian for they also had dirty hands. This position of the public press that if it is done by the West or any other country, then it is also fair game in Zimbabwe underlines a lot of the arguments defending various actions by the state. This was also part of a broader strategy to normalize the Zimbabwean media laws as part of accepted and if not, expected international practice.

The public press' defense of Zimbabwe's news media laws as tools to fight Western hegemony, imperialism, and neocolonial machinations to replace liberation movements

with puppet regimes, is testimony to how journalistic interpretive communities in fragile states are also vulnerable to global power dynamics. It does not matter whether there are real or imagined Western or Eastern enemies. Regional power dynamics also come into play as seen in how the public press became concerned with how trade unionism in Zambia was influencing political developments in Zimbabwe. Journalistic interpretive communities in powerful nations that are not at war and with a leadership that feels more secure politically are rarely if at all prone to these outside forces. In other words, journalistic interpretive communities are as good as the national contexts within which they operate.

### *Normalizing repression*

In defense of Zimbabwe's newly enacted news media laws, the public press also adopted a normalization strategy through comparative analysis, whereby it generalized the Zimbabwean news media laws in terms of how they are nothing out of the ordinary, but just the same as what happens around the globe. In defense of statutory regulation, Matonga (2001) published his *Herald* article titled: "Media laws a common feature world over," in which he argued that "Zimbabwe may be the only country in the whole world that allowed journalists to work anywhere in Zimbabwe without restrictions." This was supported by Chipungudzanye (2004) who argued that there is nothing wrong with Zimbabwe controlling the news media industry because "even First World countries have even been fighting for decades to control their own media." In the article, "Act Opens New Era in Broadcasting" (2001), *The Herald* defended the Act's clause that broadcast licenses would only be issued to Zimbabwean citizens and permanent residents arguing that this is in line with international practice. The paper argued that this is "critical and in line with worldwide

trends where foreigners are not allowed to own and run radio and television stations.” To defend POSA, the public press also argued that if Britain was to find itself in a similar situation, they would come up with a similar law. Reverend Matamisa (2004) argued that if “Tony Blair’s United Kingdom were to come under threat from unpatriotic elements, he would speedily implement laws resembling POSA because the British very well know that lack of patriotism in a country spells disaster.” These laws were thus normalized as usual in any country; hence Zimbabweans had no need to worry, at least according to the public press. But beyond this normalization, and all arguments about national sovereignty, the public press also argued that these laws would shape the country’s journalistic practice in positive ways.

The public press defended the new laws as key in fostering a responsible and constructive news media industry. According to Tim Chigodo (2001), former *Herald* editor, the information bill, which later became AIPPA, came as no surprise “as there had been calls for responsible journalism in the country. Most people felt that there was a need for constructive and responsible media.” A responsible news media industry would inform, educate, and entertain, critique the government in line with the aspirations of a developing nation. In an article “We Have Nothing to Fear from AIPPA” (2004), *The Herald* argued that it had no problems with the Act because it was “driven by the desire to inform, educate and entertain our readers by truthfully and honestly reporting and interpreting events in and around Zimbabwe.” Citing the then Speaker of Parliament and now Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa, Chigodo (2001) argued that a responsible press was one that would criticize the government, but the critique had to be developmental. He thus argued that journalism “should act as a barometer of the Zimbabwean society. It must be

developmental in its criticism of the institutions of governance.” Responsible journalism, according to Chigodo, reports in a manner “consistent with the aspirations of a developing nation like Zimbabwe.” The public press here is thus attempting to set standards of how the press should criticize the state. It is also these arguments that lead to fragmentation of journalistic interpretive communities especially considering the private press’ definitions of its roles as holding the government accountable as shown in Chapter 6.

Promoting ethical journalism is another defense that was given in favor of the new Acts. According to Chigodo (2001), the information bill would make the news media fair and objective. He argued the news media would give “fair coverage of news to all citizens of Zimbabwe irrespective of race, religion, region or political affiliation.” In addition, AIPPA would also create a responsible news media by bringing to an end the publication of lies (Chigodo, 2002), on top of stopping vendetta journalism. Chigodo bemoaned that “the press had fast developed to be a tool for settling personal scores.” The laws were to achieve this, according to Chigodo, by making sure that “media houses that secure information unethically and publish unbalanced and inaccurate stories will be banned to protect people from abuse.” Chipungudzanye (2004) also argued that this regulatory framework would thus make the press accountable. Another call was for the press to exercise “voluntary media restraint, openness and independence” (Chigodo, 2001). In addition to promoting ethical journalistic practice, the laws were defended on the grounds of protecting private citizens. According to Chigodo, the laws would stop “abuse of press freedom and protect individuals from unnecessary attacks by the media.” In addition, he argued that AIPPA would further protect “personal privacy and enhance the country’s nationhood,” thereby making the press respect people’s liberties. Online publications were

particularly singled out for invading people's privacy by publishing information such as their places of residence. This had happened in the UK where an online publication run by Zimbabweans abroad had published information about ZANU PF supporters in the diaspora with the hope of getting them deported. This motivated defense for the Interception of Communications Act (ICA) whereby Knowledge Mushohwe (2007), argued that this was a mystery for "an online paper that says it is on the same side as democracy." He also described such articles as "bar-talk stories" meaning they were substandard and did not even deserve to be covered. Thus, he argued the act of such online publications called for ICA. The effect of purging public press editors at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was that Zimpapers strategically surrendered (Lowrey & Sherrill, 2020) and stopped defending its own journalistic autonomy in order to be in line with the government's way of thinking.

By and large, by early 2000, the public press had shifted allegiance from siding with their counterparts in the private press in calling for self-regulation. The discourse of journalistic independence had all but disappeared in favor of statutory regulation. In the eyes of the public press, there were larger interests at stake than their editorial autonomy. These interests included nation building, defending national sovereignty, national security, fighting cultural imperialism and negative portrayal of Africa and Zimbabwe. This was achieved through forced resignations and dismissals of editors failing to toe the government line (Peta, 2001; "Two Editors Sacked in Zimbabwe Newspaper Purge," 2001). Thus, to understand the operation of journalistic interpretive communities in any context, it is important to examine the relationship between journalism as a field and other fields such as politics (Bourdieu, 2005). Focus should be on how much autonomy does

journalism as a field in any context be allowed to enjoy. As demonstrated here, in contexts where the journalistic field or part of it has limited autonomy, journalistic interpretive communities in that context are prone to manipulation. As seen here, the Zimbabwean government easily fractured the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community by capturing Zimpapers. While Zimpapers was captured and subdued, the private press took it upon itself to fight this nationalistic rhetoric to ensure journalistic autonomy and democratic governance in the country. The next section goes deeper to show how the private press went about this struggle.

### **Fighting for survival: Press laws and the private press response**

Whereas the public press transformed from campaigning for self-regulation based on liberal principles in the period 1995-1999, to defending statutory laws introduced in early 2000 to regulate the news media operations as progressive, the privately controlled press remained grounded in liberal ideals delegitimizing them as retrogressive. Thus, as the public press' arguments became more rooted in nationalistic ideals of nation building, among others, the privately controlled press' arguments remained consistently liberal as noted in Chapter 6. Two themes can sum up the private press' response: defending liberal ideals and fighting for the rule of law.

#### ***In defense of liberal ideals: private press' attempt to upend the public press' nationalistic rhetoric***

The private press' liberal ideals can be seen in the press freedom goals it celebrated and emphasized when *The Standard* journalists Mark Chavhunduka and Ray Choto successfully challenged the constitutionality of LOMA in the Supreme Court in 2000. As discussed earlier, the two had been charged with causing fear, alarm, and despondency

when they reported on an attempted coup by the army on Robert Mugabe's government. In its freudenfreude article, "Victory for Press Freedom as Court Rules in Favor of Standard Journalists" (2000) *The Standard* repeated the following reasons given by the Supreme Court as goals served by free expression: "(i) it helps an individual to obtain self-fulfillment; (ii) it assists in the discovery of truth, and in promoting social participation; (iii) it strengthens the capacity of an individual to participate in decision-making; and, (iv) it provides a mechanism by which it would be possible to establish a reasonable balance between stability and social change." The private press' celebration of these ideals is an illustration of the ideological split that occurred in early 2000 separating it from the public press. The court further argued that the crime of "fear, alarm, and despondency" also infringed on free expression by being overbroad, unclear, and intimidating, as well as providing for a speculative offense. This Supreme Court position is liberal in how it echoes the US Supreme Court's arguments in defending the First Amendment (Franklin et al., 2016; Garvey & Schauer, 1996). This position further informed criticism of new media laws introduced in early 2000 for going against these liberal ideals.

The private press openly criticized the new laws, AIPPA and POSA as retrogressive for maintaining colonial provisions and being unconstitutional. Farai Mutsaka (2002), veteran journalist then with *The Standard* quoted Earnest Mudzengi, a media analyst arguing that "AIPPA was from the start a retrogressive law that would never stand any serious legal scrutiny." This was after the state had failed to secure even a single conviction for all the journalists that had been arrested for violating AIPPA. The laws were also deemed retrogressive for maintaining LOMA's colonial provisions of false news. According to the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (2002), under AIPPA and POSA,



the government criminalized false news that can cause alarm and despondency “despite a previous Supreme Court ruling, in the case of *The Standard* journalists Mark Chavhunduka and Ray Choto, that such provisions were unconstitutional.” In particular, POSA echoed LOMA in banning “publication or communication of statements which are offensive in certain respects to the Zimbabwean state or to the President, or which endanger public order, regardless of whether the information is true or false” (Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 2002). Besides maintaining colonial provisions, the government literally maintained colonial laws like Censorship and Entertainment Control Act (CECA). Zimbabwe novelist Chenjerai Hove (2001), in his opinion piece, “Writers, journalists, fight the good fight” bemoaned that because of this Act, images of Chikurubi [a maximum security prison in Harare] linger in the minds of many a young writer in our country, bleeding their souls with anxiety, wishing they had been born somewhere else where the sky is more gentle to the weak than the strong.” The new laws were thus retrogressive on two grounds: maintaining colonial criminal offenses as well as being unconstitutional to aid the ruling party’s hegemonic struggle to maintain power. Thus, according to this reasoning, the laws were retrogressive in ensuring that the more things changed, the more they remained the same. In other words, the fight against colonialism was not a fight against the system, but against the skin.

The laws were also criticized as retrogressive for restricting the public sphere which is key to democratic governance by targeting and shutting down news media organizations critical of the government. According to Nigel Nyamutumbu (2019), a media development practitioner heading the secretariat of a network of nine media professional associations and support organizations, the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (MAZ), “AIPPA and other

laws were used to shut down critical media and to retain government control of information dissemination.” To him, this was retrogressive because the media are “the lifeblood of any democratic society.” This was also echoed by Mutsaka (2002) who argued that “ideally, the press should provide a public platform through which people from various social segments can air their views, be it for the status quo or against it.” To operationalize the government’s target on the media, AIPPA provided for the setting up of a “costly and hostile agency, the Media and Information Commission (MIC), to accredit journalists and register their media houses” as noted by *The Standard* in its article, “Do Join Us” (2009). True to these words, as noted by *The Standard* in the same article, “Do Join Us” (2009), AIPPA, through the MIC, was “used notoriously to close newspapers down.” This was demonstrated with the shutting down of the *Daily News* in 2003 for refusing to register with the MIC (see chapter 8), challenging the constitutionality of AIPPA’s provisions requiring news media organizations to obtain a license. According to *The Standard*, in their article, “Policies That Mask and Promote Misrule” (2004), by refusing to register, the *Daily News* played into the government’s hands:

By refusing to register, the *Daily News* gave a hostage to fortune, making itself the first casualty of that law in 2003. Four more papers were to follow in quick succession as the economic meltdown accelerated and discontent among Zimbabweans mounted. Foreign journalists were deported in flagrant violation of court orders.

Thus, according to this private press’ version of events, the new laws were tools to silence the press and not just control. In other words, the Acts were tools to mask the government’s misrule. Whereas soft power worked well to silence the public press, force had to be

employed to silence the private press. These two approaches created different working conditions for journalists from the public press and the private one. Naturally, this also facilitated and communicated the fracture in the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community because sharing the same working conditions is part of what binds journalists into a common professional community (Hanitzsch et al., 2019).

One of the central liberal ideas to press freedom, even as contained in the Windhoek Declaration, is news media pluralism. By facilitating the shutting down of news media organizations and making it difficult for new players to enter the industry, Zimbabwe's early 2000 media laws were deemed retrogressive in the private press. Providing an analytical forecast for the year 2006, Takura Zhangazha (2006), former MISA Zimbabwe Director (2009-2010) bemoaned that there "shall again be no other television stations throughout this year because of the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA)." This is because BSA, according to the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (2002), tightened government control over broadcasting by making it difficult if not impossible for new players to enter the broadcasting sector. MMPZ argued that even though "the Act officially ends the monopoly of ZBC, its many restrictions effectively bar investment in broadcasting and tightly controls output." One of those restrictions was barring foreign funding for broadcast companies which according to Zhangazha (2005) made the Act a "nightmare" for new broadcasters. In the eyes of the private press, Acts such as AIPPA were not just introduced to ensure proper journalistic practices in the news media industry, but to entrench broadcasting monopoly by the state owned ZBC. By defending liberal ideals, the private press remained attached to the liberal frame of reference which guided their operations, together with the public press in the 1990s when they campaigned for self-regulation.

However, this changed from 2000, as seen here, when state-controlled media adopted a nationalistic ideology. Thus, what fundamentally split the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community was ideological differences.

***In defense of the rule of law: private press' fight against selective application of the law and undue legal processes***

Ideally, the rule of law is based on the universal application of statutes. But in the Zimbabwean case, the private press accused the government of blatant selective application of the newly enacted media laws. Jonathan Moyo, then Minister of Information<sup>6</sup>, was the major subject of criticism. *The Standard*, in its article "Moyo: You Have Lost the Plot" (2002), argued that "the whole business is couched in hypocrisy. The independent press has suffered a rash of arrests and harassment by the Zimbabwe Republic Police since Moyo had his AIPPA rushed through parliament." This selective application of the law did not target journalists from the publicly controlled press. *The Standard* argued that this was not surprising "despite the wealth of inaccurate and sometimes downright fibs that proliferate Jonathan Moyo's so-called newspapers. So, this is hypocrisy on a massive scale." This was not surprising to the private press because in its view, "AIPPA was never invoked to prevent the state-controlled press from telling lies. Rather it exists to force the independent press to toe Jonathan Moyo's line." As if selective application of the law was not enough, the arrests were not followed with prosecution. To veteran journalist Mutsaka (2002), in his *Standard News Focus* column, this confirmed "fears that the legislation was put in place primarily to intimidate independent journalists into silence." This selective

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Moyo has resided in Kenya since the 2017 coup which forced him into exile.

application of the law meant public and private press journalists, while operating in the same country, were subjected to different opportunity structures (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019), further cementing their split as a journalistic interpretive community.

Journalists from the private press saw the effect of AIPPA, and its selective application targeting journalists from the private press, as a means to strike fear in the hearts of reporters. According to *The Standard*, in its article “Policies That Mask and Promote Misrule” (2004), fear came from the risk of failure to be accredited. The paper argued that there “is always the threat of being denied accreditation hanging over journalists like the sword of Damocles if they dare speak ill of Mugabe.” In addition, the government also tightened its control by introducing additional laws like the Interception of Communications Act that would hinder free flow of information online (Manyukwe, 2006) and the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act to strengthen laws such as POSA. According to Mathew Takaona (2004), former ZUJ president and veteran journalist, whereas under POSA, publication of statements prejudicial to the state attracted a five year jail sentence, under the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, the same offense attracted a 20-year jail term. Thus, contrary to the public press’ arguments that the laws were not meant to gag the press, the private press focused on exposing how the Acts were meant to strike fear among journalists to mask Robert Mugabe’s misrule.

The privately controlled press also debunked public press’ attempts to draw equivalences between Zimbabwe’s media laws and those of selected Western countries. After some pro-government officials argued that Zimbabwean laws are as good as those in other countries, with some equating AIPPA to the Swedish press law, press freedom activist Sizwe Thuthuka (2004) argued that “Swedish press law/Aippa [are] poles apart.”

He argued that AIPPA was based on a different set of principles as compared to those of Western nations and one of them was to “curb perceived negative reporting about Zimbabwe by sections of the media.” He argued that even if the laws could have used similar wording, they remain different. In direct praise of Sweden, Thuthuka argued that “Sweden has an admired tradition of press freedom...founded on the rights of the individual: the right to freedom of expression, the right to knowledge, the right to transform knowledge into action and the right to freedom from poverty.” It is this emphasis on liberal ideas such as individual rights that has been the bone of contention in debating media laws in Zimbabwe, a sign of ideological differences. Considering that journalistic interpretive communities are not necessarily bound by geography (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999), it can be argued here that the private press journalists had become part of the Western liberal journalistic interpretive communities. It is also possible to argue that public press journalists had become part of the Eastern journalistic interpretive communities as witnessed from which international trips and training workshops both camps attended. In an interview with a former Zimpapers senior journalist and news editor, E, but now an academic, he said there was a time when Zimpapers journalists were not allowed to attend Western sponsored workshops:

We used to have Zimpapers journalists go for international workshops in Germany in the period soon after independence. At the height of political polarization in Zimbabwe, journalists working for state owned or controlled media were no longer allowed to go to those western sponsored workshops because the government was suspicious of what kind of training are they going to receive...So you can see that there is even polarization at training level.

The attempt here was to make sure that Zimbabwean journalists do not get influenced by the Western ideology in favor of the Eastern one.

Furthermore, press regulations in Western countries were differentiated in the private press for allowing due processes to take place. In debunking Mahoso's claims in drawing equivalences between Zimbabwe's AIPPA and Sweden's press law, Thuthuka argued that the former was economical with the truth. He argued that he did not reveal that while the Swedish law limits press publication of state secrets, cases are handled by competent courts and not extra-judicial bodies or (quasi-judicial bodies) such as the Media and Information Commission (MIC). He also pointed out how the press law in Sweden prohibits the state from censoring the media and that press freedom takes precedence in all matters. He went further to point out how other countries have done away with Ministries of Information altogether. The creation of extra/quasi-judicial bodies such as the MIC further supports the vulnerability and threats that confront journalistic interpretive communities under contested societies.

Private press journalists also countered public press arguments that the new laws would stop unethical journalistic practices by arguing that they would undermine ethical journalism. This was because the Acts denied journalists access to information. This put journalists in a dilemma, whereby according to *The Standard*, in its article, "Moyo: You Have Lost the Plot," (2002) they had "to choose between respect for the law or respect for standards of journalism." In a different article, "Do Join Us" (2009), the paper noted that because of laws like AIPPA, nowhere "has there been access to information except what the state deems fit to disclose." This was also supported empirically by MMPZ in its monitoring of the 2002 national election coverage. The organization noted that due to the

laws, the media covered the plebiscite under conditions “extremely hostile to free and impartial reporting.” This is because the laws, particularly AIPPA, restricted access to information by journalists. The MMPZ noted that “the Act still restricts access to official information by the media and the public (despite its name)” (Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, 2002). This lack of information access led to the publication of stories that were “speculative, unsubstantiated and unsourced, leaving readers guessing at what exactly was going on around them” (Takaona, 2004). Furthermore, laws like BSA were also set to promote interference with broadcasters’ editorial autonomy by guaranteeing airtime for government propaganda. According to Zhangazha (2005), writing for *The Standard*, the Act sought to “guarantee airtime on each established private station for government propaganda and is largely run with containment and not promotion of freedom of expression in mind.” Thus, according to the private press, the goal of the acts was not to promote ethical journalism as argued by the public press, but to cover up for the government’s misrule. Subsequently, the Acts also forced journalists to resort to illegal means to gain information. More fundamentally though, the laws created another split whereby public press journalists had access to public information and the private press did not, thereby creating different conditions of service for different journalists, which cemented the split.

The position from the private press shows that by early 2000, two different ideological positions had emerged in Zimbabwe, and these would last through the end of the Mugabe presidency in 2017: one was nationalistic, as represented by the public press, while the other was liberal, as represented by the private press. The nationalistic ideals prioritized national interest (however they defined it), national sovereignty, pushing against



media imperialism, Western neo-liberal ideas over democracy. On the other hand, the privately controlled press prioritized liberal ideas such as democracy, free expression, editorial independence, media pluralism, among others. As such, the private press criticized the statutory laws as a government ploy to work against the people in the name of the people. This ideological divide meant journalists did not share the same frame of reference in discursively defining their journalistic culture. This also had effects on how they fight for their professional jurisdiction. Their division became the government's strength.

**The new dispensation and media reform in Zimbabwe: Enduring mistrust from the private press: 2017 – 2023**

Mohlahlana (*Newsroom Afrika*): “If you are willing to be as transparent as you say, let's talk about the Criminal Law Code Amendment Bill. What is the role of that bill?”

Minister of Information Monica Mutsvangwa: “The role of that bill is to make sure that citizens love their country.

Mohlahlana: “What does that mean?”

Mutsvangwa: “That means you cannot go about talking bad about your own country.”

...

Mohlahlana: “How can you talk about freedom of expression, and then in the same breath say that there is a law effectively that can ultimately have people imprisoned if they are talking about the country?”

Mutsvangwa: “You can't. We haven't seen [South African opposition politician Julius] Malema going talking bad about the president of this country. Any citizen of a country [has] got to respect your country.”

The above conversation, part of an interview that Cathy Mohlahlana, news anchor with Newsroom Afrika, conducted with Zimbabwe's Minister of Information Monica Mutsvangwa and published on the channel's YouTube platform on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023, sums up the tension that is bedeviling Zimbabwe's media law reform. On one hand, there is an effort to reform the media laws, while at the same time making sure no one talks bad about the president. To an extent, the country's leadership has been forced into this reform out of a failure to secure a majority vote back in 2008. In 2008, Robert Mugabe lost the election to opposition candidate Morgan Tsvangirai but did not go out of government (Mutsvairo, 2013a). Controversially, after a bloody election run-off, he managed to enter into a government of national unity with him as President, and Morgan Tsvangirai as Prime Minister (Masunungure, 2011). This gave the opposition, members of the civil society, and the private press an opportunity to push for the drafting of a new constitution (Chuma, 2018). In 2013, after a referendum, a new constitution guaranteeing freedom of expression and the media was adopted. This was a departure from the old constitution, which only guaranteed freedom of expression. The implication of this was that the news media laws from the early 2000s had to be realigned with the new constitution. For four years, Robert Mugabe's regime was lethargic on media law reform and nothing happened till he was toppled in a coup in 2017, on top of having been resistant to adopting democratic reforms since independence in 1980 as argued by Misa Zimbabwe (2020a).

Eager to re-engage with the West and do away with Robert Mugabe's years of confrontation that had isolated the country from a large part of the international community, the new Emmerson Mnangagwa government promised citizens a new dispensation (Mututwa et al., 2021). This new dispensation meant re-orienting the country

towards democracy, which the public press, *The Herald*, described as a neoliberal turn – as reported by Lawson Mabhena (2019), *Herald's* News and Political Editor. As part of this re-orientation, and to show the international community that the new government has truly reformed, the Emmerson Mnangagwa government pledged to reform the country's news media sector by repealing repressive laws as well as liberalizing the country's broadcast sector. In an interview with journalist and press freedom activist P, he argued that the government is “looking at media policy reforms as a low hanging fruit, which it can demonstrate to the international, regional community that Zimbabwe is reforming.” P also admitted that whatever the case, in the end the effect is positive. However, one leader of journalists, Q, argued that “the Second Republic [after 2017] is just ticking boxes around media reform to say we have for instance licensed private broadcasters.” This one argued that the government is not sincere as it is awarding licenses to people connected to the ruling party. Whatever the suspicions though, the argument that that government is reforming the news media to improve its standing with the international community, shows the influence of global power dynamics. It is doubtful if Zimbabwe would have engaged in media reforms if not for the wish to rejoin the Commonwealth. And as seen from the above quotes, even some members of the civil society already believe that this will have a positive effect, which can influence the structure of interpretive communities by neutralizing government hardliners.

As indicated in earlier chapters, the structure of journalistic interpretive communities is not only determined by local power structures and culture, but global power dynamics also come into play. In the following sections, the chapter demonstrates how the government's change in tone in calling for media reforms – itself inspired by the

leadership's efforts to re-engage with the international community – influenced the publicly controlled press to change its tone and started singing a neoliberal tune. This is compared to private press reactions to assess if this will mark the end of a fractured journalistic interpretive community, or the struggle is still ongoing. In the sections below, the chapter first looks at the public press' wholesale acceptance of the government media reform agenda and endorsement of news media liberalization.

### **Out with the past, in with the new: Public press embraces media reforms**

Two themes can sum up the new government's media reform in the public press: a commitment to eradicate media polarization and to promote media liberalization. Media liberalization in this case is largely focused on the broadcast sector as noted by Nobleman Runyanga (2023), a *Herald* correspondent:

One of the major gripes which some media stakeholders had about the Zimbabwean media landscape was the fact that, despite Zimbabwe being among the first African countries to introduce television broadcasting, it still had one television station over 40 years into Independence.

The claim here is that the government intends to respond to the demands from its critics. The chapter turns to these themes in the sections below, before turning to the private press's reactions.

### ***Government commitment to ending media polarization***

The new government has engaged in various strategies to end news media polarization in Zimbabwe, which had contributed to fracturing the country's journalistic interpretive community. At the height of the country's news media polarization, especially in early 2000, the then Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo, prohibited public press

journalists from interacting with those from the privately controlled press. This was confirmed by both public and private news media journalists. In an interview with E1, an editor with the public press, he recounted how Mathew Takaona, then *Sunday Mail* acting news editor and Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) President was fired for assisting privately controlled *Daily News* reporters in a labor dispute with their employer back in 2004. As ZUJ president, Takaona had tried to intervene but was fired before he could get back into Herald House which accommodates the public press Zimpapers in Harare as E1 recounted it:

Jonathan Moyo learnt that Mathew Takaona had gone there to solve the labor dispute. He then said Mathew should not enter Herald House. So indeed, Matthew was not allowed to enter Herald House. So, he called me to pack his bags and everything, his belongings, and take them down there...I was also in trouble for packing his things. That's how bad things were at that time, to the point where if you met someone from *Daily News*, you'd not greet that person.

The deterioration of personal relationships due to government sponsored news media polarization indicated above was also confirmed by veteran public news media editor B1. He said "when Jonathan Moyo was the Minister of Information...It was almost impossible for a media practitioner from public media....to be seen even walking with a fellow journalist from the private media. It was total war." This got to a point whereby when journalists from the public press tried to change employers and work for the privately controlled news media, they would face suspicions. One editor Q1, now with the privately controlled press said, "when I moved from Zimpapers to join Alpha Media, I was met with a lot of hostility in the newsroom because they thought here is a ruling party person

probably coming to spy on us.” And these fears were not unfounded. In an interview with another veteran journalist M, he said there was a time when the moment one started “an investigative story (implicating the state) ... the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) is already aware.” The significance of looking at journalists as a fractured interpretive community is that it allows one to see the damage it can cause to the journalistic psyche and professionalism as seen in this paragraph.

When the new dispensation came in, however, it dealt with polarization by reaching out to journalists from both the privately controlled and publicly controlled press. Through consultations to reform Zimbabwe’s news media laws, Nick Mangwana (2019) the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information, Publicity, and Broadcasting Services, wrote in *The Herald* that even though they had points of disagreement, they “agreed on the core issue that we needed a free media in Zimbabwe. ...A media that does not polarize our environment. A media that is not polarized itself.” He also acknowledged how the public media have since been flagged for polarization and went on to claim that this “is an old simmering problem...one that the new dispensation is set to correct...” It is instructive here to note how the Permanent Secretary has deviated from the usual attack leveled on the private press to focus on the publicly controlled news media. Previously, for example, Mahoso (2006) who used to accuse the private press of being “so intolerant and sectarian that it polarizes even the journalism fraternity itself.” Now the public press is being seen as polarizing. Another strategy also employed by the new dispensation was introduction of post-cabinet meeting briefs where all journalists are invited to get information on government deliberations as acknowledged by Runyanga (2023), a *Herald* correspondent in his article, “A refreshingly new, different media dispensation.” According to Runyanga,

the government's efforts have brought media contestations to an end. That the new dispensation managed to significantly reduce news media polarization shows how in contested contexts, journalistic interpretive community structures are so dependent on power structures. Thus, this remains problematic in that the public press is still dancing in the government's tune.

This section further cements this dissertation's argument that, at times, it takes more than discourse to build up a journalistic interpretive community. As shown here, the political economy of news media ownership is a significant aspect of that. Two eras contrasted here show how the different regimes interacted with journalists differently. Jonathan Moyo, during his time as minister, encouraged polarization, while the new dispensation is working to resolve that. Whether this is genuine or whether it will succeed is not really the point at this stage. The bottom line is the Zimbabwean government can either unite or fracture at will depending on their prevailing interests at the time. Apart from dealing with news media polarization, the new dispensation also introduced a raft of new media laws as discussed below.

### ***Liberalizing the news media sector***

In line with its media reform agenda, Zimbabwe's new leadership introduced several new media laws to replace the repressive press laws of early 2000. These new laws include the Freedom of Information Act, 2020 (FOIA); Zimbabwe Media Commission Act, 2020 (ZMCA); and the Data Protection Act, 2021 (DPA) to repeal the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (H. Dube, 2019). FOIA gives effect to constitutional guarantees for everyone's right to information access in the interests of public accountability. ZMCA regularizes the establishment of the Zimbabwe Media

Commission, empowering it to conduct investigations concerning media complaints (Chikwati, 2021). DPA deals with individual data protection to prevent cyberbullying, incitement of violence, and invasion of privacy (Titan Law, 2022). Another Act, the Media Practitioner’s Bill, which is expected to empower journalists to control their profession by setting boundaries of who should be a journalist and not (Ndlovu, 2022), is also in the pipeline at the time of this writing. One proposition is that it will only allow those who have gone through journalism training to be journalists. Things are not clear now as to how this will affect the structure of Zimbabwe’s journalistic interpretive community. Also passed in 2023 is the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act which was passed by the Zimbabwean parliament on June 7, 2023 (Misa Zimbabwe, 2023). The law, according to Misa Zimbabwe, criminalizes “willfully injuring the sovereignty and national interest of Zimbabwe.” All these acts have been embraced by the public press.

In keeping with its past arguments, the public press advanced the narrative that these pieces of legislation are being driven by the national interest. For example, Runyanga (2020) argued the DPA is driven by “national interests such as building confidence and trust in the secure use of ICTs...” The Act has also been praised as a solution to fake news. Christopher Makaza, another *Herald* correspondent argued that “spreading fake news is not the freedom that the country needs.” He went on to argue that criticism against the Act is uncalled for since fake news is on the rise and justified it on the basis that Kenya has also done the same. The Act was also praised for prohibiting inciting violence, and protecting individual privacy as shown in *The Herald* article (“New Law Protects Personal Data, Curbs Internet Abuse,” 2021). In the same vein, *The Herald* also praised FOIA for going beyond just repealing AIPPA in its “Editorial Comment: Act Goes Far beyond



Dumping AIPPA” (2020). The paper argued that “AIPPA came into the law books during a low point in the First Republic and was designed to control access to information, control the media and license in an arbitrary way just who was allowed to write or publish,” but forced everyone to think. In the same vein, the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act has been described as an opportunity for the reemergence of patriotic journalism in the country. Commenting on the Amendment Bill, Gibson Nyikadzino (2023) a *Herald* correspondent, argued that in "journalistic circles, assenting to these amendments should be an opportunity to advocate for the re-emergence of patriotic journalism in Zimbabwe, which comes as an offshoot of the country’s nationalist historiography.” It is interesting that the public press had to wait for the new dispensation to realize that AIPPA was arbitrary. At the same time, it is also interesting how every law is supported, for example the amendment bill here. This is how ownership structures can damage journalistic interpretive communities by undermining editorial autonomy.

At the same time, the public press has also celebrated licensing of 14 community radio stations and awarding of licenses to new television stations as a milestone in the “Second Republic.” *The Herald* went as far as claiming that liberalizing the broadcast sector is important, in its “Editorial Comment : Opening up the Airwaves Essential” (2019). The paper argued that this will bring competition, promote freedom of expression and information access, will promote other languages, and usher Zimbabwe into a new brave world. The paper went as far as bemoaning that even though “Zimbabwe was among the first countries on the continent to have a television station, it has remained stuck with one, while other countries have gone on to overtake it.” Kindness Paradza, Deputy Minister of Information, Publicity, and Broadcasting Services, as quoted by Zimpapers’ Bulawayo

Bureau, Bongani Ndlovu (2022), boasted that “We were sort of behind in the last 37 years, but we are catching up because of the new dispensation.” Once again, the public press stance here dovetails with findings from Chapter 6 that it is there to support government policy, whether good or bad.

What should not be lost in this analysis is that this does not really mean the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities have come together and now share the same ideal. The public press took a liberal stance after the government indicated in that direction. Therefore, the public press is in unison with the state and not with fellow journalists. Skepticism from the private press and members of the civic society as shown in the two sections below are testimony to the persistence of a fractured journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe.

**Government gives with one hand, and takes away with the other: Private press perspective on media reform in Zimbabwe.**

For the first time in two decades, media polarization has receded in Zimbabwe, according to press reports and interview conversations with Zimbabwean journalists as well as members of the civil society. However, this amelioration of private press and public press relations has not yet reached the levels satisfactory to all journalists and other stakeholders in the country. Two themes can sum up the change in circumstances in the Zimbabwean media landscape: satisfaction with improved relations among journalists and with the state, but lingering misgivings on media reform continue.

***Polarization neutralized or media capture...?***

While the public press celebrates that journalists have been able to reduce media polarization, members of the private press and the civil society expressed mixed views. In

an interview with Q1, a veteran journalist and editor with the private press, he said “I think it's something that is going to be with us for some time until we get a government that is genuine about uniting people. A government that won't celebrate these camps.” This is because in his view, media polarization in Zimbabwe is dependent on political temperatures. He gave the example of how for a while, *The Herald* had stopped writing about what the private media does “but now we are beginning to see those stories. Yesterday there was one where they were talking about private media being hostile against Chinese investments. In a way, they are saying, we are against national interests.” It is important to get this media polarization in context because it is the one that is reflected in journalistic media relations in Zimbabwe. The genesis of contrasting views on press freedom and journalistic roles witnessed in Chapter 5 and 6 have been the result of this polarization. This also indicates how fixing polarization does not necessarily mean the emergence of a common journalistic interpretive community in the country. Rather, a common journalistic interpretive community is dependent on the extent to which journalists can share the same journalistic culture.

By and large, however, there is widespread consensus, as shown through the interviews for this project, that the government's efforts to fix media polarization in the country have started to bear fruit. Whereas in the past, journalists used to have different editors' forums, one for the public press and one for the private press, now they have one in common. For an example of this unity, all journalists are now participating in the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) activities. According to one government official, X, he said relations have improved much better than what they used to be.

I can tell you without mincing my words that I can pick up a phone anytime and call my brothers who are on the other side for a meeting. And that meeting will happen, and we focus on issues. We've done co-trainings; we have done a lot of lobbying together. We've changed laws and regulations together.

This transformation in government-press relations, as well as among journalists from the public and the private news media after the government's initiative to eradicate polarization, shows how, in the Zimbabwean context, journalistic interpretive communities are so prone to political influence.

The nuance in the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community is that it is layered. On one level, most journalists share the same journalistic culture in terms of what is newsworthy and expected journalistic roles as evidenced by how they share news stories that they know will not be published in their newspapers new to the editorial policies. On the other level, they cannot practice the same journalistic culture due to ownership structures. One strategy that journalists have employed here according to various journalists, is that public media journalists could share stories they know will never see the light of the day at Zimpapers with their colleagues from the private press. And journalists from the private press could do the same. The challenge, according to Editor X, was with some journalists that self-deploy and feel like they're part of different political parties. Some will feel they are part of the opposition. Some will feel they're part of the ruling party...And those ones are very extreme...if a government official describes the private media as enemies of the state, they feel obliged to also treat them as enemies of the state.

Thus, in examining journalistic communities as fractured, it is important to be cognizant of these layers whereby journalists may have a different professional culture and a common one that they practice underground. For instance, by sharing stories with colleagues from the other side. It is also easy to see here why it has been easy for the state to deal with polarization. Journalists have always attempted to maintain their community, despite the political polarization. The challenge is with the private press' skepticism over media reforms.

***Aluta continua: Media reform mustn't be for PR purposes***

The private press has continued to be skeptical of media liberalization as found from texts examined for this research. The previous chapter looked at allegations of media capture in relation to community radio licensing. Kudzai Kwangwari (2020), a media development practitioner writing in *The Standard*, reviewing the issuance of first community radio station licenses by the government, questioned why now:

...we need to interrogate the move by the government to license community radios now. What does it mean? Is the government giving in? Is this a strategic move by the government? Has the government all of a sudden now developed a desire to serve the people and respond to people's needs? Who is their key beneficiary in this move? If they feared community radios in the early 2000, what has changed now?

The background to this skepticism is that George Charamba, former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information, Publicity, and Broadcasting Services, once threatened to extinguish the Zimbabwe Association of Community Radio Stations (ZACRAS) by licensing community radios. ZACRAS has been at the forefront of advocating for

community radio licenses and in their perception, Charamba meant rendering the organization useless by awarding licenses to community radios that are connected to the ruling party. This is why Kwangwari (2020) continues to insist:

the struggle for community radio licensing in Zimbabwe has not ended, but it has just achieved a milestone...The licensing of these community radios must represent a real transformation of our media landscape and not just tokenism for public relations with the international community.

Trust here remains the biggest challenge to the establishment of a common journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe. While the public press, in its mandate to support the government of the day, has celebrated licensing of community radios as transformation, those in the private press remain skeptical. Fundamentally, they are suspicious that the government is not genuinely interested in reforms but want to please the international community to gain readmission into the Commonwealth, re-engage with the West, and get sanctions removed.

In the same way the private press is skeptical about liberalization of the broadcast sector, so it is about media law reform. One thing they all agree on is the issue of co-regulation as a compromise after government insistence on co-regulation. According to MISA Zimbabwe and Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (2022), “the government of Zimbabwe adopted the principle of media co-regulation. There is consensus among stakeholders on this principle. What is, however, contested is the manner in which co-regulation is going to be implemented.” The major point of contention over implementation of this co-regulation principle as what came out through interviews, pertains to the role of the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC). In an interview with one ZMC official Y, she said

the contest is over the establishment of a common media council to represent the interests of journalists. She argued this would render ZMC irrelevant hence she insisted that different sectors should have their own ethical codes and councils. In an interview with V, a leader in press freedom activism, he had harsh words for this move:

That's the nonsensical position I'm talking of, which is being pushed by certain factions within politics. Why? Because they don't want a united body of journalists...why do they want to say do not allow them to unite if they unite they are a danger to us? Who are you?

By opposing establishment of a common Press Council to allow media practitioners to self-regulate, the government threatens the existence or establishment of a common journalistic interpretive community. Fundamentally, this also shows how a fractured journalistic interpretive community can be engineered through legal instruments. This is also typical under circumstances like Zimbabwe where journalistic solidarity is not approved in general (Waisbord, 2013).

Unlike the public press, the private press has cited weaknesses in the new media laws. The private press has criticized the government for reforming media laws specific to media operations but then go on to revive the same draconian clauses in other pieces of legislation not directly connected to the press. For instance, despite all the liberal laws like FOIA that the Zimbabwean government passed, it went on to enact the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act which criminalizes “willfully damaging the sovereignty and national interest of Zimbabwe,” according to *NewsDay* in its article: “Parliament Passes a Bill That Seeks to Punish ‘unpatriotic’ Citizens” (2023). Opposition members of parliament, according to this *NewsDay* article, criticized the Act for

perpetuating “violation of freedom of expression and...media freedoms.” The same arguments have been raised against other laws like the Data Protection Act which Misa Zimbabwe (2020) argued entrenches surveillance. Kenneth Matimairé (2022), a freelance journalist, also criticized the Act for infringing on media freedom by reviving criminal defamation, criminalizing falsehoods and misinformation among other issues. He said the Act makes it “difficult for journalists to write stories based on information that can be considered to be invasion into data. Even where no such invasion has happened...” Misa Zimbabwe (2023) also questioned if this is a case of history repeating itself. It is these developments that continue to threaten establishment and existence of a common interpretive community as the private press feels that the government continues to give freedoms with one hand but taking them with the other.

This section shows that while the new government is attempting to depolarize and reform the news media sector, it still faces lack of trust from the private press. The public press has embraced and endorsed the new government’s news media reform agenda, praising it for liberalizing the news media sector and repealing repressive news media laws. The private press is skeptical as to why now. The private press also doubts the government’s sincerity in reforming the country’s news media laws and sees it as window-dressing to please the international community. Thus, going forward, the private press level of trust in government actions poses one of the biggest threats against the possibility of having a united journalistic interpretive community in the country.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the malleability of journalistic interpretive communities under contested environments where there is no dominant shared ideology.



In the period 1995-2000, the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community was united and grounded in the liberal ideology as it worked to identify its role in postcolonial Zimbabwe. At the time, the Zimbabwean government was relatively secure. Come 2000, when the Robert Mugabe regime was threatened by the opposition, the government applied divide and rule tactics. The government ideologically captured the public press through indoctrination with nationalistic ideas (Mukasa, 2003), and by force: hiring, firing, and promotion of editors who could not toe the government line. The private press was subjected to naked repression. This transformation of the Zimbabwean journalists' opportunity structure (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019) communicated differences to the country's journalists by subjecting them to different working conditions in the same context. From 2017, however, the government has been making attempts to bring journalists together through various mechanisms aimed at eradicating media polarization. Even though this is a noble idea, the fact remains that journalistic relations in Zimbabwe are dependent on government attitude towards the press. This shows a few factors that influence journalistic interpretive communities in transitional societies.

Local culture and power dynamics play a major role here. Due to closeness between the press and the government in Zimbabwe, it is easy for the latter to easily alter it depending on the political temperatures of the day. International power dynamics also come into play. The international community does not necessarily need to directly influence the press in specific local contexts. Local elites' insecurities and fear of the international community can work in favor or against the interests of local journalistic interpretive communities. In early 2000, Robert Mugabe's regime split the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community in fear of the local opposition and the international

community, particularly the US and the UK. In 2017, the government began working to reconcile the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community, once again to appease the local population, but most importantly to show signs of reform to the international community.

As argued earlier, journalistic interpretive communities are dependent on the nature of relationship between the political and journalistic fields, especially in contexts characterized by political tension of their nation states. As the world grapples with increasing levels of political polarization including in leading democracies like the US (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020), this dissertation provides a way to think about how this may impact the news media if the phenomenon continues beyond what is healthy for democracy. At the same time, as will be shown in the next chapter, media polarization can be so toxic to a point where journalists cannot speak with one voice in defense of their professional zones of autonomy. Journalists can celebrate the closure of other news media organizations, as well as harassment of their colleagues. The next chapter illustrates this using two case studies from Zimbabwe.



## Chapter 8

### **Polarization taken a gear up: When journalists hate each other to death**

*Polarization on its own, it's nothing threatening. But when you then find that there are strong strains of hatred, strains of undemocratic tendencies, intolerance, the wish for the other competitor to be phased out or even to be eliminated in whatever possible means, it then becomes toxic. (Interview with Zimbabwean academic I).*

The quotation above from a Zimbabwean academic sums up the toxicity that has characterized Zimbabwean journalism since early 2000. The level of journalistic hatred described above explains why journalists in the Global South, especially those operating under authoritarian regimes, fail to respond in a united way to challenge threats against their profession. In stable liberal Western democracies, moments of political, economic, technological, and legal disruptions have presented journalists with solidarity opportunities to reinterpret their journalistic boundaries (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) and fend off threats to their autonomy (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014). This has included taking moments of attack to the journalism profession as didactic opportunities to educate all stakeholders about journalistic culture (Berkowitz & Eko, 2007). This has also included pushing back against professional encroachment by non-journalistic actors (Carlson, 2015). This ability by Western journalists to maintain their boundaries renders them a professional grouping in the sense that they are able to make jurisdictional claims that allows them to maintain higher levels of journalistic autonomy (Abbott, 1988; Waisbord, 2013) than those who

operate under an authoritarian political system. Things are however different in the Global South, where due to toxic polarization, coupled with interference from political regimes being undermined by political and economic liberalization, journalists respond in a fragmented manner (Hanitzsch, et al., 2019).

Using two case studies, this chapter illustrates how journalists operating under a polarized socio-political environment, characterized by media capture not only lose their ability to teach about journalistic values when they find themselves under attack, but also lose the solidarity opportunity to defend their profession. Two prominent occasions nearly two decades apart demonstrate how Zimbabwean journalists failed to speak with one voice in defense of their profession. The first one was the *Daily News* closure by the government in September 2003. The case of the *Daily News* is a perfect illustration of how divided journalists fail to defend their professional space. In the *Daily News* closure case, the public press not only defended but celebrated the newspapers' shutdown. This is the extremity of Zimbabwe's polarization, particularly in the early 2000s during the reign of Robert Mugabe. Yet these patterns persist. The second case is a digital news media example, again to illustrate how failure to share a common journalistic culture can impact journalists in terms of how they define their profession. This case involves debates around boundaries of journalism and activism which came to the fore when Zimbabwe's freelance journalist Hopewell Chin'ono took to Twitter, among other social media platforms to expose an over US\$60 million COVID-19 procurement scandal in the country. Early in 2020, the Zimbabwean government awarded contracts to two companies allegedly linked to the president to supply COVID-19 related material without going out for bids. Later, Chin'ono

was arrested for inciting public violence when he called upon citizens to protest corruption. In the press, there was debate about whether he is a journalist or an activist.

This chapter uses these cases to show how the divide shown in the last three chapters manifest in practice. Due to the use of two case studies, this chapter is divided into two sections: the first one focuses on the *Daily News* case study, before turning to the Hopewell Chin'ono one. Below, the chapter will start by giving an outline of the events that led to the closure of the *Daily News* before giving different reactions that emanated from the public and the private press.

### **Daily News Closure and the Press' Contradictory Responses**

Prior to the *Daily News* launch in 1999, the Zimbabwean government had become paranoid about the press (Chuma, 2004; Dombo, 2014). According to Dombo's (2014) chronicle of the steps taken by the Zimbabwean government in shutting the *Daily News*, Robert Mugabe had started questioning the idea of independent journalism, accusing the privately controlled press' young editors of being fronts for Rhodesians who were out to stop such programs as the Land Reform. Unlike with the public press, which he silenced through hiring and firing of editors for failure to toe the government line (Nyarota, 2006; Rusike, 1990), in the case of the *Daily News* he resorted to lawfare. According to Dombo (2014), then Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo sponsored the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) as a bill in 2001, which was signed into law in 2002. Two problematic requirements from the Act were to lead to the closure of the *Daily News*. First, the law made a provision for the establishment of a Media and Information Commission (MIC), a statutory body which was to be responsible for the regulation of the news media and journalists in the country. Second, the Act also made it a requirement that

no news media owner should operate without a license from the MIC. The *Daily News's* mistake, as its founding editor Geoff Nyarota (2006) later explained, was its refusal to register with the MIC when arguing AIPPA's provisions were unconstitutional. This gave the government the much-needed excuse to shut down the paper.

In September 2003, the *Daily News* challenged the constitutionality of AIPPA in the Supreme Court (Dombo, 2014). On September 11, the Supreme Court refused to hear the case citing that the paper had approached the courts with dirty hands as they were supposed to comply with the law first before challenging it. Hence the court said they could not entertain a case from an applicant operating outside the law. The following day, the authorities seized the *Daily News's* assets, arrested its officials, and threatened some with arrest. This forced the paper to apply for registration with the MIC three days later. While pending the MIC's decision, the *Daily News* approached the High Court, which on September 18 granted it permission to operate while waiting for the registration application outcome. On September 19, the MIC rejected the *Daily News's* application for registration. The paper approached the Administrative Court to appeal the MIC's decision. The court set aside the MIC's decision, ordering that a license should be issued by November 30, failure of which the *Daily News* would be considered legally registered. The following day, the paper published news, forcing the police to come back to their premises to prevent any further publication. The authorities further defied a court order to return the equipment, and that marked the death of the *Daily News*.

While in other contexts, this could have led to a spirited response by the press in solidarity defense of press freedom as has happened in other contexts (Berkowitz & Eko, 2007; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014), or condemnation of statutory regulation at the very

least, the Zimbabwean press responded in a fragmented manner. The public press responded in a schadenfreude style (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014), whereby it celebrated the papers' shutdown as a necessary evil while the private press responded in typical paradigm repair fashion (Bennet et al., 1985; Berkowitz & Eko, 2007) delegitimizing the government's actions. This section starts by looking at how the public press derived pleasure from the *Daily News* shutdown before turning to the private press' paradigm repair responses.

### **The *Daily News* has no one to blame but itself: A Public Press' Schadenfreude**

#### **Reaction**

In its celebration of the closure of the *Daily News* in September 2003, the public press justified the government's action by accusing the paper of being a counter revolutionary element. The accusations included alleging that the paper was a driving force of a neo-colonial agenda, countering Zimbabwe's nation-building and revolutionary project, a political organization masquerading as a news organization engaged in unethical journalistic practices, as well as an outlaw. But way before *The Daily News* closure, the public press had expressed fears of media imperialism.

Public press criticisms of the *Daily News* arose from the beginning. Back in 1998, before the *Daily News* hit the Zimbabwean streets but after information came through that it would have British investors, the public press raised concerns over media imperialism as expressed in foreign media ownership debates. Mathew Takaona (1998), then ZUI president, who was working for the public press, did delegitimize foreign media ownership for fear that it would promote media globalization, sacrifice principle for political and business interests, and stifle journalistic work due to media concentration. As an example,



he used the case of South Korean journalists who lost jobs and suffered salary cuts after foreign owned new media companies collapsed. He explained that globalization was the problem, foreign capital is very mobile, foreign interests tend to borrow carelessly, and tend to have a false picture of business potential. He argued that while the *Daily News* would be good for employment, “casualties of a media dominated by foreigners are democracy, culture, and ethics of journalism,” as foreign interests tend to be at loggerheads with national interests, hence national sovereignty would suffer. His fear was from the political influence ANZ would have in Southern Africa as it had “indicated that it would take its media interests to 14 other countries in the region.” Even though media pluralism is essential for democracy, the argument here is that foreign ownership in news media activities jeopardizes it as well as the national interest and sovereignty. This was partly why the public press celebrated the *Daily News* closure. This also shows how ideals such as national interest as a guiding journalistic ideology militate against principles of diversity and pluralism. In addition, the coming in of the *Daily News* was also seen as a challenge to the public press’ role in fighting global news media imperialism as shown in Chapter 5.

The public press’ animosity toward the *Daily News* was immediately apparent when the newspaper was forced to shut down. Headlines from the public press demonstrate the public press’ schadenfreude reactions: “Demise of Daily News looms” (Sifelani Tsiko, 2003 - senior journalist with Zimpapers); “ANZ doomed from the start” (Herald political editor Lovemore Mataire, 2003) and “Newspaper group ANZ dug its own grave: Daily News shut down for flouting media laws” (by former Herald editor Caesar Zvayi, 2003). *The Herald’s* fictional character, Nathaniel Manheru, a pseudonym believed to belong to then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Publicity, George Charamba,

also mocked and scapegoated *The Daily News* for its misfortune. Three headlines from this shadowy character are illustrative: “ANZ caught in quicksand of its own contrivance” (Manheru, 2003a); “Daily News back to square one – against the law” (Manheru, 2003c); “What ill-wind wind blows Sipepa?” (in reference to Samuel Sipepa Nkomo, Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe chairman) (Manheru, 2003d). It is instructive that most of the headlines scapegoated the *Daily News* for its misfortune. This shows the dangers of having a fragmented journalistic interpretive community because as seen here, the public press blamed the victim.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged however, that the public press’ reactions to the *Daily News* were characterized with mixed feelings. The public press’ response to the *Daily News*’ shut down involved selective gloating whereby it would sympathize with certain groups but at the same time regard them as collateral damage they could only feel sorry for. Tsiko (2003) gloated that the Supreme Court ruling shutting the paper had shaken the ANZ center, its management, and jolted advertisers and readers. At the same time, he expressed a sense of regret that readers “lost on the choice between *The Herald* and the *Daily News*.” He also quoted some observers who were of the view that *The Herald* could become complacent, since the competition had brought an improved quality of papers. Mataire (2003) argued “Sympathy should be extended to innocent people that worked and toiled under ANZ, without even the slightest knowledge that the paper was not launched to make money.” However, this was as far as the public press’ level of ritual solidarity with the private press could go.

The public press scapegoated the *Daily News* for its closure, arguing the paper had itself to blame for its own demise because ANZ, the newspaper’s parent company had

refused to register with MIC, in line with AIPPA, challenging the constitutionality of the law. Zyayi (2003) mockingly described the *Daily News* situation as self-inflicted, because they gambled and lost. For this, he affirmatively stated that “last-minute attempts by the ANZ to register after the ruling went against them should be dismissed with the contempt it deserves.” He justified his position by arguing that ANZ thought they were above the law which is why it was shut down. Manheru also marveled in the *Daily News*’ closure by celebrating how the newspaper’s situation had become untenable as well as how they were to blame for their own misfortune. After the *Daily News* got their court challenge against AIPPA dismissed by the Supreme Court for having defied the same law, Manheru (2003) celebrated that the “harder it wriggles to try and get out, the deeper it sinks.” For challenging a law that they refused to obey in the first place, Manheru (2003) argued that the *Daily News*’s legal action was flawed and behaved like a “spoiled brat.” In a related piece, “Daily News must not cry foul,” Manheru (2003), argued that like “a spoilt brat, ANZ was aware that its refusal to register with the MIC was tantamount to being an outlaw, but still continued publishing its papers which day in and day out churned out fictional stories.” For this illogical move, Manheru (2003) described the *Daily News* as a dump puppet. In the same line, he mocked the West arguing that the “art of puppetry is to get loyal and pliant actors who have it upstairs not to be an embarrassment to the puppeteer.” This approach also involved scapegoating ANZ management for the *Daily News* closure. Mataire (2003) argued that the ANZ proprietors wanted to shut down the paper and were just waiting for an excuse. Mataire justifies his position by arguing that if indeed the proprietors did not want to shut down the paper, they would have thought about the plight of their workers and registered. He also argued the fact that the paper made frantic efforts

to register at the last minute, when they had been advised to register earlier, means that they had already decided to have the paper shut down and blame the government. This was also supported by Zvayi (2004) who argued that its owner, Strive Masiyiwa, Zimbabwe's billionaire business mogul now based in the UK, had actually pointed out to the then editor Geoff Nyarota that "You do not understand me, I don't want money from the *Daily News*, but what I want is to close it." This last argument, however, is supported by different studies and literature (see Dombo, 2014; Nyarota, 2006). What is still questionable though, is why Strive Masiyiwa did want to shut down the paper so much. Also, important here is how the public press' policy to support the government of the day, and its policies, whether good or bad can lead to dire consequences such as repression for the news media industry.

The public press journalists further argued that they could not sympathize with the *Daily News* because it was set up to drive a neo-colonial agenda to undermine the country's nation-building and revolutionary projects like the Land Reform Program. This strategy started off with the classification of the *Daily News* as a political organization registered as a media institution which made it easier to attack as the categorization stripped the paper of deserving any press freedom rights. In Mataire's (2003) words, the problem with "the *Daily News* was that its publisher, the Associated Newspaper of Zimbabwe group was registered as a media services provider when in fact it was a political organization with heavy funding from the British." He goes on to give different political roles that the paper played which prove that it was a political organization. These include, writing libelous stories against Robert Mugabe and failing to write a single positive story about Zimbabwe. According to Zvayi (2003), the paper's failure to write even a single story about Zimbabwe means that "its objectives are no different from those of the Western media which paints

Africa as a dark continent inhabited by naked savages and wild animals.” Here again, the public press’ role conceptualization as a challenger of Western hegemony gets in the way. The public press castigated the *Daily News* for advancing the same narrative as the Western news media. What this means is that different role conceptualizations also undermine journalists’ ability to stand with each other in times of need.

Even though the *Daily News* was shut down on a legal technicality, the public press justified the paper’s closure using political reasons. The *Daily News* was first and foremost accused of driving a neo-colonial agenda. Countering *Daily News* chairperson, Samuel Sipepa Nkomo’s argument that the government had shut down the paper for political reasons, Manheru (2003) argued that “by so charging, he was in fact confirming the *Daily News*’ political role.” To advance this argument, he described the *Daily News* as the mind manager for the opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Manheru described the paper as the opposition party’s “central and ultimate apparatus and instrument for keeping its riotous rabble constituency in line.” To prove his argument, he argued that both the *Daily News* and the MDC trace their origins from the same political loins, the British. This position was also supported by public press journalists who argued that the *Daily News* was established for circumstantial and fundamentally flawed reasons to counter nationalist and revolutionary sentiments, counter *The Herald*, and support the MDC, facilitate Robert Mugabe’s removal, remove a government for an alternative one. Because a British company had also invested in ANZ, Mataire (2003) questioned British interests in the ANZ project. He used this to counter *Daily News* founder Wilf Mbanga’s (2003) argument that the country’s economy and political situation was degenerating into a crisis: “Really, if the country was sliding into such a deplorable state, what then were the

interests of the British in investing in the newspaper industry in Zimbabwe?” In his view, the *Daily News* was set-up because British interests were at stake. One possible explanation for why the public press used political reasons to justify the *Daily News* shut down is that political arguments are easy to comprehend for their targeted audiences. At the same time, this speaks again to how the government’s insecurities that Britain was out to exploit Zimbabwe also infiltrated into the public press. In addition, it is evidence for the effect of a too close affinity between the journalism and political fields.

The *Daily News* was further accused of negating the nation building project by being a playground for racist Rhodies (a term used in reference to Whites of Rhodesian origin currently in Zimbabwe and abroad), peddling racial stereotypes, and celebrating imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe. Apart from fanning racism, the paper was also accused of “peddling fictitious ‘Shona supremacy’ documents in a bid to wreak havoc between the country’s two major tribes in a bid to win votes for the hopeless opposition” (Zvayi, 2003). Due to this tribalism, Zvayi argued that the closure of the *Daily News* was done on principle to protect the country’s peace. Having made this case, Mataire (2003) then concluded that “the prime motive of the *Daily News* was not to inform, educate or entertain.” At issue here is the boundary between appropriate journalistic roles and destabilizing national peace or contributing to nation building. As highlighted in Part 1, the challenge is lack of agreement on what some of these roles like promoting peace mean.

Apart from failure to fulfill nation-building journalistic roles, the *Daily News* was also accused of violating ethical journalistic principles of truth telling. Zvayi (2004) accused the paper of peddling lies about its publications and the status of the economy. He argued that the government was clamping down on corruption, interest rates were falling,

the economy was on a rebound, and prices of commodities were falling, but that the *Daily News* ignored all these sentiments because “lying is a neurosis of the opposition mouthpiece.” He even added that the paper hated any positive developments in Zimbabwe and had been given awards for this. Zvayi (2003) thus found justification for AIPPA arguing that the law had been crafted to curtail the company’s yellow journalism, hence the “Supreme Court justifiably rapped the knuckles of the media criminals.” Zvayi went further to point out that “Zimbabwe would be better off without the vindictive tabloid.” Zvayi’s justifications for shutting down the *Daily News* for flouting the law set up to deal with its yellow journalism, shows the public press’ concession to statutory regulation which is what was being challenged by ANZ. It further shows the public press’s shift from support for self-regulation to backing statutory regulation. The problem here though is that under polarized political environments, where the same reality is seen from different perspectives, application of ethical principles becomes subjective, hence undermining the standing of a journalistic interpretive community.

The tragedy of polarized environments is that journalists may fail to stand together as an interpretive community. As seen here, even if the newspaper was shut down for a licensing technicality, the public press invoked many other reasons to justify *Daily News* closure, including negating nation-building, driving a neo-colonial agenda, violating the law, negating the nation-building project, as well as violating journalistic ethical principles. These reactions displayed by the public press here are contrary to what has been witnessed in other contexts, especially in liberal Western democracies. In the case of *The News of the World*, in the UK, British journalists stood in one corner to defend their journalistic autonomy and push back against statutory regulation (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2014). In the

case of Jyllands-Posten and Muhammad cartoons scandal in Denmark, again, the European press defended press freedom (Berkowitz & Eko, 2007). However, this is different in the Zimbabwean case whereby the public press took the government's side and defended government interference or limitations of press freedom. This can be traced to two possible factors: polarization and the political economy of the news media. The country's ideological polarization between the public press' nationalistic ideals and the private press's liberal views means journalists from across the divide lack a shared ideological frame of reference, hence they cannot fight together as a united interpretive community. From a political economy perspective, government ownership of *The Herald* also means the public press could not fight against statutory regulation as that would be tantamount to fighting their own employer. The section below examines the private press's reactions to the *Daily News* closure.

### **Paradigm repair in the privately controlled press**

Contrary to the public press' schadenfreude-based reactions to the *Daily News* shutdown, journalists from the private press responded by commiserating with ANZ, scapegoating the state, assessing the synecdochic meaning of the shutdown, negatively evaluating the Supreme Court judgment as well as the impact of AIPPA and its rationalization. As this section will show, the usual moment of mutual solidarity was missed as this group took sides with the victims while those from the public press were in solidarity with the state.

The defense of the *Daily News* started with the newspaper itself. The first reaction of commiseration came from the *Daily News*'s founding managing director, Wilf Mbanga, who took it as a moment to engage in some collective memory on the challenges the *Daily*



*News* had encountered. He compared the paper's closure to the death of a son. In his commiseration, he touched on different aspects that first point to the challenges of operating a private press in an African context, the role that such a newspaper has to play, as well as the motivation behind its set-up. Mbanga (2003) gave three motivations behind the setting up of the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (*Daily News*' parent company) in general. These were that the public press had lost credibility and become a propaganda machine for the ruling party; the need to give an alternative voice; and degeneration of Zimbabwe's political and economic situation. This background gives the roles that he uses to legitimize the role of the *Daily News*. These roles included facilitating the emergence of the MDC as an opposition political party; informing the world about the Zimbabwean government's crackdown on the opposition; as well as informing the Zimbabwean public "of the activities of Zanu PF's corrupt and murderous leadership, breaking such stories as the President and the Cabinet's 1,150% salary hikes when 80% of Zimbabweans were living below the poverty datum line." The *Daily News*'s roles thus went beyond mere informing, educating, and entertaining and had two groups of audiences: the local Zimbabwean public and the international community. This also shows how different conceptualizations of press audiences undermines the Zimbabwean press' ability to stand together. The very roles that Mbanga argues were the reason for setting up the *Daily News*, are the same the public press uses to justify its closure. These include facilitating the emergence of the *Daily News*.

The struggles that ANZ went through in operating the *Daily News* further speak to the challenges of setting up and running a paper that is critical of the government in transitional and authoritarian contexts. According to Mbanga (2003), ANZ faced financial

challenges early on as the government threatened investors who had to withdraw from the project. This was followed with arrests of journalists and editors of the paper over frivolous charges that would not stand in the court of law. The paper was also up against ZANU PF thugs who “banned the *Daily News* – confiscating, burning and tearing up copies on a daily basis.” Dubbed a national security threat that had to be silenced, the company suffered bombings to its printing presses and offices. Eventually, the government crafted AIPPA which required all newspapers to register with the then MIC to get an operating license. The relativity of such terms as national security as witnessed in Part 1 has material effects on how journalistic interpretive communities operate.

Commiseration with ANZ also took the form of reflecting on how many employees had lost their jobs and thrown into abject poverty. This was reflected in such headlines as “AIPPA takes toll on Zim media workers” (ALPHA media journalist, Caiphas Chimhete, 2004) and “*Daily News* Closure Throws Thousands Out of Work” (Alpha media journalist, Henry Makiwa, 2003). According to Chimhete (2004) about 6,000 workers lost their jobs, and as a result they ended up in abject poverty noting that consequently “some editors have been evicted from their homes for failing to pay rentals.” Not only the media workers suffered, but also their immediate families. At the time, ZUJ president Mathew Takaona was quoted saying the media workers’ “situation is very desperate, especially their immediate families. They are failing to make ends meet.” These experiences by the private press journalists show how they had different working conditions as compared to their counterparts in the public press. These different conditions of service also further divided the journalists as they also symbolically communicated how they were different from their counterparts in the public press.

Different people were also scapegoated for the *Daily News* shut down. These range from the Supreme Court Chief justice, MIC, and its Chairman Mahoso, Zimbabwean government, ZUJ, the police, former minister of information, Jonathan Moyo, then current minister of information Tichaona Jokonya. In an article, “Travesty of Justice” (2003), *The Standard* singled out the Chief Justice for giving the ruling party ammunition to shut down the *Daily News* by refusing to entertain its case using the dirty hands principle. The MIC was also singled out for blame for failing to show “compassion on the plight of the journalists, and other media workers affected, who were bound to lose their jobs and their livelihoods (“For Whom the Bell Tolls,” 2004). Much fault was put on the commission’s chairman Mahoso for his hatred of the *Daily News*, his ruthlessness as well as how he despised anything anti-ZANU PF. This was explained by pointing out his conflict of interest. According to Macdonald Chimbizi (2003), a Zimbabwean journalist then based in the UK, the *Daily News* suffered a case of premature closure because of Mahoso’s conflict of interest:

For starters, Mahoso is a man of many masks. Apart from being a fashion disaster, he was until recently head of Mass Communication at the Polytech. He is a *Sunday Mail* columnist, a historian, a pan-Africanist, MIC chairman, a political and social commentator, and a ZANU PF consultant and government spin doctor, third in rank after Jonathan Moyo and George Charamba.

The above quote also shows the private press’ lack of trust in government institutions. In this case, the privately controlled press did not trust the MIC as its head had a conflict of interests, especially considering his connection with the ruling party. Thus, this case demonstrates how different levels of trust in state institutions by the press fractures it.

Also singled out for blame was former Junior Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo who presided over the crafting of acts like AIPPA, which was finally used to shut down the *Daily News*. This is captured in Clemence Manyukwe's (2006) story, “Moyo’s legacy stifles ANZ titles’ registration.” Also blamed for the paper’s shutdown were Moyo’s successor, Jokonya, then Ministry of Information Permanent Secretary George Charamba, as well as the government in general for remaining part of Moyo’s projects. Manyukwe argued that “regardless of their attempts to distance themselves from Moyo’s projects, they are still part and parcel of them.” Charamba continued to defend AIPPA after Moyo’s departure, while Jokonya failed to reconstitute MIC as he had promised before becoming an information minister. The government and the police were also blamed for misinterpreting the Chief Justice’s ruling in the *Daily News* case. In an article, “More Arrests” (2004), *The Standard* argued that “Whatever the case, there is no prohibition except the government’s own publication. The government has made an interpretation of the Supreme Court ruling that suits itself and the police have acted accordingly.” ZUJ, in the article: “For Whom the Bell Tolls” (2004) was also blamed for leading to the establishment of AIPPA due to its own lack of leadership:

The idea of a Media and Information Commission was actually mooted by journalists in the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists in the early 1990s as one way of regulating the industry and chucking out the chuff. ZUJ at the time envisaged an independent commission – funded by media institutions... Petty jealousies, lack of resources and poor leadership at ZUJ caused the establishment of an independent media commission to remain a pipe dream over the years until Moyo and his boys “discovered” it. The rest, as they say, is history.

The blame here is that lack of journalistic unity allowed the government to control the press. This blame is also extended to journalists in general who cannot speak with one voice. *The Standard* argued that “until the journalists in this country stop petty quibbling and work together to form a united front, their professions and livelihoods – whether in the State media or in the so-called independent private organizations – are under threat” (“For Whom the Bell Tolls,” 2004). While these explanations and interpretations show how the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community has been divided, it also shows how the country’s case became problematic due to polarization. Different groups can come up with different interpretations of the same reality. At the same time, this case also shows how paradigm repair extends beyond setting journalistic norms and standards, to attempt and repair or mend the journalistic interpretive community’s relations.

A clash of perspectives among Zimbabwean journalists is also illustrated by how journalists from the private press negatively evaluated the Supreme Court judgment that led to the eventual banning of the *Daily News*. According to *The Standard*, the Supreme Court ruling was a dangerous one “because it has not taken long for enemies of free expression to pounce on the *Daily News* – Zimbabwe's main independent daily newspaper” (“Travesty of Justice,” 2003). Furthermore, the paper argued that the ruling defies logic because the dirty hands principle applied meant that the paper had to first subject itself to the law before challenging it. *The Standard* thus queried “How can the ANZ submit itself to the same law whose legality it is challenging in court?” In fact, the paper followed in 2006 questioning “how can what is known as a ‘clean hands’ application succeed when the means to make that application is removed?” (“No Going Back on Press Freedom,” 2006).

It is these different perspectives on the challenges facing Zimbabwe and the media in general that over the years have continued to push the journalists away from each other.

The private press also engaged in debunking the public press' rationalizations of AIPPA. While the public press argued that the government instituted AIPPA to cover-up for a legal vacuum that was there, as well as protect all citizens, the private press argued that AIPPA was a political decision. This is the same explanation also given for the closure of the *Daily News*. At the time, Makiwa (2003) argued that "The newspaper group is paying the price for its confrontation with the ruling Zanu PF party and senior members of the government since its inception in 1999." This is also corroborated by arguments that this was done for business purposes. Brian Raftopoulos, Zimbabwean scholar and activist based in South Africa was quoted by Makiwa arguing that "The ruling party is doing this from a political and financial rationale – they want more money for their State Press and to shut all despondent voices." In addition, the private press also took a synecdochic approach in assessing the impact of the *Daily News* closure. In the article, "Travesty of Justice" (2003), *The Standard* argued that "in one stroke of the pen, it (Supreme Court) gives the Media and Information Commission the legality it so badly strove for, to move and frustrate Zimbabwe's vibrant but small private media." Broadly, the Supreme Court ruling was regarded as an assault on press freedom. In another article, "No Going Back on Press Freedom" (2006), *The Standard* quoted the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights arguing that "Repression may therefore have sadly found itself an ally against human rights defenders in the form of the judiciary." Thus, while the public press regarded the shutting down of the *Daily News* as a positive move, the private press took it as a regrettable action

with wider implications on press freedom in general. In other words, this showed that Zimbabwean journalism was in crisis.

Reactions to the *Daily News* closure show the division among the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community. The private press responded in a paradigm repair way, commiserating with the *Daily News*, reflecting on challenges in setting up a private news media company in Zimbabwe, scapegoating the state and its officials, as well as debunking the public press' rationalizations of AIPPA. These reactions alone show how the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community had been divided along political lines that had impacted the Zimbabwean society. It can also be argued that this is a feature witnessed in transitional societies where the journalistic paradigm is still in process (Berger, 2008). The above case study shows professionalization challenges (Waisbord, 2013) faced by journalists working under a polarized news media environment. That is professionalization conceptualized as journalistic ability to make jurisdictional claims in defense of their autonomy. This cannot happen in Zimbabwe as journalists cannot speak with one voice. The bigger problem being the government's interference with the public press. The distance between the political field and the public press' journalistic field is too close. The above professionalization challenges have also persisted to digital journalism debates in Zimbabwe, particularly what should be regarded as journalism on Twitter, and who should be considered a journalist. In the current media reform debates in Zimbabwe, as gathered through interviews, there are efforts to establish legal/statutory journalistic boundaries by making sure that only those qualified by training are considered journalists. The next section, through a case study of a Zimbabwean journalist arrested for activism after exposing a corruption scandal in 2020 illustrates how the digital transformation has again

exposed professionalization challenges confronting the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community due to polarization that has fractured it.

**Press discord in negotiating digital journalism definitions and boundaries: The case of Hopewell Chin'ono**

Lying at the heart of African journalistic cultures, before even factoring in the disruptive nature of digital technologies, is a tension over the extent to which journalists can take a stance in socio-political issues. This is an unsettled question at the heart of three alternative journalisms of Africa: journalism for social change, communal journalism, and oral discourse journalism (Skjerdal, 2012). Both journalism for social change and communal journalism reject objectivity as counterproductive for it supports the dominant ideology (Blankenberg, 1999). The rejection of objectivity as a guiding value for journalism is also philosophically supported by the concept of Ubuntu, an African principle guiding human conduct (Mokgoro, 1998), which emphasizes that journalists, as community members, cannot present social problems in a neutral manner (Metz, 2015). The tensions associated with these ideas come from different angles.

First, there is no universal agreement that Ubuntu-guided journalism is not compatible with objectivity because some scholars insist that objectivity, impartiality, and journalistic independence must be honored (see Metz, 2015). Second, Ubuntu is also in conflict with the concept of Afriethics which advocates for non-confrontational journalism with a human face (Kasoma, 1996). Third, both journalism for social change and communal journalism, by rejecting objectivity, create tension with Western libertarian journalism (Skjerdal, 2012). This creates tensions with a lot of African journalists who have been trained using the Western curriculum. Fourth, confrontational journalism



rejecting objectivity was all good when conceived during the fight against colonialism, when it was conceptualized as a national unity vehicle in support of government policy and facilitating breaking up with the colonial past in the sense of Nkrumah's<sup>7</sup> revolutionary journalism (Skjerdal, 2012). It was all good till this revolutionary journalism was turned against post-independence African leaders as a tool to stop their corrupt tendencies.

The coming in of digital technologies exacerbated these tensions when African journalists, circumventing news media repression resorted to digital platforms as not just tools for conventional journalism, but arenas to advance social change (Skjerdal, 2011). Media repression gave birth to the rise in alternative sites in places like Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2007; Moyo, 2011), raising the question about the boundaries of journalism. African journalists have used repressive conditions in their countries as justification for their activist journalistic practices (Batist, 2010; Skjerdal, 2011). In some instances, activist journalism has borne results in the African context. Guerrilla journalism, which is adversarial, uncompromising and unconventional advocacy reporting gained acceptance after vitiating the credibility of the mainstream press in Nigeria (Kperogi, 2008) while radical journalism aided the fight against apartheid in South Africa (Pinnock, 1992). Given this background, it is not surprising that moments of technological disruptions in the African context complicate journalists' ability to rearticulate their journalistic values or in general, reinterpret their journalistic culture (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), especially under polarized contexts like Zimbabwe.

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<sup>7</sup> Kwame Nkrumah was first Ghanaian president when it became independent in 1957.

It is within this context of Africa's journalistic cultural uncertainty that the Hopewell Chin'ono's case emerges. He was arrested for inciting public violence after calling on Zimbabwean citizens to protest corruption following his Twitter exposé of a COVID-19 corruption scandal. The case has both elements of digital revolution, activism, and press freedom suppression, making it ideal to assess challenges that confront a fractured journalistic interpretive community's efforts to professionalize in the digital era while operating under a repressive regime. Below, the section starts by giving a brief background to Hopewell Chin'ono's case before turning to how he positioned himself as a journalist. This is followed with examination of how he was positioned in the press either as a journalist or an activist. Interviews are used to support data gathered from the analyzed texts.

### **Hopewell Chin'ono and the COVID-Gate scandal**

Early in 2020, the Zimbabwean government awarded about \$60 million contracts to two companies: Swiss and UAE registered Drax Consult SAGL and Namibian based JAJI investments, both allegedly indirectly linked to President Emmerson Mnangagwa to supply COVID-19 related material without going out for bids (Mathuthu, 2020a). Drax was represented in Zimbabwe by Delish Nguwaya, an alleged business partner to the president's son Collins Mnangagwa, while JAJI investments is allegedly connected to the president's bodyguard Valdamo Brown. The story came to light after Nguwaya, during a donation of a \$200,000 drugs consignment to the President at the State House on April 8, announced that he had struck a \$60 million drugs supply deal with the government. This prompted online publication *ZimLive* to investigate the deal, after which the paper reported that the contract had not gone for bids as usual (Mathuthu, 2020a). The story further alleged

that the Minister of Health was also involved in the deal, which saw Drax making its first delivery of masks, test kits and coveralls with an over 200% price inflation (Karombo, 2020a). It was also alleged that the former health minister hand-picked Namibian based JAJI investments (Karombo, 2020b). Both contracts were terminated in early June 2020.

While the story first broke out in online news publications and legacy news media organizations, Hopewell Chin'ono also took up the case and tweeted a lot about the corruption scandal (Machaya, 2020). Due to the implication of the president's family in the scandal, the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) issued a warning to journalists to avoid the story, particularly Chin'ono who had tweeted a lot about the corruption scandal (Machaya, 2020). In some of his tweets, Chin'ono called on citizens to demonstrate against corruption on July 31<sup>st</sup> which led to his arrest on July 20<sup>th</sup> for inciting public violence ("JUST IN," 2020). Despite his arrest for inciting public violence, Chin'ono was later awarded the People Journalist of the Year 2020 by Greenfield People Journalism Prize for Africa (Zimbabwe Journalist Hopewell Chin'ono Gets Top Africa Media Award, 2021). He was also to be listed as one of the 100 most influential Africans under the label of an opinion shaping journalist (Versi, 2022) before he was invited to speak at the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy in Switzerland as one of the "world's most courageous dissidents and rights activists" (Ndoro, 2022). These conflicting labels not only raise questions about the boundaries of journalism and activism but offer an opportune moment to examine how journalists respond to such legitimacy crisis that digital journalism faces on platforms like Twitter especially with reference to professionalization concerns under authoritarian conditions.

For various reasons, Chin'ono's case is ideal to interrogate how journalists respond to digital disruptions to their professions especially under repressive regimes being undermined by political and economic liberalization. First, he solely used social media to report this case, which helps avoid research bias toward the mainstream press and traditional journalists. Second, the case ignited debates about whether he is an activist or journalist. This is interesting when considering Carlson's (2017) argument that the new practices and news forms being questioned on Twitter have an opportunity to institutionalize the same way current accepted practices gained legitimacy in legacy media. The question of course is what the challenges to their institutionalization are when journalists are divided. Third, the story had consequences that saw Chin'ono being arrested for inciting public violence and then Minister of Health Obadiah Moyo arrested and subsequently dismissed for alleged abuse of office on June 19 (Mathuthu, 2020b). Research shows that in other contexts, Chin'ono's arrest could have attracted a news media pushback against the state. However, as this chapter will show, just like with the *Daily News* case, the public press responded differently, positioning Chin'ono as an activist, implicitly justifying his incarceration, while the private press positioned him as a journalist, subtly legitimating his Twitter activities as journalism. But first, it will be important for the section to start by examining how Chin'ono positioned himself.

### **Chin'ono's brand: self-positioning within journalism**

The brand of a journalist can be deciphered from direct self-promotion and individual level labeling (Molyneux, 2015; Molyneux et al., 2018) or the nature of their content (Olausson, 2017). Direct self-promotion involves reference to their own stories and

those of others as well as third party endorsing retweets and their Twitter profiles. In the image below, Chin'ono positions himself as a journalist.

Chino'no's Twitter profile brands him as an award-winning journalist.

Figure 1.1

*Hopewell Chin'ono's Twitter Profile, 2020*



This profile seeks to verify Chin'ono's credibility as a journalist by aligning with two US-based institutions, including as an award-winning journalism expert in documentary filmmaking who received further training as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. The awards he lists in conjunction with Twitter's blue badge assert his authority and his expertise as a reporter, especially when considering that being a news organization or journalist is one qualification that was needed for verification by the platform before Elon Musk took over. Thus, before delving into the boundary debates surrounding his work, he clearly uses his Twitter profile to position himself as a journalist. Implicitly, this is also an attempt to take care of organizational legitimacy that is enjoyed by legacy media journalists on Twitter, which Chin'ono lacks as a freelancer.

Chin'ono also emphasized his position as a journalist by referring to his institutional identity as a reporter whereby he set boundaries of what he can and cannot do

by dismissing people who asked him to open a WhatsApp group and “translate these LOOTING tweets in different languages.” He asked them to open the groups themselves, stating: “I am doing what I am trained to do as a journalist! Do your part as patriots, citizens!” He also denied the responsibility to keep on pressing against corruption arguing that “We as journalists have done our job. It is you the citizen and the opposition that should NOW be in action.” Here Chin’ono’s was drawing boundaries between what he can and cannot do, to keep himself a professional or at least attempt to be seen as such. Here, he emphasized the constraints of what he cannot do due to his belonging to the institution of journalism.

However, Chin’ono’s self-positioning is complicated by some stances that he took, for example calling for Obadiah Moyo to be dismissed from his post as Minister of Health and Childcare through the hashtag: #ObadiahMoyoMustGo. He justified the stance by arguing that they had “put evidence as journalists to prove that he, Obadiah MUST GO.” However, he refused to say #ZanupfMustGO (Zimbabwe’s ruling party) because that is a “political slogan that the official opposition and political activists MUST now act on!” This raises the question of to what extent journalists can challenge authorities.

Chin’ono also foregrounded his journalistic identity by retweeting comments (Molyneux, 2015) from followers who positioned him as a reporter as in this June 14<sup>th</sup> post: “You’ve done your part @daddyhope along with fellow journalists.” He also positioned himself among other journalists thanking them for helping in exposing corruption. He said: “At this point in time I would like to stop and thank my colleagues. I didn’t do this alone.” In an image collage accompanying the tweet, he included privately controlled newspapers: the *NewsDay*, *Zimbabwe Independent* and *ZimLive*. Use of both followers and fellow

journalists shows not only how journalists can engage in rhetoric of differentiation, but also rhetoric of association. This is an example of boundary expansion.

Chin'ono also constructed a watchdog identity for himself by advertising/promoting his upcoming work (Olausson, 2017), which he described as reporting by tweeting that “We have been reporting about the nurses’ protests for a week, but we haven’t taken you inside the hospitals. Tomorrow, I will take you into a ghostly looking Harare Children’s Hospital to see the breakdown of the health service...” Chin'ono further branded himself as an investigative journalist by pulling up a story which he wrote after his “investigations in yet another bogus deal by Mnangagwa’s regime!” The tweet reported that the Zimbabwean government reported to have “sealed a US\$130m deal with a company that...only had \$3 in its UK bank account.” This shows how, in the face of Twitter journalism’s legitimacy crisis, journalists can resort to embed discourse about their work with their tweets. This is not only a matter of legitimizing oneself as a journalist, but a new form of positioning tweets as news stories contrary to legacy media forms.

Considering the above, it is without doubt that Chin'ono positioned himself as a journalist holding the government accountable through Twitter. He achieved this through different strategies: self-branding, retweeting comments from followers, engaging in discourses of association and differentiation, as well as positioning his tweets as part of reporting work. In doing so, he collapsed journalism and activism as complementary rather than antithetical, which echoes the attitude of many African digital journalists who have accepted activism as part of their journalistic identity and work due to the repressive conditions in their countries (Batist, 2010; Moyo, 2007; Skjerdal, 2011). This self-positioning however was not uniformly accepted by Zimbabwe’s legacy news media

organizations: the public and the private press. Below, the section starts by looking at how the public press positioned Chin'ono as an activist before turning to how the private press positioned him as an investigative journalist.

### **Hopewell Chin'ono as a political activist: A public press perspective**

As the government arrested and charged Hopewell Chin'ono with inciting public violence, the public press, particularly *The Herald*, classified him as a journalist-cum-activist fronting the opposition in attempts to unconstitutionally remove an elected government. In addition, he was also accused of working with the US in this attempt to unconstitutionally remove the government.

In classifying Chin'ono as a journalist-cum-activist fronting the opposition political parties as their voice for regime change the public press redefined his journalism claims as a cover-up, arguing that he was not even a courageous reporter as claimed (Mavaza, 2020; Munyoro, 2020; "Opposition Leader Exposes July 31 Plot," 2020; "SB Moyo Speaks on Activists' Arrest," 2020; "Zanu PF, War Vets Warn Instigators," 2020). Charlene Shumba (2020), a *Herald* correspondent, wrote that "Chin'ono is not a journalist. He is a political activist and Trojan Horse for the nefarious agenda of the US to unconstitutionally remove ZANU PF from power." However, in a few instances *The Herald* referred to Chin'ono as a journalist, for example in the story "JUST IN: Ngarivhume, Chin'ono Appear in Court," (2020) where they reported that "Opposition leader and organizer of the July 31 mass protests Jacob Ngarivhume and journalist Hopewell Chin'ono have appeared at Harare Magistrates' Court charged with scheming against the Government." This double name-calling shows the public press' ambivalence about whether to classify Chin'ono as a journalist or an activist. This also shows the importance of journalistic autonomy. Based



on previous chapters' arguments by the public press that they are mandated to support the government policy whether good or bad, it also follows that here *The Herald* was simply defending a government position.

To delegitimize Chin'ono's work as non-journalistic, *The Herald* also started off by explaining his arrest as having emanated from his posting of "messages calling for mass demonstrations by any means against Government on July 31" ("Chin'ono in Bail Appeal," 2020), "ostensibly against corruption" ("No One above Law: Govt," 2020). Once framed this way, Chin'ono ceased to be a journalist but a criminal abusing social media who sought to remove the government through unconstitutional means ("ZANU PF, War Vets Warn Instigators," 2020). This framing was important for the state as it legitimized its invasion of journalistic professional space. Zimbabwe's Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services Permanent Secretary Nick Mangwana said there "is no profession which is above the law. Journalists are not above the law" ("No One above Law: Govt," 2020). The argument that journalists are not above the law, classifying Chin'ono as an activist in the same sentence again indicates the challenge faced by the government in classifying Chin'ono, either as an activist or a journalist. This position by *The Herald* dovetailed with the police's distinction between journalists and citizen journalists, with the latter having no rights at law. This was implied by Zimbabwe National Police Spokesperson Assistant Commissioner Paul Nyathi, who, when denying allegations of selective application of the law, argued: "journalists were free to do their work as long as they observed the law," but warned that "they should identify themselves to the police in order to distinguish them from citizen journalists that have also been posting false information on social media"

(Langa, 2020). By implication, this argument means that false news is criminalized, and citizen journalists do not enjoy the same rights as legacy news media journalists.

The argument that what Chin'ono did was not journalism emerged in follow-up interviews with Zimbabwean journalists currently or formerly with the public press, as well as public officials. In an interview with academic E, formerly with the public press, he argued that journalism involves a process of investigation and not just posting documents on Twitter:

Journalism is a process of investigating, establishing beyond doubt, that the allegations are facts. After gathering the information, you then process it in a manner that even a half literate person can comprehend...So when I get a document from some office, post it on my Twitter handle, whether its Hopewell or its anyone else, and say let's vote this one out, let's vote these ones in, can we say journalism has happened there?

Here academic E was criticizing what he called leak journalism, characterized by a situation whereby one “just harvests a document from somewhere, don't even verify it, and post on Twitter, and then have likes.” He also criticized Chin'ono for posting the documents without simplifying them to help the common man to understand their contents. In addition, he argued that when a journalist gets sensitive documents, it is important to call the subjects of the story and get their opinion before posting on Twitter. Thus, here the process of journalism is deemed much more important, and its violation justifies government action to arrest Chin'ono. But most importantly, this indicates the legitimacy crisis faced by African journalistic genres like journalism for social change and communal journalism. In moments of controversy, they can be mobilized or sidelined to defend

positions. In this case, the public press resorted to the conventional objective news paradigm process. What is not clear about the African journalistic paradigm is the extent to which journalists can take political positions.

Academic E further explained that Chin'ono deserved to be arrested because what he did is like a lawyer who commits a crime. His logic for this went like:

When a lawyer commits a crime and they appear in court, and a subaltern out there commits a similar crime, and they appear in court, the probability of the lawyer getting a harsher punishment compared to the ordinary citizen who has committed the same offense is much higher because in the eyes of the court the lawyer deliberately violated the law.

He thus argued that the same “applies when senior journalists behave in a manner that is partisan, when they say at the end of their reportage, let's vote ABC out of power, the assumption would be that they cease to be journalists and become politicians.” There is also fear in the public press that people like Hopewell Chin'ono are going to keep the news media in Zimbabwe polarized because they are going to be around for some time. In an interview, public press editor F1 argued that “don't underestimate the following that he has, to the extent that certain people believe that if it's coming from Hopewell, it's true and if it's coming from *The Herald*, it's fake, it's propaganda.” Thus, one other challenge here also promoting the existence of a fractured journalistic interpretive community is that social media journalists like Hopewell are trusted by some audiences better than *The Herald*. This also means that when examining journalistic cultures and the structure of journalistic interpretive communities, audience trust in the press must be accounted for.

In the interviews, it also emerged that the question of “who is a journalist?” has become prevalent in contemporary Zimbabwe. In an interview with government official X, he said this is one of the reasons they agreed that journalists should self-regulate, a mechanism that is expected to be facilitated by the Media Practitioners’ Bill<sup>8</sup>. He said self-regulation will help journalists protect the profession:

They can protect the practice because there's another big debate which is who is a journalist. Because now we see the big tent mentality where anybody who writes is described as a journalist. And some of them do not come in with any background in journalism, no training, nothing.

This was also raised by Commissioner Z with the Zimbabwe Media Commission who said the biggest challenge now considering digital platforms is who is a journalist rather than press freedom repression. The Commissioner said this is now one of the biggest questions that journalists must decide on. Even though journalists have tended to use organizational affiliation and backing, media and role conceptualization to exclude bloggers, social media personalities and citizen journalists as non-journalists (Ferrucci & Vos, 2016; Tong, 2015), a legal boundary has not yet been suggested (in as far as this researcher could gather). This is thus a question that can only be decided in due course in terms of whether it will be possible to set-up legal boundaries of who a journalist is and who is not. It is certainly a question for future research.

In the public press, a case was then made for classifying Chin’ono as a journalist-cum-activist calling for the unconstitutional removal of the government. The public press

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<sup>8</sup> This is the proposed law that seeks to provide mechanisms for media co-regulation in Zimbabwe by delegating the powers of the Zimbabwe Media Commission to one body/bodies run by media professionals.

further delegitimized his Twitter activities as mere leak journalism different from proper investigative processes and these arguments justified his arrest. In making these arguments, the public press simply stuck to its mandate to support the government of the day as outlined in Chapter 5. These developments also show that even though the government can repress the news media with or without journalistic support, here the public press played a role in legitimating the government's actions. This section has also raised an important issue whereby the government is proposing attempts to come up with legal boundaries demarcating who is and is not a journalist. This is an important proposition to monitor going forward. By and large, the positions given to Chin'ono in the public press are however different from how the privately controlled press constructed him.

### **Hopewell Chin'ono “is a small fish fighting stupid greed”: A private press perspective**

Contrary to the public press' positioning of Chin'ono as an activist, the private press constructed him as a journalist enduring state harassment. The *NewsDay* was very consistent in separating him as a journalist from politicians. In one of *NewsDay*'s stories, the paper's Bulawayo Bureau Chief Silas Nkala (2020) reported that journalist “Hopewell Chin'ono and opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume were detained for 43 days.” Along these lines, Chin'ono was recognized either as just a journalist, award-winning, or freelance investigative reporter (Chikandiwa, 2020; “International Pressure Saved Me: Chin'ono,” 2020; Mhlanga, 2020). This is the identity recognized by fellow journalists, bishops, human rights activists, and those in the health sector (e.g., “I'm a Zim Doctor, the COVID-19 Crisis Is Worse than You Imagine,” 2020). Responding to Chin'ono's arrest for instance, Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) secretary-general Foster Dongozi

described it as a “brazen attack of a journalist...who engage in investigative journalism...exposing corruption in government” (Mhlanga & Kunambura, 2020). On the other hand, bishops, and the church, in reference to Chin’ono’s arrest argued that to “have a different opinion does not mean to be an enemy” (Matenga, 2020). Here, Hopewell Chin’ono’s identity as a Harvard University Nieman Foundation Fellow came into play the same way he applied it on his own Twitter handle. Expressing solidarity with Chin’ono, Obey Manayiti (2020), a former reporter with the *NewsDay* and also another Harvard University’s Nieman Fellow, made reference to Chin’ono’s identity and appreciated how he was using his “Twitter handle to shine light in very dark places.” He even criticized his colleagues from the public press for supporting the government in harassing Hopewell Chin’ono:

I felt ashamed for my colleagues who rejoice when other journalists are being harassed. It is a personal choice to side with the oppressor and to be complicit in mis-governance for a few temporary privileges is nothing short of being disgraceful. But history will judge those siding with the looters and oppressors.

He went further and explained that Zimbabwe’s problems are rooted in corruption, poor governance, and the “‘yes-men’ who are eager to crush free press and harm anyone, who dares expose them.” Taking a swipe at the public press, Manayiti contended that it is “shameful for journalists to glorify corruption” adding that a “free press is essential for democracy.” Implied in this critique is the assumption that the public press is a part of the “yes-man” defending corruption.

Again, contrary to the above view that Chin’ono simply practiced leaked journalism, the *NewsDay* described his tweeting as story writing based on “leaked

documents, including invoices and contracts, alleging that key COVID-19 supplies were being looted” (“International Pressure Saved Me: Chin’ono,” 2020). The Zimbabwe Human Rights Association’s (ZimRights) qualification of Chin’ono’s work as human rights issues further complicate matters. The organization argued that as “a grassroots human rights advocacy group, whose members are suffering the effects of corruption, we stand in solidarity with ... Hopewell Chin’ono. We reiterate that corruption is a human rights issue” (Mhlanga & Kunambura, 2020). In fact, the private press described Hopewell Chin’ono as a brave investigative journalist who was using his Twitter handle to hold the government accountable by exposing corruption. Manayiti (2020) argued that “Chino’no, among many other brave journalists in Zimbabwe, has played a big part in exposing corruption that has become pervasive in the corridors of power.” He further added that Chin’ono had achieved what brings joy to every journalist, that is writing impactful stories. This was because if Chin’ono had not exposed the scandal, “US\$60 million could have been siphoned from the broke government’s coffers to pay a dubious Dubai-based company that supplied overpriced medical sundries.” Not only that, Chin’ono’s reports had also led to the arrest and dismissal of the then Health Minister Obidiah Moyo. For this, Manayiti argued that Chin’ono had practiced true factual journalism and held the government to account. He thus expressed his solidarity with Chin’ono:

I am standing with my brother Chin’ono, the Zimbabwean Nieman family has stood up with you, other well-meaning journalists are with you, and the rest of the country is with you...They harass you because they want you to stop exposing the rot, but the ethos of journalism requires you to do more. Journalism is not a crime. It is an exercise in truth telling.

This quote carries another division between well-meaning journalists and those who support corruption.

Furthermore, the private press engaged in autonomy protection boundary work (Carlson, 2015) attempting to delegitimize the crime of inciting violence arguing that Chin'ono and others were arrested for “just calling for an end to looting of public funds, violation of human rights as well as a myriad bad governance issues” (Nkala, 2020). Even parliament was divided over Chin'ono's crime with Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Information, Media, and Broadcasting Services chairperson Prince Dubeko Sibanda saying “the scribe (journalist) was being persecuted for exposing high-profile corruption.” In addition, the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum tried to delegitimize the arrest by describing it as arbitrary (Mhlanga & Kunambura, 2020) while his lawyers argued that “there was nothing criminal about calling for change of government outside elections as that was how the late former President Robert Mugabe was removed from power in November 2017” (Matenga et al., 2020). Despite these complications, the *NewsDay* argued that "Journalism Is Not a Crime, Cde Charamba" (2020b), in an address to George Charamba, Deputy Chief Secretary-Presidential Communications in the Office of the President of Zimbabwe. Chin'ono himself argued that his arrest “means journalism has been criminalized” (“Journalist, Harare Mayor Denied Bail,” 2020). The broader debate here to protect journalism or to decriminalize journalism will remain challenging so long both the public and the private press do not agree on what is journalism, on and offline. This also includes the need to draw boundaries between journalism and activism, and most importantly, there is a need to agree of activism should be punished.



In the eyes of the private press, Chin'ono's arrest was a government ploy to cover up for its criminal activities. To Kenneth Mafuka (2020), a Zimbabwean academic based in the US, Chin'ono's incarceration was not only a form of "grave injustice, but a threat and a cover for greater evils taking place not only in Zimbabwe, but in Africa as a whole." He even went further to argue that there was no basis for denying Chin'ono bail because from where he saw things, the journalist had more work to do in Zimbabwe as he had "barely scratched the tip of the iceberg." This is because to Mafuka, Zimbabwe's biggest problem is legalized plunder:

Please, dear reader, notice that we no longer use the terms theft, or fraud. Austrian economist Frederic Bastiat long realized that where the elites habitually steal from the poor, they will pass laws, which make it legal to do so. Zimbabwe is a classic case. Bastiat named the two great ideas behind legalized plunder as "stupid greed" (his words) and false philanthropy.

To Mafuka, it is this "stupid greed" that had taken over in the scandals investigated by Chin'ono driven by a desire "to obtain wealth (of others) which they cannot acquire through open competition" hence the government took advantage of COVID 19 to muzzle the press as Manayiti (2020) argued. This was supported by Manayiti (2020) who argued that Chin'ono was arrested because of an exposé "which implicated the first family and ended Moyo's brief tenure as Health minister certainly rubbed the authorities the wrong way." In addition, Mafuka (2020) argued that "Hopewell is a small fish in the scheme of things, but he has stepped on big toes." Manayiti (2020) further noted that this was not surprising as the Zimbabwean government has a history of protecting and rewarding the corrupt and this time around, the government was simply out to defend criminals as usual:

The harsh treatment of journalist Hopewell Chin'ono has shown the extent to which President Emmerson Mnangagwa can go to protect those robbing future generations of their wealth through unbridled corruption.

The private press further argued that Chin'ono's arrest was part of a government ploy to instill fear in journalists "by classifying any critics as enemies of the state" (Manayiti, 2020). As a result, Manayiti argued that "very few people are courageous enough to expose corruption because of the big price they would have to pay." By failing to applaud Chin'ono for exposing the corruption scandal, Manayiti actually wondered whose interests the government was protecting "by activating its propaganda machinery, which churned out all sorts of threats and started calling for Chin'ono's arrest." The synecdochic approach taken here to classify Chin'ono's arrest as representative of "greater evil" not only in Zimbabwe but across Africa shows the deep-seated mistrust in government structures by the private press. This lack of trust is fundamental to the maintenance of a fractured journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe. The public press has high levels of trust in the government, while the private press does not.

In the private press, Hopewell Chin'ono was thus positioned as an impactful investigative journalist holding the government accountable through Twitter. His incarceration was thus part of the government's ploy to silence the press and protect criminals. As has been argued elsewhere, this shows the private press's persistent lack of trust in the government. The private press is suspicious of the government's intentions. This section has thus shown how the fractured journalistic interpretive community characteristic of the Zimbabwean legacy news media that arose in early 2000 has persisted to the new dispensation and is playing out in digital journalism debates. Also central to

digital news media debates is the challenge of regulating practices such as citizen journalism. Previously, this has always proven to be a challenge because in the face of perceived potential litigation, citizen journalists tend to go underground and become anonymous making it difficult to enforce the law (Sabao & Chingwaramusee, 2017). The other challenge associated with regulating digital platforms is balancing the law with freedom of expression rights (Semuju, 2017). This is in addition to the problem associated with the fact that digital platforms allow citizens in their numerous numbers to broadcast from anywhere, sometimes outside the jurisdiction of national laws, complicating such regulations (see Batist, 2010; Skjerdal, 2011). Furthermore, the central element in this whole debate is the government's hand in the public press. It is easier to see that following government reshuffling of editors at Zimpapers, the publicly controlled press took the government stance, reneging on their colleagues in the public press.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has thus used two case studies, the *Daily News* closure and Hopewell Chin'ono's arrest to demonstrate the toxicity of news media polarization in Zimbabwe, which has fractured the country's journalistic interpretive community. In the first case, the public press celebrated the closure of the *Daily News*, which is an extreme case in news media history while again, in the second case, the public press expressed the same disapproval. These developments echo Hanitzsch et al.'s (2019) argument that under circumstances where the news media support a regime confronted with challenges of political and economic liberalization, journalists respond in a fragmented manner to challenges threatening their professional jurisdiction. In this instance, because the public press serves the government of the day, as outlined in Chapter 5, it could not stand in

solidarity either with the *Daily News* or Hopewell Chin'ono. Again, as shown in previous chapters, this is because public press journalists have interests to protect that go beyond journalistic autonomy. These interests are both political and economic. As such, the challenges confronting journalistic professionalization in Zimbabwe are deep-seated. These challenges, as shown in the next chapter, undermine all efforts that the press try to take to unite themselves. The next chapter shows how even collective memory (Zelizer, 1992, 1993), a tool that has been known to unite journalists, faces serious constraints because even in death, Zimbabwean journalists cannot stand together.

## Chapter 9

### **Collective memory as a community (re)building and maintenance tool:**

#### **Opportunities and limitations**

The last four chapters have focused on how Zimbabwean journalists have been fractured into different camps largely at the mercy of a confluence of political interests arising in a postcolonial society, dividing them into public and private press journalists. However, this narrative would be incomplete if it were to end here because the identity of journalists goes beyond their professional organizations, even their beats, and suppresses journalistic agency. As a collective, journalists belong to an interpretive community that goes beyond even the idea of the profession (Zelizer, 1992, 1993), which means their association is not necessarily bound by their employer boundaries as the previous chapters may imply. According to Zelizer (1992, 1993) at the heart of the journalistic interpretive community is the discourse that journalists share with each other beyond channels of their professional organizations. Also central to this discourse is how it builds journalistic authority that unites them into a community (Kitch, 2002; Zelizer, 1992). This discourse, according to Zelizer (1993), proliferates around key events that she calls critical incidents, moments when journalists question the logic and standards of their practice. The discourse, as she explains, comes in two forms: in the local mode of interpretation, when journalists assess an event from a particularistic perspective or in the durational discourse when it emerges as collective memory. Because previous chapters have looked at how Zimbabwean journalists reacted to certain events such as the *Daily News* shut down in a fragmented manner in the local mode of interpretation, the chapter turns now to collective memory to assess how they use it either as a tool to unite or divide themselves.

Collective memory, according to Edy (1999), comes in three different forms: commemorations/anniversary journalism; historical analogies; and historical contexts. Commemorations can be event oriented, anniversary reflections or chance commemorations, as in the moment of death (see Carlson, 2006, 2007; Carlson & Berkowitz, 2011). Historical analogies, on the other hand, attempt to connect the past to the present through comparison while historical contexts explain how the present came about. Historical contexts are thus good for use as a standard of measurement especially by journalists (Zelizer, 1992, 1993). One thing that all these forms of collective memory have in common is that they have an effect on the extent to which members see themselves as a community or not (Edy, 1999). At the same time, following this dissertation's discursive approach, this chapter also considers collective memory as a socialization tool that recruits and initiates new journalists into the journalistic institutional framework, culture, and community by sharing occupational myths to maintain occupational mythology (Hanitzsch, , et al., 2019). As a socialization tool, collective memory is thus a teaching tool about the dos and don'ts of journalism, drawing boundaries of who belongs and who does not, as well as setting standards of appropriate practice.

Cognizant of the above functions of memory, this chapter turns to how Zimbabwean journalists use three different forms of collective memory – commemorations/anniversaries; historical analogies; and historical contextualization – to understand how they either bring themselves together or move themselves apart through shared discourse that builds their journalistic authority. Focus is on their sources of journalistic authority and the narratives that they employ in building it up. Narrative is a central feature in collective memorialization as it can either build authority of some people

or annihilate them through omission (Zelizer, 1990, 1992). In her previous studies, Zelizer (1990) has given three different forms of narratives: synecdoche, where one part is used to represent the whole; omission, where narrative omits certain aspects of history; and personalization, where particular journalists use their presents as eyewitnesses to build their personal authority. This chapter is not necessarily bound by these narratives but looks at the Zimbabwean context in its context.

Below, the chapter is organized into three broad sections: “Collective memory battles of inclusion and exclusion”; “Collective memory battles of continuity and discontinuity”; as well as “Anniversary journalism: Positioning the press.” The first two sections look at obituaries of Zimbabwean veteran journalists as a form of chance commemoration while the last is a look at how the country’s press positions itself through anniversary articles featuring the *News Day*, *The Standard*, and *The Herald*. Because the chapter is examining the obituaries of many different veterans, it will introduce each of them as an object of analysis as the sections unfold. Two groups of narratives dominate this analysis: narratives of inclusion and exclusion, as well as narratives of continuity and discontinuity. The chapter starts with a look at how Zimbabwean journalists use narratives of inclusion and exclusion to define who is a journalist and who is not, while legitimating or delegitimizing certain practices and individuals.

### **Collective memory battles of inclusion and exclusion**

The Zimbabwean collective memory narratives of inclusion and exclusion are connected by how narrators use discourses of persecution as a source of journalistic authority. What differs however, is the source of that persecution, and how this fractures them into different communities based on how they represent different causes. As such, the

narratives legitimize different forms of journalistic standards and qualities. On one hand, the narrative of inclusion builds journalistic authority by portraying how both public and private press journalists are subject to state persecution and abuse. On the other hand, the narrative of exclusion is a debate about who qualifies as a true journalist or not in the Zimbabwean media landscape. At the same time, narratives of continuity and discontinuity also portray how the legacy left by deceased veteran journalists continues to live on while at the same time, it dies due to the changing political landscape. These conflicting narratives show both the potential and limitations of collective memory as an authority and community building tool. Below, the section starts with narratives of inclusion.

### **Narratives of inclusion: Remembering Zimbabwe's journalistic martyrs**

Celebrated through the narrative of inclusion are those deceased journalists, who through their work, endured one form of persecution or another at the hands of the state. This could have been arrest, torture, and detention at the hands of the security forces or state sponsored loss of employment. This narrative is titled “narrative of inclusion” because it is not necessarily based on whether the journalist was working for the public or privately controlled press, suffice to say in line with the journalists’ interpretive fracture, obituaries appear in the newspapers where the deceased worked. What is remembered the most is what they endured, how they survived it, and what that means for the journalistic community in Zimbabwe. Several deceased journalists have endured harassment at the hands of the security forces in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe and other Southern African countries pre-Zimbabwe’s independence, but the degree of this persecution varies.

What also makes this discourse inclusive is that it openly calls for unity among journalists. Upon his death in 2017, after working as a journalist for 60 years, in both



Zambia and Zimbabwe, as editor in both publicly and privately controlled news media in the latter in a career spanning 60 years, Bill Saidi was remembered for calling for journalistic unity. According to veteran Zimbabwean journalist, Geoff (Nyarota, 2017b), writing in the publicly controlled *Herald*, Saidi was known for telling journalists: “We should cultivate the sort of familiarity that ensures we recognize how great it is to build the nation.” According to Nyarota for Saidi, political affiliation or employer did not matter here as he said: “It is healthy for all of us in the fraternity, whichever side we are on, to remain close — not to the extent of exchanging valuable corporate secrets or explosive ‘inside’ titbits.” He was even quoted explaining what this journalistic unity meant:

This is to know that there is no formula that could set us apart — a formula of THEM vs US, two camps fighting like dogs over a piece of discarded meat. We are all on one side — perhaps not the side of the angels, but The Good Side — the side that wishes the country well, that would not betray the country for anything, the side that would not conceal any dark secrets from the people, or anything that is going on everywhere in their country, including its darkest, ugliest side. (Nyarota, 2017b)

It is with this in mind that in the paragraphs below, this section begins with those who were subjected to the most severe forms of harassment to move toward those who endured the less severe, but all with a focus on how Zimbabwean journalists build journalistic authority out of these narratives of persecution.

One source of journalistic authority from persecution in Zimbabwe is not necessarily the abuse itself, but its gravity. The more severe the persecution, the more validation or journalistic authority is derived from the incident, especially for journalists

who served in the private press. This can be illustrated by looking at how Mark Chavunduka, a former *Standard* editor who died in 2002, is remembered as a courageous journalist for having endured torture from Robert Mugabe's government. As memorialized by *The Standard* in its obituary "Chavunduka: Gallant Son of Zimbabwe Media" (2017) reproduced as part of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, the paper recollected how the deceased, together with his Chief reporter, Ray Choto, "were subjected to electric shocks on their genitals, hands and feet by military interrogators, and had their heads submerged in drums of water." *The Standard* had reported of a rebellion by Zimbabwean soldiers against the government over the deployment of their fellow 14,000 colleagues to the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For having undergone this horrific experience, Chavunduka is remembered for "his historic display of journalistic nerve which saw him endure painful detention and torture along with his chief writer, Ray Choto" ("Chavunduka: Gallant Son of Zimbabwe Media," 2017). As Chavunduka later narrated the story himself in a book chapter (see Chavunduka, 2002) before he passed on, the military police did not accuse them of falsehoods, but wanted to know the source of their news story. As *The Standard* remembered, because of his courage, under Chavunduka, the paper became a symbol of resistance, exposing corruption and intimidation under Robert Mugabe's government.

One journalistic quality foregrounded in the above narrative is the courage to hold the government accountable by exposing corruption. While courage may be promoted in other contexts, in the Zimbabwean case it carries a different meaning. It is courage in the face of death. Bill Saidi also suffered a similar fate in post-independence Zimbabwe when he was arrested by the Zimbabwe Republic Police after publishing a story in the privately

controlled *Daily News* alleging that police cars were used in looting commercial farm property during the Fast Track Land Reform program. What was severe in Saidi's case is that he was diabetic and time in the cells threatened his health, if not life. Recollecting their ordeal in the public press, Nyarota (2017), who was arrested together with Saidi, argued that they were saved by their factual reporting. He recounted that the "police hierarchy was far from amused but what we published was the copper-bottom truth, backed by indisputable evidence, images recorded by our photographer." This is legitimization of both the journalistic quality of courage, and the ethics of truth. This is not only meant to legitimize the deceased, but to set it up as a community standard for living journalists.

Also key in building journalistic authority from persecution in memorializing the deceased is the prominence of the abuse. This prominence can be derived from the status of the tormentor. A good example is how Bill Saidi, known for being denied citizenship in both Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Zambia, and Malawi over his work became eminent after the Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda publicly denounced him and called for his deportation at a press conference. According to Zimbabwean veteran journalist Stanely Mushava (2017), also writing in the publicly controlled *Herald*, Saidi's crime was writing and publishing a story without the president's permission. Kaunda was so angry he said: "Why doesn't the person who wrote this go back to his country?" According to Nyarota (2017), this denouncement by Kaunda was a high level kind of distinction that no other journalist had achieved in Zimbabwe. Nyarota recounts that this "was a ground-breaking incident that Saidi spoke of or wrote about with elation in newspaper articles after his return on Zimbabwe's attainment of independence in 1980." Nyarota himself does not hide that persecution by the leadership is indeed a source of journalistic authority by arguing in the

same obituary that “No journalist will ever please all readers, however. So it was with William Sylvester Saidi.” This goes back to Zelizer's (1992) argument that journalists don't assess themselves in terms of how they affect their audience, but what matters to themselves, and that is what unites them as an interpretive community.

What is also significant in building journalistic authority from discourses of persecution is an explanation of how the deceased reporters came to annoy the authorities during their careers. This was asserted to be something in their character beyond the case of persecution itself. In the case of Saidi, Mushava (2017) argued that the late journalist had “characteristically managed to make himself a smoke in Kaunda's nostrils with his insistent autonomy.” For this, Saidi was remembered as a fearless journalist who would tell a story without fear or favor, a non-conformist streak questioning authoritarianism using a bare-knuckle approach to journalism (Mushava, 2017; Nyarota, 2017b). Implicitly, this is legitimation of journalistic qualities of fearlessness, and legitimation of journalistic autonomy. Without saying it, these tales or journalistic mythologies, as Hanitzsch et al. (2019) would put it, serves not only to tell young Zimbabwean journalists of the challenges that await them, but the qualities they need to overcome. What is also inclusive about these narratives is the source of their publication. Saidi's obituaries here were published in the state-controlled *Herald*, one of them written by Nyarota, a man the state once described as an enemy of the people.

Other journalists to have suffered deportations are Father Michael Traber, a Swiss born veteran journalist under Rhodesia who passed on in 2006 back in Switzerland, and Ezekiel Makunike, another veteran journalist and early journalism trainer in post-independence Zimbabwe who passed on in 2012. Both journalists were hounded out of

Rhodesia in 1970. According to Zimpapers' journalist, Chipo Sabeta (2006) Father Traber, as editor of now defunct *Moto*, had published a cartoon "depicting a White man's hands squeezing out blood from the head of a Black man" which led to his deportation for "making mockery of the colonial government's policies aimed at oppressing and marginalizing the black majority,". For this, Father Traber is remembered for pro-democratic communication, standing up for Blacks, as well as advocating for social change. In general, "Right wing Rhodesians hated him and saw him as a threat for supporting the cause for Black liberation and nationalism that was sweeping across the region at the time." For almost a similar case, Ezekiel Makunike, according to *Herald's* Features, Health, and Society Editor Roselyine Sachiti (2012) had to escape to Zambia after a tip off that the police were after him over a story critical of the establishment that he had written. He had published an editorial comment, as editor of *Umbowo* (evidence), calling for the arrest of Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith, which according to Sachiti (2012) "shook the very foundation of white power and the edition was sold out, leading to a reprint. It placed Makunike under government surveillance." One common thread here among these deceased journalists who suffered deportation is what they stood for, that is the fight for political change to bring about a democratic society. In post-independence Zimbabwe, the same fight, personified by the likes of Mark Chavhunduka has continued as the change of government in 1980 did not bring substantial democratic improvement. The Robert Mugabe government continued with the colonial policies of arresting and deporting journalists, and even took things a gear up by torturing them.

Termination of employment over editorial differences is another form of persecution upon which journalistic authority is built for Zimbabwe's deceased veteran

journalists. This loss of employment comes in various forms. It can be by dismissal, especially from the government press, where editors are notoriously fired for failure to toe the government line, or a news media organization goes out of business either because it has been bombed, shut down by the government or folds due to economic challenges. One journalist who was unfairly dismissed at the hands of the government was Bornwell Chakaodza, a veteran Zimbabwean journalist who had worked in the publicly and privately controlled news media. Chakaodza, according to veteran Zimbabwean journalist and news media entrepreneur Mathew Takaona (2012), writing in the privately controlled *NewsDay* was dismissed from *The Herald* for failing to toe the government's line as then Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo did not agree with his editorial stance in 2000 (Peta, 2001). In a synecdochic style, Takaona (2012) noted that Chakaodza's case "was not the only story of unfair dismissal of the time and neither was it the most touching, there were hundreds other journalists and media workers whose careers were shattered at the stroke of a pen." However, Takaona (2012) argued that he chose to narrate this story for posterity, "because those who saw the pain, suffering, hopelessness, dejection and condemnation of professionals to second citizens and menial workers in foreign lands would not want to see a repeat of such in a country so rich in resources." While Chakaodza's obituary was published in the privately controlled press, Saidi's, written by Nyarota (2017) and published in the publicly controlled press, also narrated how he ended up being offered the post of Group Features and Supplements editor after his dismissal as editor of the government controlled *Sunday News*. Thus, what is holding all these journalists as members of the same interpretive community is the commonality of their persecution at the hands of the state, whether one was working for the private or publicly controlled press.

As with deportation and torture cases above, what is significant about these journalists is not just the memorialization and chronicling of their misfortune but the reasons why they lost their jobs and how they handled the issue. One reason Chakaodza could not survive in the public media, according to Takaona (2012), is because he “was a journalist who would not take orders from politicians,” hence his fallout with information minister Jonathan Moyo, which led to his dismissal. Zimbabwean freelance journalist Desmond Kumbuka (2012) also described Chakaodza as a round peg in a square hole, because he was a man of a “fiercely independent personality, who became increasingly disillusioned by the excesses of a state bureaucracy that seemed preoccupied with its own survival while pretending to be driven by public interest.” As a result, according to Kumbuka (2012), BC, as Chakaodza was known, “opted out of that system, turning his back on the privileges that came with government office to become a full-time media consultancy.” That is, he moved away from both the Zimbabwean government and Zimpapers system. After his dismissal from *The Herald*, as recounted by Takaona (2012), Chakaodza just took the termination of his employment “in his stride.” This is even though he “had children to look after...a lifestyle to maintain. He was a very educated man and one of the best journalists in the country...” The same was with Saidi. After all that he went through, including dismissal as editor of the *Sunday News*, ending up at the *Daily News*, he “soldiered on, guided by his own ideals of democracy, fairness and justice” (Nyarota, 2017b). Mushava (2017) also acknowledged that “in as far as the ideas inform the experiences, Saidi feverishly espouses democracy and press freedom.” In a way, this is also implicit legitimation of journalistic qualities like resilience and ideals such as democracy, fairness, and justice. These democratic ideals are thus presented as sacrosanct,

whatever the scenario and journalists derive authority, for the living and the deceased from holding onto these ideals on behalf of the people despite the persecution.

Persecution did not only come in the form of dismissal, arrest, torture, and deportation; it also included press attacks. When the public press learnt that Chakaodza was appointed editor for *The Standard* in 2002, according to Takaona (2012) it subjected him to “publication of a derisive series of full-page articles against him.” Takaona argued that this attack on his person was unwarranted, unprecedented, and shocking.” Chakaodza was neither the first, nor the last though to endure these press attacks. At the tail end of his career, according to Nyarota (2017), Saidi was once mocked as a pauper by the ruling party mouthpiece, *The Patriot*. *The Patriot* described Saidi as “a pauper who suffers from the Kwashiorkor of failure to embrace the freedom that independence brought to him and the rest of Africa’s progressive minds.” Nyarota admitted that “*The Patriot* was correct though in characterizing Bill Saidi as a pauper, but only in the sense of being totally impecunious after he devoted 60 years to active journalism.” Nyarota (2017) contrasts this to how rich he was career wise as till “the time of his holiday in Zambia, during which he succumbed to death in Kitwe, Saidi was still an active columnist in the *Daily News*, a role he played going back to the founding of the newspaper in 1999.” Nyarota further added that Saidi was morally upright, hence “he died a poor man...far away from the opulent lifestyles of the corrupt politicians he routinely lambasted.” Reflecting on the ruling party mouthpiece’s attack on Saidi, Nyarota responded that “any man who is maligned by the weekly tabloid, *The Patriot*, must be a progressive and patriotic citizen.” This positioning further legitimates Zimbabwean journalists as the one who wish the country well as argued by Saidi during his life as they are the ones who are morally upright than the corrupt



politicians. This moral goodness is also illustrated by how journalists continue earning poor salaries when politicians are leading wealthy lives out of corruption.

Zimbabwean journalists, especially those from the private press, also memorialized their deceased veterans for how they indirectly but stoically endured persecution from the state, as attacks on their news media organizations passed onto them. In memory of Assistant Editor for the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) Ray Matikinye, who died in 2020, journalist Noah Pomo (2020) chronicled how the deceased veteran journalist had to sacrifice for *The Daily News* against all odds:

Through the perils of practicing journalism, he raised his family...yet through company-induced austerity measures one had to soldier on, at times for months without payment. Twice the Daily News was bombed. The presses were smashed. They were replaced with much financial deprivation to the workforce, a sacrifice perpetually ignored.

Generally, Matikinye was remembered for having endured a career “punctuated by the peak of crises in the economy, the media and the company” (Pomo, 2020). But according to Pomo (2020) Matikinye “laughed through crisis, *kuseka nhamo kunge rugare*, as they say in Shona...He laughed through it all...” The same is with Saidi who was appointed as *Daily News on Sunday* editor in 2003, a post he served for a few months before Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), the parent company was shut down by the government in 2003 (Nyarota, 2017b). Once again, the deceased Zimbabwean journalists here are legitimated for having endured all these vicissitudes on behalf of Zimbabweans. They are presented as martyrs.

This section has thus shown how Zimbabwean journalists build journalistic authority from discourses of persecution. This persecution includes torture, loss of employment, deportations, and arrests. These are tragedies suffered by journalists in both the publicly and privately controlled news media. What holds them together is the trope of persecution, which all of them endured despite the employer they worked for. This shows how these narratives supported inclusion, which goes back to Saidi's earlier point that all journalists are on the same side, no matter who they work for. The fact that some of these obituaries, delegitimizing the state's repressive actions, are granted space in the publicly controlled press speaks to that effort to build their community by telling stories that affect them all. However, the discourse is not so simple as some journalists remain entrenched in their polarized positions through narratives of exclusion.

#### **The narrative of exclusion: In memory of Zimbabwe's patriotic journalists**

The call for community building through obituaries among Zimbabwean journalists is not without controversy as boundaries are set over who qualifies to be a journalist and who does not. This can involve rationalizations of the deceased to make sure they fit into the journalistic interpretive community or emphasizing non-journalistic attributes as part of building authority for the deceased journalists. The second approach is a rebuff of the journalistic identity that qualifies one as a member of the interpretive community in favor of causes like patriotic journalism or the liberation struggle. This discourse of exclusion also involves emphasizing non-journalistic qualities over journalistic ones, in appreciation of certain causes. At the same time, this exclusionary narrative is also about setting boundaries of autonomy, fending off non-journalistic actors from the journalistic field.

Thus, this section looks at the limitations of collective memory in uniting journalists under politically charged and polarized conditions.

Contrary to the Zimbabwean Shona custom that *wafa Wanaka*, which means the dead have no blemish and the living should not say anything negative about them, Zimbabwean journalistic obituaries have been characterized with controversies over expulsion boundary work practices (Carlson, 2015). One controversial journalist was Charles Chikerema, a former *Herald Editor* who died in a heart attack after serving in the post for only nine weeks (“Proud Stalinist,” 1998). Chikerema, who was Robert Mugabe's nephew, joined *The Herald* in 1982, and as he rose through the ranks, he attempted to convert Zimpapers into a socialist publication (Nyarota, 2006; “Proud Stalinist,” 1998). Declaring himself a proud Stalinist, he promoted socialism in Zimbabwe and in 1997 Zimpapers management suspended him for promoting racism (“Proud Stalinist,” 1998). The government responded by reinstating him and dismissing the executive who had reprimanded him. It is against this background that his death in 1998 ignited debate over whether he qualified as a journalist or if he was more accurately a ruling party ZANU PF activist.

Controversy over Chikerema's status as a journalist arose after Bill Saidi (1998) in an article for the privately controlled *Zimbabwe Independent* published by Alpha Media Holdings (which is not part of this study but relevant to make reference to for the sake of this argument) argued that the deceased did not qualify to be in the community of “hallowed niche of editors.” In response to this criticism, Kenneth Mafuka (1998), a US-based Zimbabwean history professor, argued that Saidi had failed to see the dilemma that confronts “every writer, Black or White, who breathes African air.” Mafuka (1998) took

issue with Saidi's accusation that Chikerema had a "mild persecution mania." He argued that Chikerema's approach was justified because in "Africa, the games they play mean life and death, and somebody's livelihood is always at stake." Thus, the challenge here is that Zimbabwean journalists must make a choice about whether to support the government or criticize it. This makes a fractured interpretive community inevitable. In Mafuka's view, African journalists have to choose either to be on the side of the government or that of the White and business community. Mafuka put the dilemma this way:

If you are a White journalist and you place emphasis on the destruction of the economy, you ignore the truth that colonial economies did not benefit Blacks, no matter how efficient and well managed they may have been. If you place too much emphasis on White racism, you ignore the economic miracles the White man has been part of. (Mafuka, 1998)

The argument is fatalistic in the sense that either way, African journalists, Black or White, must choose a side, and whichever side they choose, they are damned. The uniqueness of this controversy, though, is that Mafuka (1998) attempted to fight for Chikerema's inclusion in the "hallowed niche of editors" from which Saidi (1998) had expelled him.

The preceding paragraph epitomizes the challenge associated with commemorating the lives of the public press' "patriotic journalists" (see Ranger, 2005), as for some, the pro-government cause they stood for matters more than being included in the interpretive community of journalists. This is what characterized the memory of Judith Makwanya, ZBC's veteran diplomatic correspondent, who passed on in 2019 while still on the US sanctions list for aiding the Robert Mugabe government as a reporter. While many criticized Judith Makwanya for aiding the regime, disqualifying her journalistic practice,

Munyaradzi Huni (2019) a veteran Zimbabwean journalist and former editor with Zimpapers, argued that many “people knew Sister Judy, but very few understood her.” The controversy around Judith Makwanya’s qualification as a journalist is documented by Zirugo (2021). Huni (2019) went on to argue that Judith worked for a cause, not applause. He praised her, arguing that “You lived to express and not to impress.” As such, according to Huni (2019), Judith Makwanya was a patriotic reporter. Huni (2019) even went further to argue that Judith Makwanya took her placement on the sanctions list as validation as she had said: “It shows we are doing something good for our country.” For this, Huni remembered Judith Makwanya as a patriotic journalist to the bone, who defended her country against mockery through broadcasting. This discourse of exclusion shows the malleability of memory work and uncertainties over journalism standards and mission in Zimbabwe. Compared to the section on narrative of inclusion, the case of Judith shows controversy around such concepts as patriotism. While one can argue that Zimbabwean journalists who suffered persecution for freedom are patriots, Judith was here positioned also as a patriot for enduring persecution from the US government.

At times, this discourse of exclusion is subtle and not openly contested as above. This discourse is characterized with rearrangement of the journalists’ life (Zelizer, 1990, 1992), omitting aspects that might have put the deceased at loggerheads with the state. In memory of Willie Musarurwa, the first Black editor for *The Sunday Mail* in post-independence Zimbabwe who died in 1990, *The Herald* in an article, “Cde Musarurwa: A Witty, Uncompromising Journalist” (2014) foregrounded his role as a politician and not as a journalist. *The Herald* article is conspicuous for its silence over how Willie Musarurwa was dismissed in 1985 after he exposed corruption at the nation’s airline, Air Zimbabwe

(Moyo, 2003). The article only refers to how he was dismissed over editorial controversies yet at the time Musarurwa was considered an embarrassment to the government by acting like an opposition editor and had to be fired. While the headline emphasized how he was a witty, uncompromising journalist, emphasis in the body of the article was on his life as a politician and freedom fighter more than a journalist. He was described as “a true patriot who loved his country enough to die for it.” Implicitly, by emphasizing how Musarurwa sacrificed his life during the liberation struggle, but going silent on his dismissal in 1985, the public press set the boundary that what was worth dying for was the fighting the wrongs of the colonial regime and not those by the post-independence government.

Obituaries are also taken as a platform to draw boundaries of journalistic autonomy from government involvement in the journalistic field. Bornwell Chakaodza, who was not only an editor for both the public and the private press, but also a senior civil servant at some point, was remembered for his stance against the government’s news media ownership. According to Takaona (2012), Chakaodza “always said when politicians took control of the media they did it for personal interests and not for the people.” Also remembered was Chakaodza’s advice on how to go about this in a non-confrontational way. According to Takaona (2012), Chakaodza’s advice to the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) was “to keep the union’s doors open and engage the government as much as possible.” This advice from Chakaodza shows how in Zimbabwe, politics is such a significant factor that cannot be ignored in discussions about media polarization, as well as resolving it to mend the journalistic interpretive community’s fracture. In this sense, collective memory serves as a boundary setting tool whereby it pushes back against government news media ownership to maintain editorial autonomy.

This section has thus considered how attempts to build a common journalistic interpretive community in Zimbabwe through collective memory are militated against by the malleability of memory itself. At the center of this controversy stand the ways in which terms like patriotism can be easily manipulated for different ends. There is thus a group of patriotic journalists who consider themselves different from those who have worked for both the public and the private press. This group remains entrenched in their positions so much that even in death, there is no hope for reunification. In the next section, the chapter turns to discourses of continuity and discontinuity.

### **Collective memory battles of continuity and discontinuity**

Contrary to the above two narratives, obituaries in Zimbabwe are also characterized with two other narratives of continuity and discontinuity. The narrative of continuity is about those journalists who never truly die as they continue to live through their legacy. On the other hand, the discourse of discontinuity is about how much the current crop of journalists measures itself negatively in asserting how it has deviated from previous practices or failed to learn from the departed. In relation to journalistic interpretive community building, the narrative of continuity builds journalistic community by emphasizing how the current crop learnt from the best, no matter who they worked for. On the other hand, the narrative of discontinuity regrets the current fractured journalistic interpretive community as a deviation from the community once built by the deceased journalists. Below, this section starts by looking at how Zimbabwean journalists use the discourse of continuity to legitimize not only the dead, but also themselves, in the process attempting to build their community.

### **The narrative of continuity: Journalists never die**

The narrative of continuity, as indicated above, is about how journalists portrayed the enduring legacy of deceased veteran journalists whose memory shall live forever, either through the way they shaped Zimbabwean media landscape by establishing professional journalism, or passed on their skills onto young journalists, thereby creating an enduring legacy. In addition, they are also remembered for how they shaped Zimbabwe as a society at large. This group of journalists was depicted as one that will always be remembered because they are a part of the country's history.

### ***Deceased journalists as part of institutional memory***

One enduring legacy that the deceased Zimbabwean journalists are remembered for is how they shaped the country's news media landscape and left it in a better shape as a respected profession. One journalist known to have forced everyone to respect journalism is Brian Chipoyera, former *Sunday Mail* business editor who passed on in 2012. He is known for having fought for the respect of journalists in Zimbabwe. At one point, as memorialized by Zimbabwean journalist Robert Mukondiwa (2012) he is said to have torn a speech by then Zimbabwean Minister of Information Nathan Shamuyarira at an event in the 1980s. Mukondiwa explains that after taking notes and being given the Minister's speech, at dinner time he was told that "Journalists are here to report and not to eat" which provoked him. He is said to have responded that "...it was rude to think journalists were to be used then seen as sixth-class citizens," and went on to argue that: "We are the Fourth Estate...Let me show you that we are important." At that point he tore the minister's speech and said "*Udza Shamuyarira anyore story yacho ega.*" (Tell Shamuyarira to write the story himself). It was at this point that the Minister intervened and made sure Chipoyera was



served dinner. Mukondiwa (2012) argued that “because of that we can say the man was the patron saint of food for journalists (and no doubt respect) up until this day. In legitimating this downside of Chipoyera’s temperamental character, Mukondiwa even goes against the Zimbabwean tradition that *wafa wanaka* which literally means the dead have no blemish hence everyone speaks glowingly of them. Mukondiwa argued that the deceased journalist could not escape from his factual reflection:

In journalistic culture, however, even Brian, in the afterlife, would be proud to know that the tenet of Veritas – truth, that guides our lives and our work, should guide the eulogies too when we go onto the other side. (Mukondiwa, 2012)

Chipoyera, then, is hereby taken not only as a vehicle to assert journalistic authority as the Fourth Estate, but also to emphasize the significance of truth as a guiding professional tenet. In this instance, the division among Zimbabwean journalists is forgotten to foreground how the deceased stood for everyone. By defying cultural practices that demand speaking glowingly about the deceased, truth is also symbolically portrayed as applicable to whatever situation without selectivity.

Then there are those journalists memorialized as paragons of professionalism in the Zimbabwean news media landscape. One thing to note, however, about this discourse of continuity is that at times it is manipulated for legitimacy purposes even where the virtues they embodied are not reflected in practice. Ezekiel Makunike is one veteran journalist remembered as the epitome of professionalism for his honesty, objectivity, and being a pillar in Zimbabwe’s quest for objective journalism and belief in editorial autonomy and ethics. Justin Mutasa, former Zimpapers Group Chief Executive Officer, who was Makunike’s nephew, recollected how upon his appointment as Zimpapers CEO, the veteran

journalist came to tell him to respect editorial autonomy, despite a well-documented history of editorial interference at Zimpapers (see Chuma, 2004). He told Sachiti (2012) what Makunike had told him: “First and foremost, he told me that newspapers belong to the editors, and I had come to Zimpapers to do the business side as the chief executive. I still abide by that. I do not interfere in editorial matters...” Mutasa further recounted to Sachiti how his uncle had also said “ethical journalism is the cornerstone of any newspaper. If you want people to read *The Herald* or other newspapers, write things as they are. Urge your editors because not doing so will affect the business of your newspapers.” Again, he repeated: “I still abide by that.” In the same line of ethical journalism, Willie Musarurwa is remembered for practicing “enquiring, responsible journalism in Zimbabwe” (“Cde Musarurwa: A Witty, Uncompromising Journalist,” 2014). Again, this claim is silent on how Musarurwa was dismissed from *The Sunday Mail* for exposing corruption leading him to be described as acting like an opposition journalist (see Chuma, 2004; Moyo, 2003). This is the other characteristic feature of collective memory: while being applied to rebuild journalistic authority, and subsequently unite journalists, it can be easily manipulated by anyone to legitimize their practices.

Other deceased journalists’ authority is legitimated based on how long they have served in the industry as pioneers in the field, leading to claims that they left a legacy as part of institutional memory. For example, *The Herald*, in its memory piece, “Cde Musarurwa: A Witty, Uncompromising Journalist” (2014), argued that Willie Musarurwa made an indelible contribution to Zimbabwean journalism merely out of his vast experience. In colonial Rhodesia, he edited the *African Weekly*, the *Bantu Mirror*, and *Parade Magazine*, before joining *The Sunday Mail* in the early 1980s. The paper argued

that Musarurwa's "distinguished involvement in the media which spans nearly four decades made him an unparalleled authority and media houses counted on him for well thought out contributions. He was often invited as a resource person on various journalism courses." The same is with Bill Saidi, who after successfully practicing as a journalist for 60 years, "lives on as a challenge of what is possible" (Nyarota, 2017). In the same category of journalism pioneers is also Father Traber who shaped the Zimbabwean journalism media landscape through the *Moto* magazine which he edited during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle for independence in the 1970s. According to Sabeta (2006) his death "robbed the (Zimbabwean) media of a rare breed of journalists that helped to shape and influence Zimbabwe's media landscape." The same is with Matikinye whom Pomo (2020) argued "departed with immense institutional memory and an impressive turn of phrase. A hard-working father." Accordingly, Pomo argues that:

Perhaps there are lessons for us to honor or at least respect those who installed the presses, in their lifetime. Journalism tends to devour its own children. The legacy of Muzambiringa (Ray Matikinye), his given middle name, will live on. We just endure the fallout. (Pomo, 2020).

Thus, the authority of these deceased journalists emanates from having come earlier. In addition, the continuity of their legacy emanates from the fact that whatever they did in their career, has shaped the Zimbabwean media landscape. Here, once again, it does not matter whether one worked for the public or the private press, their legacy still stays.

Apart from being pioneers, Zimbabwean journalists are also remembered for concrete contributions, such as shaping beats that they made for the journalism profession in the country. Father Traber, and former Zimpapers' editor Paul Mambo are memorialized

for having led in advancing well-rounded coverage that includes marginalized communities. According to Sabeta (2006), Father Traber “advocated for complete media coverage encompassing the remote and the marginalized rural areas” as part of his ambition to see a democratized communication system. According to veteran Zimbabwean journalist Tumeliso Makhurane (2013), “Mambo's favorite beat for much of his reporting years at *The Sunday News* was the districts’ coverage where he would endeavor to give the rural communities a voice through his reporting.” Mambo is also remembered for being the first editor to have a gender page in *The Sunday News*. Thus, these veterans left a legacy of new reporting beats.

At the same time, some veterans are legitimized for having shaped the country’s news media environment by fighting for press freedom. In its article, “Chavunduka: Gallant Son of Zimbabwe Media” (2017), *The Standard* recognized Chavunduka as a “champion for media freedom in Southern Africa.” The same is with Bill Saidi, Iden Wetherell, and Bornwell Chakaodza whom Takaona (2012) argued bore “scars from a media environment that can sometimes be inhumanely hostile,” but remained a regular for the World Press Freedom Day commemorations. Masunda (2021) also memorialized Wetherell for having received a prestigious award “at the UN Headquarters in New York City for ‘his enterprise, courage and leadership in advancing the freedom and responsibility of the Press.’” By remembering the likes of Mambo and Father Traber as leaders in giving coverage to marginalized communities, there is an implicit message that there is something that matters to Zimbabwean journalists beyond the polarizing political subjects. This is not to say such subjects cannot be polarizing too.

What emerges from this section is that there are many avenues for a journalists' legacy to be remembered as part of institutional memory. These include leaving journalism a much-respected profession or leaving an enduring legacy of journalistic professionalism. Here professionalism is defined in terms of honesty, objectivity, editorial autonomy. In addition, experience alone also lets one be part of institutional memory by virtue of having come earlier. Others become part of institutional memory through concrete journalistic interventions like introducing new beats, widening sphere of coverage to include marginalized communities, or fighting for press freedom. This kind of memorialization is further testimony to Zelizer (1992, 1993) that journalists legitimate themselves on the basis of issues that are of concern to their community. Here those concerns include issues of professional respect, editorial autonomy, and innovation like introducing new beats. In addition, it is noticeable here that while institutional belonging is polarizing, Zimbabwean journalists implicitly try to rebuild their journalistic interpretive community by going beyond the employers that the deceased worked for.

***Journalists continue to live through their mentees and trainees***

Central to the narrative of continuity is also how deceased journalists passed their legacy onto the next generation. This is both a narrative legitimating the legacy of the deceased veterans as well as build authority for the living journalists by demonstrating how they have been mentored by the best. In recalling the memory of Ezekiel Makunike as one of the first journalism trainers in independent Zimbabwe, noted: "Today, the Press carries his obituary not necessarily because it outlived him, but he will live with it as he trained the greatest minds in journalism that carry his legacy for many years to come." She argued that being "the good journalist he was, he 'wrote' his own obituary" through the thousands

of students that he taught from whom no one can delete his memory. Makunike was remembered as a mentor of many journalists, a man who was passionate about training, and even produced a regional editor, Makuwerere Bwititi who edited *The Southern Times* at one time. *The Southern Times* is a Southern African regional newspaper launched in 2004 as a 50-50 joint venture between the Namibia New Era Publications Corporation and Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Limited (Dentlinger, 2005; Sachiti, 2012). Also remembered the same way was Chakaodza, whom Takaona (2017) argued left a legacy as an excellent writer, a media tutor and editor of repute. This is because Chakaodza was “a journalist with *The Herald* in the late ’70s, a journalism lecturer...” This memorialization implicitly gives Zimbabwe’s current crop of a fractured journalistic interpretive community a common background they cannot escape. Again, this is a background that goes beyond their employers.

What is also valued the most here are the values that these veteran journalists taught the young reporters. These values mainly center on ethical practices like shunning cheque book journalism. According to Sachiti (2012), Makunike “always told journalists to shun giving politicians the space to settle personal battles and dancing along to the tune of ‘cheque book journalism’ because politicians must fear, and not control journalists.” She argued that this is what he was known for. Similarly Judith Makwnya, according to Terrence Mapurisana (2019), a colleague with whom she shared an office, mentored many young journalists stressing “the importance of kindness and hard work.” Mentorship also included taking young journalists onto the field and teaching them how to cover news stories. Makhurane (2013) cherished how Paul Mambo taught him how to cover political assignments: “Mambo took me under his wing to cover a political meeting addressed by

Forum Party of Zimbabwe president Dr Enock Dumbutshena at the Presbyterian Church along Jason Moyo Street in Bulawayo.” This mentorship includes passing skills by shaping training modes used. Father Traber, according to Sabeta (2006) “contributed immensely towards the development of media in Zimbabwe and on the continent through the training of journalists and writing of numerous books of journalism in Africa.” Once again, this is a presentation of values that cuts across Zimbabwe’s journalistic polarization.

The implication of the above training and mentorship as a legitimation tool is that current journalists, that is those who interacted with the deceased, learnt from the best and inherited the skills and qualities of these great journalists. For instance, there is the implication that journalists taught by Chakaodza would also be resilient as he was in enduring hardships that come with the profession as he just took for instance his own “dismissal in his stride” (Takaona, 2012). Other values that these great journalists represented include journalistic independence, humility which Chakaodza, according to Takaona, embodied. Cherishing the tutoring done by the likes of Makunike also means that by implication he passed on his prolific writing skills (Sachiti, 2012), while the likes of Munyuki whom veteran journalist Chiza Ngwira (2007) said had a zeal for training young journalists means he passed on his news spotting skills to them as he was known for possessing “the nose of a bloodhound when it came to sniffing out stories.” By implication, this is a strategy for setting journalistic standards and emphasizing important skills for the profession as well as telling the audiences why they should be trusted with telling the country’s stories: they were hewn from the best mentors.

Broadly, cherishing the training and mentorship from the country’s deceased journalists implicitly unites all Zimbabwean journalists as members of the same

interpretive community despite their fracture since they came from the same background. Thus, underneath their fractured community, there is a common foundation which shapes them all.

***Deceased journalists will continue to live as part of national memory***

Apart from having shaped Zimbabwe's news media landscape, the deceased are also memorialized for their national impact which makes them part of national memory. What is emphasized is how the deceased are remembered for making a positive impact on Zimbabwean society. Following Bill Saidu's death, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), a political party based in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second largest city, in a statement said the deceased "helped shape our greater society in a positive way and we shall forever cherish and celebrate a life well lived to benefit humanity in one different way." This is because Saidu's "passion for the profession went beyond the glory of the byline. It was driven more by his desire to make a difference," as argued by Nyasha Nyakunu (2017), another veteran journalist. ZAPU's condolence message further legitimized Saidu's public interest emphasis. According to Nyarota (2017), Saidu always insisted that any "journalist who addresses issues of interest, importance and relevance to the public will make his newspaper's readers happy, especially if he or she does so professionally, while digging deep where other reporters merely scratch the surface." For Saidu, this was a serious matter, and no story would pass without satisfying the public interest test. According to Nyakunu (2017), when asked about why a story would meet the public interest test: "You had to summon all your knowledge of news values and elements and the context of the obtaining economic and political environment on why the story was worthy of his consideration." Also remembered in the same fashion was Matikinye, whom



Pomo (2020) argued “wrote for posterity, defined our existence, probed our conscience, tickled our fancy and reminded us of our absurdity.” According to Pomo (2020), Matikinye did not just inform people about what had happened, but reminded them of how they “felt about it then and why.” This memorialization legitimates such journalistic values as the public interest and builds authority for reporting that is impactful.

Beyond just journalistic work, the deceased journalists were also remembered for advocating for social change, including fighting for the liberation of Zimbabwe and promoting good governance through being critical of both the colonial and post-independence government. Father Traber is particularly known for his advocacy for social change as memorialized by Sabeta (2006):

Between 1962 and 1970, he was the managing director of Mambo Press in Gweru, publishers of Moto Magazine, which strongly advocated for social justice and offered the country’s two main liberation movements a platform to air their grievances.

The above roles positioned Father Traber as a fighter for Black liberation which turned him into an anti-racism hero. According to Sabeta (2006), Father Traber’s efforts endeared him to the local populace so much that “by the time he left Rhodesia he was given a hero’s farewell at the then Salisbury Airport by many Blacks and other White liberals who believed in his prophetic dream of freedom and equality.” Iden Wetherell was also remembered for his role in promoting good governance in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. According to Masunda (2021), Wetherell “fearlessly and courageously took it upon himself to speak up for and on behalf of the downtrodden on a whole host of retrogressive policies which were then being vigorously and relentlessly pursued by the [colonial Rhodesian

Prime Minister Ian] Smith administration.” According to Masunda (2021) Wetherell did the same with Robert Mugabe’s administration from 1980 till 2017. This memorialization again implicitly sets the standards of consistency, roles of representing the downtrodden, as well as qualities such as fearlessness and courage.

By and large, though, this section shows how beyond the journalistic interpretive community fracture in Zimbabwe, there is a far much greater role and contribution that the deceased made. This contribution, again, goes beyond who one once worked for, but is about shaping the story of Zimbabwe.

### **The narrative of discontinuity**

While the narrative of continuity emphasizes how the deceased journalists will continue to live through their mentees and trainees, as well as be remembered as part of institutional and national memory, the narrative of discontinuity emphasizes how there has been a break between the older interpretive community of the deceased and the current crop of journalists. It is a discourse that delegitimizes the current crop of reporters as a lost generation that did not learn from the greats because it fell prey to political polarization. The problem with this discourse though, usually typical with collective memory nostalgia (Usher, 2010), is that it glorifies that past and fail to fully interrogate and acknowledge the political challenges confronting the current crop of journalists. For instance, in as much as current journalists may wish to speak with one voice, research has already shown how the Zimbabwean government has captured Zimpapers through hiring and firing of editors, while the private press has also fallen to business and political interests (Chuma, 2004; Mukasa, 2003; Ruhanya, 2018). This is the context in which this narrative of discontinuity must be understood.

This narrative of discontinuity is nostalgic and regrets the current situation in the Zimbabwean journalism field, but at the same time implicitly invites the current crop to look back where they came from and return there. The discourse of discontinuity is characterized by a narrative that bemoans the state of journalistic interpretive community fracture among the current community of journalists as compared to the pre-2000 era when Zimbabwean journalists operated as a united community for example calling for news media reform (see Saunders, 1999). Following the death of Farai Munyuki, Chiza Ngwira (2007), former editor of the now defunct *Parade Magazine*, was nostalgic of “the good days when all journalists spoke with one voice be it in life or death.” He regretted how much time current journalists waste attacking each other and argued that “the divide among the scribes and media houses does not augur well for the profession. Journalists today spend much of their time tearing each other’s throat that will make our own fallen giant (Munyuki) turn in his grave.” Sunsleey Chamunorwa’s death was also used to criticize the blurred lines between journalism and politics today. Writing Chamunorwa’s obituary, Zimbabwean veteran journalist and public relations professional Ranga Mberi (2022) narrated how “Sunsleey had a puritan, almost naïve, view of the lines between journalists and political affiliation.” He illustrates this with an example of how once “he walked into the newsroom livid about a political story that he felt was too biased.” Nostalgically, he regretted how Sunsleey “would be out of place today, when lines between journalists and party commissars are not only blurred but celebrated.” This is a regret of how the current group of journalists failed to inherit the unitary journalistic interpretive community from their predecessors. This is a chastisement of today’s journalists for betraying the legacy. At the same time, it is a reminder that the current fracture must be resolved as it is not good

for the profession. Implicitly, there is a claim that if not for the profession, then journalists can be united for the sake of the legacy of the dead.

Contrary to the narrative of continuity which celebrates how today's journalists received the knowledge and skills from journalists of yester-year through mentorship, this discourse regrets how not enough efforts were made to allow the deceased journalists to impart their skills onto the current reporters. Reflecting on Saidi's exceptional command of the English language, Nyarota (2017) bemoaned that no opportunity was taken to have him groom young reporters:

For a man who was not a scholar of particularly outstanding erudition, Saidi's wordplay was truly remarkable. He was a veritable wordsmith, a linguistic giant whose outstanding skill could have been exploited in refining the writing skills of young journalists. Sadly, this did not happen, and Zimbabwe's journalism remained the poorer for this gross oversight.

The emphasis on this break between journalists of yester-year and those of today, is a rebuke of the purported fall in journalistic standards. In memorializing Bill Saidi, Nyarota (2017) explained that even though he died writing, those "familiar with Saidi's inimitable style of delivery must have detected a certain decline towards the end, compounded no doubt by the failure of a younger generation of sub-editors and proofreaders to correct elementary typos." This means the young generation of journalists failed to inherit Saidi's linguistic prowess. This is again a reminder of the best standard guiding the profession that current journalists need to emulate and revisit.

Beyond the purported fall in the skillset of the current set of journalists, there is another argument that there is also a fall in general standards of practice. Writing Bill

Saidi's obituary, Zimbabwean cultural critic and solutions journalist Stanely Mushava (2017) argued that even though "today's journalists may want to protest armchair bashing by veterans...the preponderance of NGO-speak and untested ear candy in the press may be a case for looking to the rock from which they were hewn." This is part of broader criticism against current journalists by veteran reporters who argue that the new group of scribes does not go out to find news stories but rely on what they are told by non-governmental organizations through press releases (see Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, 2014). Young journalists have responded to these veterans by criticizing them for being armchair critics. The fight thus is that young journalists must learn from the veterans. In other words, this means, today's journalists do not have Munyuki's nose of a bloodhound that facilitates spotting news (Ngwira, 2007) hence they have to rely on NGO press releases. This is again a reminder for current journalists to emulate the best standards from veterans, thereby rebuilding the country's journalistic community by emphasizing appropriate standards.

The regret in the above narrative deviates from the usual collective memorialization style which often emphasizes a narrative of continuity to build journalistic authority (see Carlson & Berkowitz, 2011). This narrative of discontinuity is an emphasis on how much the field has lost by failing to tap into the skills and experience of the deceased veteran journalist. This section has thus examined different narratives that Zimbabwean journalists apply while attempting to rebuild their interpretive community, while at the same time these are contested. Dominant in attempting to reunite Zimbabwean journalists into an interpretive community are the discourses of inclusion, continuity, and discontinuity while the discourse of exclusion features contestations over who qualifies as a journalist or not.

Discourses of continuity, inclusion, and discontinuity try to look at issues of concern to Zimbabwean journalists beyond the current fracture. While the current section concentrated on obituaries, the next two sections focus on anniversary stories and memoirs. Anniversary stories again illustrate the fracture in Zimbabwean journalism at an institutional level.

### **Anniversary journalism: Positioning the press**

Anniversaries are moments when news media organizations take time to reflect on the journey they have traveled, pivot into the future, and in the process build their journalistic authority (Kitch, 2002). Driven by this assumption, this section examines how Zimbabwean newspapers self-define in terms of traits, and journalistic roles under a repressive and polarized news media environment. The section investigates how *The Herald* self-defined in 2015, during Zimbabwe's 35<sup>th</sup> Independence Day anniversary. This section is very brief as *The Herald* does not give much. This is followed with a look into how *The Standard* reflected on its past during its 5<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> anniversaries in 2002 and 2017 respectively. This is combined with how the *NewsDay* memorialized its journey during its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. While the Zimpapers's section is brief, it remains important to examine as it reflects how it differs from the privately controlled press in terms of role conceptualization. The section thus starts with the Zimpapers part.

### **Zimpapers as the people's servant: 1980-2015**

In 2015, Zimpapers briefly reflected on the journey it had traveled since 1980 and positioned itself as a news media organization established to capture the African story. As a news organization established that traces its roots to colonial Rhodesia when the first

paper was established in 1891 (see Mararike, 1998; Saunders, 1999), Zimpapers' memorialization is a troubled one. It is memorialization that is characterized with tension between deriving authority from such a long history, as well as delegitimizing the pre-1980 operations to prop-up the current Zimpapers. This memorialization is characterized with both narratives of continuity and discontinuity as well as omission (Zelizer, 1990, 1992).

To prop up its authority as a nationalistic people-oriented publication, Zimpapers dissociates with the pre-1980 Rhodesia and Publishing Company. This is however problematic because as it tries to break up with the past, it still boasted of its "124 years of finding content, 35 years of it within the new Zimbabwe" which it claims gives it confidence that "it can continue to dominate its media markets as a content provider" ("Independence Supplement - The Zimpapers Journey: 1980 to 2015," 2015). Despite use of the 124-year history, insisted that RP&P was still limited in being truly Zimbabwean because its "staff came from South Africa in the early years and imports of immigrants from Britain filled a lot of vacancies from the 1930s right up to the 1960s." This critique allows Zimpapers to position the 1980s and the 1990s as years of consolidation after the government bought out the Arhus company using a \$6 million grant from the Nigerian government in order to indigenize the public press. In this "Independence Supplement - The Zimpapers Journey: 1980 to 2015" *The Herald* argued that the 51% shareholding by the government allowed the company to appoint new editors which ensured that "the controlling vision of each newspaper was now managed by a Zimbabwean with Zimbabwean eyes and goals." Based on this, *The Herald* argued that Zimpapers was established "with the intention of ensuring that the story of the African people is correctly captured and told." This positioning of Zimpapers as a company serving the needs of

Zimbabweans is problematic in how it sweeps over well documented incidents of state capture through the ministry of information that manifested in the hiring and firing of editors for failure to toe the government line (Mukasa, 2003; Rønning & Kupe, 2000; Saunders, 1999).

Apart from omitting its history of state abuse in order to build its authority as a people-oriented news media company, Zimpapers also erases the advantages it has from being state-affiliated to portray itself as a dynamic and diversified organization. Zimpapers attempted to build its authority by claiming how it diversified in 2012 and 2015 by establishing two radio stations: Star FM and Diamond FM respectively. These claims of diversification, while true, ignore how Zimpapers has been favored by the state in getting licenses over other publications due to its pro-state stance (Alfandika & Gwindingwe, 2021). At the same time, the company also ignores its earlier arguments against news media concentration raised by then Zimpapers reporter Mathew Takaona (1998) when the *Daily News* was established. Zimpapers also built up its profile as a dynamic organization that embraced digitalization early as it sought to transform “from a newspaper company to a content company that seeks to use all available platforms to publish suitable packages of content.” Again, this memorialization omits how Zimpapers’s even digital articles are only accessible from around 2012 whereas those by Alpha Media are available from as early as 2002. Zimpapers thus builds its journalistic authority by omitting problematic aspects of its history and propping up those elements that portray it in the positive light.

This is however different from how the privately controlled press publications: *The Standard* and the *NewsDay* positioned themselves. The privately controlled press relies on how they have been persecuted by the state and still maintained their dynamism in the face



of adversity. These different positionings show how Zimbabwe's leading news media organizations structurally promote journalistic interpretive community fractures by having different notions of what it means to serve the Zimbabwean people. Below, the section turns to how the privately controlled press, Alpha Media holdings, positions itself as a fighter for people's freedom, as its own way of serving Zimbabweans.

### **The champion of freedom: Alpha Media Holdings's (AMH) self-positioning**

Contrary to Zimpapers which positions itself as a publication that has arrived, Alpha Media Holdings's publications position themselves in terms of three aspects: character traits, the roles that they fulfill, and the challenges that they have endured. With these aspects, the papers also envision the future. The following brief sections start by looking at how Alpha Media Holdings publications position themselves as liberators of the people of Zimbabwe, a role which Zimpapers would consider irrelevant since independence was achieved in 1980.

The source of Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community fracture emanates from how Alpha media publications position itself as the alternative in relation to *The Herald*. During *The Standard's* 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002, the paper claimed that it had been established "to provide readers and advertisers with an alternative and credible source of news, entertainment, and leisurely Sunday reading," in its article "A Luta Continua" (2002). The year 2002 is part of the era that marked the beginning of media polarization in Zimbabwe, an era when the country's story became highly contested (Chuma, 2004; Willems, 2004) with Zimpapers focusing on giving a positive image of the country to both local and international audiences. This is why *The Standard* constructed its authority by claiming that it had been successful in being the alternative as evidenced by its increasing

print run from 10,000 copies in April 1997 to 50,000 in April 2002. The paper also prides itself for having achieved this goal under difficult circumstances characterized by:

...high production costs, growing unemployment, which meant less disposable income among potential readers, and official harassment which has since intensified with the introduction of pieces of legislation more draconian in nature than the notorious Law and Order Maintenance Act promulgated by the colonial government in 1960. (“A Luta Continua,” 2002).

Differentiating itself from Zimpapers, *The Standard* positioned itself as the alternative in terms of providing a public sphere for diverse voices, fighting for peace and justice, mobilizing people to continue fighting, and being a mirror of the Zimbabwean society.

Being the public sphere, as explained by the *NewsDay*, means providing a platform for people to debate ideas. During the paper’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the paper’s former editor, Wisdom Mudzungairi (2020), claimed that the publication “endeavors to offer a canvas upon which Zimbabweans showcase their best ideas to help transform the country into a knowledge-based society.” This role is considered significant in resolving the country’s polarization by allowing Zimbabweans to express their fears and desires. Mudzungairi argued that only “through a robust engagement will Zimbabweans emerge from the current polarization into a society characterized by high levels of tolerance.” In addition to being a public sphere, *NewsDay* also sets itself up as a Fourth Estate to reflect the Zimbabwean story as a mirror. In a message to the audience, Alpha Media Holdings CEO Kenias Mafukidze (2020) claimed that “in its decade of existence, *NewsDay* has been a polished mirror of our nation.” He even added that if as a nation we wish to run away from this mirror, it means the country must change its ways. In the words of Mudzungairi (2020) this

is part of the paper's "unparalleled commitment and dedication telling the unadulterated Zimbabwean story through this daily paper during an extremely difficult period." This is part of its role as a witness to Zimbabwean history as well as its chronicler. Mafukidze (2020) said "though the hours and minutes tick, *NewsDay* continues to write the first draft of our history. The good, the bad and the ugly. Our work involves writing the first draft of history." Positioning itself as the first drafters of Zimbabwean history, the *NewsDay* thus implicitly legitimates itself as the authority to retell the Zimbabwean story especially considering that it adheres to telling an accurate one. Implicit in this positioning is a rebuttal of Zimpapers' positioning of itself as the newspaper best able to tell the Zimbabwean and African story correctly. Here, Alpha Media claims to simply reflect the story as a mirror which echoes role conceptualizations from chapters 5 and 6.

Apart from reflecting Zimbabwe as a mirror, Alpha Media publications, both the *NewsDay* and *The Standard*, present themselves as fighters for the freedom of Zimbabweans. This also includes fighting for press freedom, defending justice, transparency, as well as being a voice for the voiceless. In his message to the audience, Mafukidze (2020) set the boundary that the *NewsDay* is not in the business of politics, but "in the business of erecting a solid wall in defense of justice, transparency and fairness." He argued that only those who violate these ideals cry foul. This fight for freedom also includes fighting for press freedom. *The Standard* editor Kholwani Nyathi was quoted by investigative journalist Tinotenda Munyukwi (2017), narrating that "*The Standard* had been a champion of Press freedom and one of its past editors, Bornwell Chakaodza, was known to be on the forefront, advocating for Press freedom in Zimbabwe." In fighting for freedom, *The Standard* also positioned itself as a mobilizer, giving Zimbabweans hope to

continue fighting. In the 2002 anniversary article for *The Standard*: “A Luta Continua” (2002), the paper’s founding editor Mark Chavunduka said “all Zimbabweans who cherish the ideals of a free, open and democratic society should close ranks to fight to the end the lawlessness, corruption, and anarchy prevailing in the country. There is power in numbers.” This is part of the paper’s role as a voice for the voiceless as pointed out in *The Standard* article: “The Standard: 20 Years and Not Out” (2017). Once again, role conceptualization emerges here fracturing Zimbabwe’s media institutions in collective memorialization. This is because Alpha Media publications are in a liberation mode for freedom, while Zimpapers is in a corrective mode to tell the African story correctly.

Alpha Media publications don’t just draw their authority from being the first drafters of the country’s history, it claims that its history is intertwined with the history of the country. Reflecting on the *NewsDay*’s 10-year history, Mudzungairi (2020) argued that he was making “a special look back not only examining the paper’s history and what the paper stands for but the history of the country during that period.” In its 20-year anniversary, *The Standard* made the same claim that it had endured the challenges that have bedeviled Zimbabwe (“The Standard: 20 Years and Not Out,” 2017). Under these challenges of repression, in both 2002 and 2017, *The Standard* positioned itself as a “fearless and hard-hitting publication” (“The Standard: 20 Years and Not Out,” 2017), claiming that the work it does “is not work for the weak kneed or faint hearted, bearing in mind that one of the fringe benefits is a free weekend at Harare Central Police Station once in a while” (“A Luta Continua,” 2002). Implicitly, *The Standard* is hereby claiming authority from having stood the test of time, 20 years under persecution. Implicitly, this

also shows how Alpha Media Holdings publications are different from Zimpapers by virtue of operating under different conditions even though in the same geographic location.

In addition, Alpha Media publications have not only been fearless and courageous but have been pioneers in many different respects including being leaders in breaking news, resilient, competitive, drivers of pluralism and diversity. Mudzungairi (2020) capitalized on how the *NewsDay* came in as “the first independent daily in seven years, and probably a first step towards diversity and pluralism in the media sector,” representing hope for a tortured nation. Making reference to *The Standard’s* 20 years in existence, journalist Munyukwi (2017) argued that “the newspaper has stood the test of time with remarkable achievements, among them establishing itself as a competent paper within a polarized environment and in the face of serious economic challenges.” *The Standard* also celebrated its 20 years of existence as a remarkable achievement as it “survived the vicissitudes presented by a failing economy and state machinery that has always regarded the private press as foes.” During the 20 years of its existence, *The Standard* claims that it created “a very rich history and has been at the forefront of ground-breaking journalism in Zimbabwe with its influence stretching beyond our borders.” Once again, Alpha Media Holdings publications use not just persecution, but also the economic challenges that they have endured as a legitimating tool for deserving the authority to tell the Zimbabwean story.

To sum up, at an institutional level, Zimbabwe’s publicly and privately controlled news media organizations position themselves differently in terms of how they conceptualize their roles and the challenges that they face. This forms the foundation of the journalistic interpretive community fracture that is seen in the country. This means that at an institutional level collective memory does not necessarily serve to build journalistic

authority that constructs a common community in a contested context. It is also notable here that the private press engages in a lot of collective memory work compared to the public press, a feature attributable to the history and circumstances of the two news media entities. Zimpapers' memory work is complicated by the fact that it is part of an inherited colonial institution (Mararike, 1998; Saunders, 1999) that never changed its stance to serve the government of the day. At the same time, the public press is also secure in the sense that even if it loses credibility, it has government backing that through clientelist tendencies, guarantees it of advertising revenue (see Ruhanya, 2018). Therefore, it is not compelled to engage in a lot of authority building work. On the other hand, the private press has suffered a barrage of attacks from the public press as well as the state itself. This includes accusations of being agents of regime change which is reputation damaging (Chuma, 2004; Rønning & Kupe, 2000; Ruhanya, 2018). At the same time, the private press attempts to establish an alternative journalistic culture that is based on autonomy from the state and holding the government accountable, as explained in Chapter 6. This new journalistic culture calls for a lot of work to legitimize it as important in the Zimbabwean society. In addition, the private press, in the case of Alpha Media Holdings dating back to 1996, has much work to do to build its authority and profile considering that they are competing with Zimpapers that has a long history of more than a century (Mararike, 1998; Saunders, 1999).

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at two forms of collective memory: chance commemorations and anniversaries. Contrary to the power of collective memory as a journalistic authority and community building tool (Zelizer, 1992, 1993), this chapter

exposes its limitations. A look at obituaries has shown how the power of collective memory in building journalistic interpretive communities is context dependent. What emerges here is that in the same way journalists under contested environments, characterized by regimes being undermined by political and economic liberalization, do not only respond in a fragmented manner to attacks on their profession, but even in collective memory they remain disunited. This also deviates from how Zelizer's (1993) local and durational modes of interpretation operate. Under the local mode of interpretation, she argued that journalists in the United States react from a particularistic and localized version as a united body. She then argued that this changes in durational discourse as through collective memory, journalists begin to reflect with a critical eye as a loose interpretive community. In the Zimbabwean case, due to extreme social and political polarization, Zimbabwean journalists continue to be fragmented even in durational modes of interpretation in the form of collective memory. This furthers arguments by the likes of Waisbord (2013) for the need to continue examining how journalistic communities operate beyond liberal Western democracies.

In conclusion, Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive communities operate based on contrary journalistic cultures. The public press has its own journalistic culture based on a nationalistic frame of reference while the private press operates from a liberal frame of reference. These two frames of reference shape collective memory work by the two news media entities which they use to legitimize different social purposes. As has been shown in the preceding paragraphs, the public press pushes a pro-state nationalistic oriented social function, while the private press drives a Fourth Estate role purpose. These different orientations in terms of frame of reference and social purpose influence collective

memorialization by the public and private press. The public press attempts to legitimize its “patriotic journalism” (Ranger, 2005) through collective memory while the private press attempts to legitimize its Fourth Estate role conceptualization. Thus, different frames of reference and social purposes for the private and public press undermines collective memory’s ability to unite the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community. Chapter nine has thus complemented the previous chapters in showing the depth of journalistic interpretive community fracture in Zimbabwe. In the next chapter, the conclusion, the dissertation gives a framework of how a fractured journalistic interpretive community can be understood.



## Chapter 10

### **Conclusion: Journalistic interpretive communities beyond the liberal Western world**

Using a discursive approach that de-essentializes our understanding of journalistic cultures (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019) in both the Global North and the Global South, this dissertation has used the case of Zimbabwe to advance the argument of how journalists, in transitional, and contested post-colonial societies can be conceptualized as a fractured interpretive community. The dissertation advances this argument through a combination of various Global North theoretical concepts that include: metajournalistic discourse (Carlson, 2016), interpretive communities (Zelizer, 1993), collective memory (Kitch, 2002; Zelizer, 1990, 1992), and the Global South's post-colonial (Kumar, 2014; Rodney-Gumede, 2015), and ubuntu theories (Blankenberg, 1999; Metz, 2007; Mokgoro, 1998). The post-colonial and ubuntu theories help to adapt, transpose, extend and contextualize the Global North theories to make sure that they speak to the Zimbabwean reality.

Through this hybrid theoretical approach, this dissertation makes two theoretical interventions: first, it advances our understanding of how and why journalists in the Global South operate differently as an interpretive community as compared to those in liberal Western democracies; second, it provides further evidence for why a moderate, hybridized, and heuristic approach to de-Westernizing journalism studies maybe more useful than a radical approach that sounds like reinventing the wheel. From a practical perspective, the study also provides evidence for challenges that militate against the professionalization of journalism in the Global South, which is crucial in finding pathways to reform the news media in post-colonial transitional societies. In addition, the dissertation also provides

evidence for why it is important to think seriously about political and social polarization in contexts beyond the Global South as this can have a huge impact on journalistic culture and the undermining of the news media's democratic role.

In the following sections, the chapter explains these theoretical and practical contributions that the dissertation makes to journalism studies scholarship in general. In the first section, the study summarizes how this dissertation has articulated the case of Zimbabwean journalists as a fractured interpretive community before teasing out how this idea can be understood as a concept. In the second section, the chapter turns to how the hybrid discursive approach applied in this dissertation illustrates the significance of a moderate, and heuristic de-Westernization approach. The chapter ends with a look at this dissertation's practical contributions to not only how the news media may be reformed in Zimbabwe, but in Southern Africa and other regions of the Global South in general.

### **How context determines the structure of journalistic interpretive communities**

As has already been noted throughout this dissertation, a journalistic interpretive community is a group of reporters engaged in common news media activities, sharing a common frame of reference, and social purpose (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). Alternatively, again as has already been argued, this means such journalists share the same journalistic culture (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019), which means having a common ideological framework as their frame of reference, similar journalistic role conceptualization as their social purpose, as well as similar levels of trust in public institutions and ethical orientations. This journalistic culture, according to Hanitzsch et al. (2019) can be understood in terms of its three aspects: the extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions, as well as opportunity structure. Extrinsic dimensions refer to journalists'

perceived influences, such as forces that strengthen or undermine journalistic autonomy. Intrinsic dimensions, on the other hand, refer to journalists' conceptualization of their roles, ethical orientations, as well as level of trust in public institutions. Lastly, the opportunity structure is the context within which the journalistic culture's intrinsic and extrinsic cultural elements are negotiated. Hanitzsch et al. give three elements of the journalistic culture which are: the context of politics and governance, level of socio-economic development, as well as the country's socio-cultural value systems.

Chapter Two has already made an argument for how the liberal Western context, where much of the research on journalistic interpretive communities has been carried out, provides an opportunity structure that allows its journalists to operate as a united interpretive community. In terms of politics and governance, which includes the state of the country's rational legal authority (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), journalists in Western liberal democracies enjoy constitutional protections that limit government interference with their free speech activities. Economically, these countries are also advanced as again noted by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Although there are differences among nations, the liberal Western societies' socio-cultural value system can largely be described as liberal, characterized by advanced democratic governance systems that respect freedom of speech, press freedom, as well as individual rights (Sørensen, 2006). Referring back to Berkowitz and TerKeurst's (1999) definition of an interpretive community, it means journalists in North America and Western Europe have a liberal frame of reference. This explains why the region is dominated by a monitorial journalistic culture (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019) which defines its journalists' social purpose as holding the elites accountable. This engagement of Western journalists in common reporting activities, guided by a shared

liberal ideological framework, and a monitorial common purpose allows them to discursively react in unison, through paradigm repair in defense of their occupation against any political, economic, social, technological, and legal disruptions (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) that may threaten their professional boundaries or jurisdiction. Western journalists' ability to react in solidarity against professional threats not only makes them a highly professionalized grouping (Abbott, 1988; Waisbord, 2013), but is also what unites them as a journalistic interpretive community (Zelizer, 1993). Differences certainly abound throughout the Global North, and the threat of illiberalism is palpable as media capture strategies take hold. However, as shown below, the Zimbabwean context fundamentally differs from North America and Western Europe, but resembles Central and Eastern Europe as well as Sub-Saharan African nations in many respects.

### **How Zimbabwean journalists operate as a fractured interpretive community**

Contrary to the liberal Western scenario described above, Chapters Five to Nine have demonstrated how Zimbabwean journalists operate as a fractured interpretive community. The dissertation has demonstrated how the country's journalists, split along public and private press journalists, are not only guided by different ideological frameworks, but also conceptualize their journalistic roles differently. Apart from only engaging in common journalistic activities, Zimbabwean reporters also do not share the same conditions of services, which means they do not qualitatively share the same opportunity structure. This failure to share the same journalistic culture has had consequential effects on their professionalization project as it undermines their ability to speak with one voice in defense of their occupational jurisdiction. In the following sections, the chapter first summarizes how Zimbabwean journalists are grounded in different frames

of reference, leading to different role conceptualizations, as well as how that affects their ability to speak with one voice. Next, it takes a closer look at how this is the work of the context within which they operate.

***One country, same profession, different frames of reference and role conceptions***

In Part 1 of this study, that is Chapters Five through Six, the dissertation has provided evidence that Zimbabwean journalistic and non-journalistic actors are divided along two contrasting Southern African perspectives of how reporters should understand and construct news: 1) an ethnocentric, essentialist Afrocentric nationalistic approach to press freedom, and 2) a liberal press freedom perspective (Tomaselli, 2003). Chapter Five demonstrates that the Zimbabwean public press is grounded in this essentialist Afrocentric approach that calls for the contextualization of press freedom to sensitize it to the development needs of Zimbabwe as a young democracy. For this reason, the public press even calls for the curtailment of press freedom to protect the country's national sovereignty, national security, and national interest. The public press' position is motivated by government fears of neo-colonialism, exploitation by Western countries, as well as regime change. On the other hand, Chapter Six demonstrates how the privately controlled press is guided by a universal liberal conceptualization of press freedom that dismisses contextualization arguments in favor of implementing it as it is understood internationally. In this regard, the private press exercises autonomy protection boundary work (Carlson, 2015), in addition to mobilizing paradigm repair strategies (Bennet et al., 1985), to allay any fears that press freedom might cause social chaos. These different frames of reference lead to different role conceptualizations.

Regarding role conceptions, the public press, as indicated in Chapter Five, follows a nationalistic frame of reference to advance a “patriotic set” of journalistic roles meant to protect the national interest. This set of journalistic roles includes working as a government partner or support the government of the day, being a nation-building ideological state apparatus, and advancing development. The public press is also ambivalent about holding the government accountable. While some analyzed press freedom texts and articles on press law reform debates implied that they aspire to play the watchdog role, interviews confirmed that Zimpapers, as currently structurally constituted, can never be able to hold the ruling political elites accountable due to government interference. The public press’ journalistic roles are grounded in what Tomaselli (2003) criticizes as essentialist African values or virtues to respect the authorities, or what Kasoma (1996) calls non-confrontational journalism.

On the other hand, based on its liberal conceptualization of press freedom, as explained in Chapter Six, the privately controlled press advances an extended Fourth Estate journalistic role that goes beyond holding the elites accountable, to acting as a government adversary, voice of the voiceless, providing a public sphere to those denied a platform in the public press, and promoting development through watchdog journalism. In many respects, the privately controlled press’ conceptualization of its journalistic roles is monitorial or better still, it can be understood as a monitorial journalistic culture (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019).

The conflicting role conceptions summarized above mean Zimbabwean journalists in the public and those in the privately controlled press do not have a shared journalistic culture (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). This is because they differ on the journalistic culture’s

extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions. In terms of perceived influences on their editorial decisions, this study has shown that public press journalists are aware and constrained by the government's editorial preferences as has also been noted by Mabweazara, et al. (2023). This does not mean the privately controlled press is totally free, but the difference is they do not perceive a strong influence from the government because they position themselves as a government adversary. However, previous research has shown that the privately controlled press is beholden to private sector and donor community interests (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Ruhanya, 2018). The public press' concession to relax journalistic boundaries to curtail press freedom for the sake of the national interest, national sovereignty, and national security, implies they do have a higher level of trust in public institutions. On the other hand, the private press' autonomy protection boundary work (Carlson, 2015) to fend off state encroachment on their profession implies mistrust in public institutions. The difference in Zimbabwean journalistic cultures also goes beyond just having different extrinsic and intrinsic journalistic cultures to having different working conditions.

Even though Zimbabwean journalists share the same opportunity structure in terms of operating under an authoritarian political and governance system as is common across Sub-Saharan Africa, including poor economic conditions, and different cultural value systems like respecting and not questioning authority (Tomaselli, 2003), there are qualitative differences which cement their separation as a fractured journalistic interpretive community. This qualitative difference emerges out of patrimonial relations, and systems of media capture established by the Zimbabwean government. Patrimonialism, according to Waisbord (2013), or clientelism, as Hallin and Mancini (2004) put it, means differential treatment of news media organizations where some are favored over the others through

discretionary use of public resources like extension and withdrawal of advertising revenue. Media capture, on the other hand, according to Mabweazara, et al. (2023) refers to a subtle influence of news media's editorial decisions by private interests for self-serving goals through corrupt socio-political and economic systems. Courtesy of systems of patronage and media capture, Zimbabwean journalists enjoy different working conditions.

In various parts of Part 1 and Part 2 of this manuscript, the dissertation has demonstrated patrimonial relations between Zimpapers and the government. In both Chapter Seven and Nine, the dissertation has shown how Zimpapers is a favored news media organization that has received broadcast licenses ahead of other news media organizations, promoting news media concentration. The study has also pointed to another emerging patronage system where the government is awarding commercial and community radio licenses to people with the ruling ZANU PF connections. This patronage system, as shown in Chapter Five, is also implemented through employment contracts for editors. Zimpapers editors are required to support the government of the day to make sure they do not stir debate on controversial topics that may cause tribal conflict in the country as set by the government. This means this patronage system influences Zimpapers' news agenda and judgment. In addition, the dissertation has also shown how Zimpapers' editors also play along to these patronage linkages to safeguard their political and business interests. The government-Zimpapers patronage connection has been well orchestrated to a point of masking involvement of state institutions as noted from how in its collective memorialization, Zimpapers, in Chapter Nine claimed that it was established to serve the majority and protect it from government control through the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust. This is contrary to previous studies that have documented how ZMMT has failed to protect



the public press due to government interference (see Chuma, 2004). Different studies, including Mabweazara, et al. (2023), have also noted these relations of patronage at Zimpapers. This study extends this line of research by pointing to how patrimonialism has worked to fracture Zimbabwe's journalistic interpretive community. Even the privately controlled press, as pointed out in Chapter Six, is also linked to patron-client relationships with members of the private sector and the donor community, something that has already been pointed out in previous studies as well (see Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Ruhanya, 2018).

The study has also provided further evidence for how different forms of media capture through regulatory, ownership, and financial incentive mechanisms – as noted in previous studies (see Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Mlotshwa, 2019; Ruhanya, 2018) – continue to divide the country's journalists into fragmented journalistic interpretive communities. Chapter Seven through Nine especially, have shown how the government, through repressive laws, has created different working conditions for journalists in the private press as compared to those in the public press. Two case studies in Chapter Seven have shown how the *Daily News* was shut down for failure to register with the Media and Information Commission (MIC) back in 2003. In 2020, Hopewell Chin'ono was also thrown into prison for inciting public violence after exposing a COVID-19 corruption scandal. This followed his calls upon citizens to protest corruption after he tweeted about the corruption scandal. Chapter Seven has also shown how the government seems to be continuing in the same direction following the passing of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Amendment Act, popularly known as the Patriotic Act in the country (Nyikadzino, 2023; "Parliament Passes a Bill That Seeks to Punish 'unpatriotic' Citizens," 2023). Chapter Five has also shown how, through ownership control in Zimpapers, the

government has also captured the public press as the government can hire and fire editors at will as has been documented in so many studies (Chuma, 2004; Saunders, 1999). Chapter Three has also shown how this capture has been extended to the private press as people connected to the president are purchasing shares in companies like Alpha Media Holdings. These different forms of media capture have also been noted in detail by Mabweazara, et al. (2023). The effect of these systems of patronage and media capture is that Zimbabwean journalists cannot respond to threats against their profession in solidarity.

***Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive community: A divided house that cannot stand against professional threats***

United journalistic interpretive communities respond to threats against their profession in times of political, economic, social, technological, and legal disruptions in solidarity (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), defending their professional turf. This is because they share the same journalistic culture in all its different elements from the same opportunity structure to extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions. This does not mean there are no variations. The point is that the variations do not threaten the existence of a journalistic interpretive community that shares the same frame of reference and social purpose, in addition to engaging in common activities (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). By default, journalists who fail to share the same journalistic culture as described above, respond to threats against their profession in times of crisis in a fragmented manner. Zimbabwe falls in the latter category where journalists from the public press do not share the same journalistic culture as those from the privately controlled press.

This dissertation's Part 2 from Chapter Seven through Nine has demonstrated how the effects of political polarization, undergirded by patrimonialism and media capture

(Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Mazango, 2005; McCandless, 2011), have undermined Zimbabwean journalists' ability to stand up in unison and defend their profession. Chapter Seven demonstrates how Zimbabwean journalists, due to their divisions, have failed to speak with one voice against repressive media laws. The public press defended the laws, while the private press criticized them, thereby delaying media reform in the country. In fact, this has given the government the leeway to lead calls for media reform. The effect of this is that the media reform program started after 2017 following Robert Mugabe's removal runs the risk of being another false start as efforts of the late 1990s (Saunders, 1999). This is because the public press, as shown in Chapter Seven, has already rushed to endorse the reforms when their counterparts in the private press are expressing skepticism. Chapter Eight, using two case studies, further provided evidence for how Zimbabwean journalists failed again, to speak with one voice when the *Daily News* was shut down by the government in September 2003, as well as when investigative journalist Hopewell Chin'ono was arrested for inciting public violence after exposing a COVID-19 corruption scandal in 2020 and calling upon citizens to protest corruption. In the first instance, the public press celebrated the closure of the *Daily News* while in the second instance, the public press justified Chin'ono's arrest by positioning him as an activist while the private press described him as a journalist.

These divisions, as shown in Chapter Nine have undermined the Zimbabwean journalists' ability to use even collective memory to build their journalistic authority and bring themselves together as a united journalistic interpretive community. This has been demonstrated through four different narratives that characterize Zimbabwean journalists' collective memory: narratives of continuity versus narratives of discontinuity, as well as

narratives of inclusion versus narratives of exclusion. While narratives of continuity emphasize endurance of veteran journalists' legacy, narratives of discontinuity debunk the same by exposing a break between the veterans and the new generation of reporters. Narratives of inclusion and exclusion also contradict each other as the former attempts to build journalistic communities by using persecution as a source of journalistic authority while the latter features controversies about who is and is not a journalist. However, even the narrative of inclusion itself is also fragmented. While a legacy of persecution is largely used as a dominant trope to prop up journalistic authority, obituaries are published in the publications where deceased journalists once worked. That is, public press journalists are memorialized through the public press while those who worked for the privately controlled press are memorialized there<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, Zimbabwean journalists, at the present moment cannot be regarded as an interpretive community because they do not share the same working conditions that can make them a professional milieu (Hanitzsch et al., 2019). This is also because they do not share the same frame of reference, social purpose, besides merely engaging in common journalistic activities (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). This of course is because of patrimonial relations and systems of media capture undermining the Zimbabwean journalistic interpretive as noted by Mabweazara, et al. (2023) and Mano (2005). What this means is that Zimbabwean journalists are not a professional grouping in the sense that they cannot defend their professional boundaries (Waisbord, 2013) as they cannot use their

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<sup>9</sup> The only deceased veteran journalist to have defied this is Bill Saidi whose obituaries were published in both the public and the private press. Saidi had two obituaries published in *The Herald* ("Bill Saidi died in his footsteps"; "Saidi, a journalistic giant among midgets") and one in *The Standard* ("Working with Saidi no easy call).

discourse to unite themselves as noted in studies of journalists in liberal Western democracies ( e.g., Zelizer, 1993). Hope for the emergence of a united interpretive community perhaps lies in technological affordances that can enable journalists to write beyond the influences of organizational editorial policies. This can either help unite journalists or further fracture them. In this respect, the study provides part of the answer to Waisbord's (2013) call to examine challenges to journalistic professionalization in the Global South. This study crystallizes these challenges under the concept of a fractured interpretive community.

A fractured journalistic interpretive community can be described through a few basic traits, which have been remarked on above. In summary, journalists operating under a fractured community do not share the same frame of reference, and social purpose, key tenets of an interpretive community as given by Berkowitz and TerKeurst (1999). Alternatively, this means they do not share the same journalistic culture in terms of its intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019). In terms of extrinsic dimensions, journalists operating as a fractured community will have different perceptions of their external influences. Regarding the intrinsic dimension, the journalists will have different role conceptualizations, ethical orientations, as well as different ethical orientations. In other words, journalists operating under a fractured journalistic interpretive community have a variegated journalistic culture. While these journalists might share the same opportunity structure as described by the country's political and governance system, levels of socio-economic development, as well as socio-cultural values (which may differ within the same nation) (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), the context does not allow them to have enough leeway to defend their journalistic autonomy,

a key tenet for journalistic autonomy protection and condition for professionalization (Waisbord, 2013).

The context for a fractured journalistic interpretive community is characterized by a situation whereby the journalistic field is too close to both the political and economic fields (Bourdieu, 2005). This closeness to both fields opens up the journalistic field to manipulation through systems of patronage and media capture (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Waisbord, 2013). The context also tends to be characterized with a poor rational-legal authority to protect journalistic autonomy (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). What this means is that these journalists who operate under a fractured interpretive community lack a common paradigm or it might still be in process (Berger, 2008), hence the journalists cannot react to professional threats in unison through paradigm repair (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Waisbord, 2013). Due to relations of patronage and media capture, journalists under this context also find more incentives in maintaining their patron-client relations than belonging to a community of journalists (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Waisbord, 2013). As a result, these journalists lack consensus over what it means to be journalists, or what should be their social purpose, let alone the willingness to be distinctive from other fields (Waisbord, 2013). Consequentially, these journalists cannot mobilize around a common journalistic project as noted by Waisbord, and even discourse from memory work that has been used to build journalistic authority and bring journalists together as noted by Zelizer (1990, 1992, 1993) is limited in its potential. Countries hosting fractured journalistic interpretive communities also tend to be weaker or fragile hence their interference with journalistic activities, splitting reporter communities as they suspect them of being agents of regime

change for powerful nations (Mare, 2019). That is besides being multicultural (Tomaselli, 2003).

Thus, this dissertation's first contribution to journalism studies is advancing this concept of fractured journalistic interpretive community by showing how the discourse that structures the community of journalists is pre-constrained by both the local as well as global geographic and cultural power dynamics, especially in weaker states. This description provided here, however, is only tentative. It only lays the foundation for how journalistic interpretive communities operating beyond the liberal Western democracies can be understood. This is mainly because, unlike full blown autocratic systems, Zimbabwe has a dual legacy of liberalism and authoritarianism characterized by some level of autonomy in the private press countered by strict control in the public press (Mututwa et al., 2021). What is important is paying attention to context. The second theoretical contribution of this study is that its discursive and theoretically hybridized approach marrying theories from the Global North and those from the Global South provides important lessons for how to de-Westernize journalism studies.

### **Adding voice to the cause for a moderate and heuristic approach in de-Westernizing journalism studies**

Over the years, and rightfully so, there has been calls to de-Westernize journalism studies in a bid to recognize different experiences from the Global South (Nyamjoh, 2011; Wasserman & De Beer, 2009). This call has been motivated by realization of nuanced contextual differences between the liberal Western contexts and the Global South. De-Westernization was then called for as an attempt to explain contextual differences between liberal Western nations and the Global South, make sure experiences from regions such as

Africa contribute to theory building, produce global definitions of journalism, and improve the validity of various journalism epistemologies using Western concepts and methods (Kupe, 2004; Nyamjoh, 2011; Wasserman & De Beer, 2009). This call was also motivated by a lack of theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding African journalism (Kupe, 2004). However, the big question has been how to de-Westernize journalism studies. Two approaches, according to Ngomba (2012) have come up: cross-cultural inclusiveness by Western scholars, as well as proposals to use indigenous non-Western theoretical frameworks (Tomaselli, 2003). Based on the discursive approach used in this study, this section adds to existing voices calling for a non-ethnocentric approach to journalism studies that is less dramatic, to quote Ngomba (2012).

Instead of a radical approach that goes indigenous, this study provides further evidence that there is more to gain from taking a hybridized theoretical approach in understanding African journalism. This is because, as has already been noted by Mabweazara (2015), home grown theories are not always the answer due to their own inherent weaknesses. These include ignoring the fact that journalism as a practice, and journalism studies itself, has a long Western history; that African journalistic practices are still evaluated using Western models; and that a lot of journalistic practices are from the West. This research has demonstrated, for example in Chapter Six how Western news media institutions and veteran journalists are taken as role models and heavily criticized whenever they are perceived as deviating from their journalistic norms. Even the public press, as shown in Chapter Five, turns to Western models to criticize the privately controlled press whenever it suits its agenda. The other challenge with taking an Afrocentric approach is that some of the theoretical perspectives are still less coherent, and



not yet fully tested empirically (Ngomba, 2012). For example, Ubuntu theory itself has libertarian, middle ground, and communitarian aspects (see Gyekye, 1992; Metz, 2015; Wasserman & de Beer, 2005). Africa itself has got three alternative journalisms: journalism for social change, communal journalism, and journalism based on oral discourse (Skjerdal, 2012). In light of these different Ubuntu and journalism forms, journalism studies research in Africa should avoid taking an essentialist and reductionist approach that assumes Africa has homogenous experiences, views, philosophies, and contexts (Mabweazara, 2015; Tomaselli, 2003).

Accordingly, as this study has demonstrated, traditional Western theories remain relevant in providing conceptual frameworks (H. M. Mabweazara, 2015). As argued by Mabweazara, what is important is to contextualize these theories by marrying them with African perspectives so as to foreground the experiences of African journalists by recognizing that they operate under different environments as compared to their Western counterparts. Thus, research on African journalism studies can still engage with international scholarship from an African perspective by selecting relevant Western theories as they apply to each case (Mabweazara, 2015; Ngomba, 2012). This study has used Zelizer's (1993) interpretive community framework as a lens, adapting, and modifying it to come up with the concept of fractured journalistic interpretive communities, an approach also advocated for by Berger (2008). The study achieved this by hybridizing Carlson's (2016) metajournalistic theory by applying it alongside the post-colonial theory (Kumar, 2014; Rodny-Gumede, 2015). Using collective memory as a concept as previously used by Zelizer (1990, 1992) this study also came up with different narratives of continuity and discontinuity as well as inclusion and exclusion. These are more applicable in

describing the Zimbabwean context. This is part of efforts to come up with meaningful theorization that is contextual (Mabweazara, 2015; Nyamjoh, 2011).

Thus, this study's second theoretical contribution adds to calls for a non-dramatic but heuristic approach to journalism studies in the Global South. This approach will benefit more from using both theories from the Global North as well as the Global South by taking a discursive approach that de-essentializes journalism (Hanitzsch et al., 2019) in both Western and non-Western contexts. This section's argument should not be read as an argument against formulation of theoretical concepts from the Global South. Such academic pursuits are certainly welcome and must be encouraged for their contribution to journalism studies as a field. The point, however, is this should be done as and when necessary, not just for the sake of doing so. Beyond these two theoretical contributions to journalism studies, the study also makes a practical contribution to the news media reform debates in Zimbabwe as well as signal to the dangers of media polarization bedeviling different parts of the world.

**Media reform should go beyond legal changes: Zimbabwe needs a  
journalistic cultural reform**

Without falling into the trap of calling for a crisis in Zimbabwean journalism by measuring it against Western standards, a practice that has been criticized by the likes of Hanitzsch et al., (2019), current efforts to reform the Zimbabwean news media (see Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020) indicate that things are not well. The toxic polarization in the Zimbabwean news media industry that manifests in a fractured journalistic interpretive community is what Mare (2019) calls a crisis of power, ownership, and resources. This is a culmination of successful concerted and systematic efforts to capture the Zimbabwean

media (Mabweazara, et al., 2023) from 1980 that has seen the country's news media being owned by powerful elites from politics, the military, and the economic sector (Mare, 2019; Saunders, 1999). Even after a change in the country's leadership in 2017 with an accompanying pledge of greater liberalization, many of the old patterns persist into the present.

Thus, the variegated journalistic culture shown in this study is a result of media capture and one of the ways to fix it, is to restructure the Zimbabwean news media industry in a democratic way as has been suggested by Mare (2019). However, to do this, as suggested by Saunders (1999) Zimbabwe has to confront its colonial past and authoritarian present. Courtesy of this call, this study proposes that a starting point is the need to decolonize the country's public media institutions as part of efforts to make them truly public media.

Even though there are many different conceptualizations of decolonization, this study defines it as reversal of undesirable European imperial processes and remnants (Bismark, 2012). This is because there is a colonial baggage that Zimbabwe has inherited and normalized. One of these is the notion that the public press in Zimbabwe serves the government of the day, a mandate set for it soon after colonization (Saunders, 1999). As shown in Chapter Five, public press journalists have now normalized the position that they must serve the government of the day, which literally means acting as the ruling party's propaganda mouthpiece. The second problem is maintenance of the Ministry of Information's control of the public press and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. The Ministry's control of Zimpapers is courtesy of the government's indirect ownership of Zimpapers (Mararike, 1998; Saunders, 1999). As argued by Saunders (1999) as well as Moyo (2004), the Ministry of Information was set up by the colonial government as a

propaganda arm. The role of this Ministry needs rethinking in post-independence Zimbabwe. Third, the government has also captured the country's news media sector through advertising revenue distribution (Mabweazara, et al., 2023; Mare, 2019).

The three elements discussed above – the public press's role to support the government of the day, the power of the Ministry of Information, and media capture through advertising revenue – are at the heart of the country's journalism professionalization challenges, yet in the current news media reform debate, these issues, as in the late 1990s debate (Saunders, 1999), are not being given full attention with so much focus being on repealing repressive laws. It is this dissertation's argument that without restructuring the public press's relationship with the Ministry of Information, the current reform process will not result in a strong rational-legal authority that will give the country's journalists enough room to set their journalistic roles and perform them without government interference. This study therefore suggests re-thinking the structure of the public press, including its relationship with the Ministry of Information and suggests a legal reform that ensures public press's editorial independence, regulating advertising revenue distribution.

In Chapter Five, public press journalists unequivocally stated that if there is no buffer to protect them from the Ministry of Information, they cannot dare hold the government accountable. This means that to help the public press execute its mandate, debate to distance the government from the public press has to be revisited (Saunders, 1999). This can include negotiating with the government to divest from the public press, or partially privatize its ownership as has been suggested before (see Mare, 2019; Saunders, 1999). The other option is to extend the role of civil society organizations like Media

Alliance of Zimbabwe that have been crucial in driving the media reform agenda in the country (Mano & Milton, 2020) by giving them positions on the boards of the public press, including ZBC as has been previously suggested by Saunders (1999). In addition, revising the debate to restructure and rethink the role of the Ministry of Information is necessary in Zimbabwe, since it was set-up as a propaganda wing in the colonial era. Either the ministry's role is redefined to make sure it does not interfere with the public press's day-to-day operations; it is restructured, or it is abolished altogether. These issues are really important because as Saunders (p.49-50) argued:

...institutions designed to oppress, suppress, and otherwise prevent the delivery of objective and free information cannot be used to accomplish the opposite. A media which is not free cannot ensure freedom of expression. To change their goals and their functions, such media must be redesigned and restructured through concerted, conscious, and deliberate reform.

This means unless the government is distanced from the public press, it cannot change its colonially defined goals and functions of supporting the government of the day. In addition, legal provisions ensuring the autonomy of the press must be put in place.

Considering serious government interference with the public press's editorial activities as has been noted through hiring and firing of editors (see Chuma, 2004; Nyarota, 2006; Rusike, 1990), there is need for a law that legally guarantees the public press's editorial independence. As suggested by Mare (2019), such a law must regulate the public press's funding, staff recruitment including appointment of directors, guarantee its editorial independence, and define its relationship with the Ministry of Information. In addition, considering the government and the private sector's use of advertising as a de facto

licensing mechanism (Mabweazara, et al., 2023), there must also be a law to make this illegal. In Zimbabwe, the government has openly threatened withdrawing advertising from the private press as punishment for its editorial stances. It is this study's argument that by giving full attention to these kinds of reforms, the public press will have room to professionalize. That is, the press will be able to stand together and control their journalistic boundaries (Abbott, 1988; Waisbord, 2013). It is now clear that if the government maintains its current powers, Zimbabwean journalists cannot share the same professional project and shape their journalistic culture as they see fit. This does not mean the journalists have to share the same journalistic roles or ideology. These can continue to differ, but not at the behest of the government. Thus, these suggestions can help bring about a journalistic cultural reform and revolution in Zimbabwe.

In addition, this dissertation also provides lessons for different parts of the world experiencing political polarization by highlighting the potential negative effects on the news media when it turns toxic. Polarization has been witnessed in different parts of the world, including Latin America (Lugo-Ocando & Santamaria, 2015), Eastern Europe (Tóth et al., 2022), Europe (Bértoa & Rama, 2021), and the US (Thompson, 2021). In stable democracies like the US, there are already threats of pernicious polarization (McCoy & Somer, 2021) in light of combative politicians like Donald Trump who can easily accuse the press of being "the enemy of the people" (Carlson et al., 2021). In light of declining trust in the news media (Newman et al., 2023), with some scholars already suspecting that political rhetoric may be contributing to this (Meeks, 2020), Zimbabwe provides lessons for why stakeholders in different parts of the world need to monitor polarization closely lest it become undemocratic. Zimbabwe has shown that toxic polarization is detrimental to

news media professionalization, hence this study's argument that this must be avoided in every possible way. Below, this section looks at the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

### **Limitations**

Even though this study has used a mixed methods approach combining an analysis of editorial, opinion, and analytical articles, with interviews to understand press freedom and role conceptualization in Zimbabwe, it still leaves room for understanding the performative aspect. For instance, in terms of journalistic role conceptualization, this approach is best at helping to understand what is normatively expected for journalists to do, what the journalists cognitively want to do, and what they claim to do through narrative performance (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). This however, leaves a gap as it does not show what journalists actually do in practice (Tandoc et al., 2013). Thus, the study left the gap between role conceptualization and enactment unaccounted for, what Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) categorize as the professional practice aspect. Even though it was not practically possible to do everything in a single study, Mellado's (2015, 2019) content analysis methodology using six dimensions of journalistic role performance could have helped and should be considered for future research. The same also applies to journalists' perceptions of influences on their autonomy. Considering discussions of "engagements" between the public press and the Ministry of Information mentioned during this study's interviews, a newsroom ethnographic approach guided by Pierre Bourdieu's analytical framework of journalistic field, capital, and habitus could be useful (Willig, 2012). Unlike other ethnographic approaches, this methodology, according to Willig, can help shed light on contextual factors that shapes the actions of journalistic agents.

This study's proposal of a fractured journalistic interpretive community cannot yet be generalized as a Global South phenomenon. In its current form, the phenomenon is limited to the Zimbabwean scenario and considering how the Global South is so varied (Tomaselli, 2003), the author is cautious not to generalize the phenomenon. Secondly, at the time of this dissertation's writing, there are current efforts to reform the country's news media sector and depolarize it (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020). Thus, time will tell how long this phenomenon will last. As such, it is important to be cognizant that this phenomenon may continue, or it may be disrupted. Previous government-led efforts to reform the country's news media sector have been false starts (Chuma, 2018; D. Moyo, 2004; Saunders, 1999). At the present moment, studies have already cast doubt over the current government's efforts to reform the news media sector arguing that so far, the news media have failed to become democratic (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020; Alfandika & Gwindingwe, 2021). These limitations and uncertainties give room for further research.

### **Future research**

Considering current efforts by the Zimbabwean government, in partnership with various stakeholders, to depolarize the country's news media, it is important that researchers continue monitoring whether these efforts can bring journalists together as a united interpretive community. Already, some Zimbabwean scholars have dismissed the reforms as a false start as they argue that so far, they have failed to democratize the news media landscape (Alfandika & Akpojivi, 2020; Mututwa et al., 2021). Also, as argued earlier, a depolarized news media sector does not necessarily mean a united journalistic interpretive community. The latter depends on the extent to which journalists share the same journalistic culture in terms of its various dimensions (Hanitzsch et al., 2019), as well



as frame of reference, social purpose, and activities (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999). Unless the latter happens, Zimbabwe cannot talk of a united journalistic interpretive community.

The effect of technological platforms such as Twitter and Facebook on news media polarization in Zimbabwe also needs close monitoring going forward. Technology can have two potential effects: either uniting journalists as they might not be subject to organizational influences, while at the same time, it may also further divide the country's journalists. This will be an important way to assess how technological changes intersect with existing media systems, and its implications on journalistic interpretive communities as argued for by Hallin (2020). It is also important to monitor how the country's news media cover the upcoming 2023 elections. Such moments have served to illustrate the extent of news media polarization in Zimbabwe (Chibuwe, 2016; Chuma, 2008). It will help ascertain if efforts to depolarize the news media are bearing fruit. That analysis would however need to factor in the media capture dimension as those connected to the country's leadership are purchasing shares in the privately controlled news media (Guma, 2023). This poses the risk of producing a false journalistic interpretive community whereby there is journalistic consensus by media capture.

In addition, as noted above that this phenomenon of a fractured journalistic interpretive community has been advanced using the Zimbabwean experience, it is important to examine the extent to which journalists in other African countries and regions of the Global South share the same journalistic culture. Thus, there is room for further expansion and opportunity to test the prevalence of this phenomenon. So far, Waisbord (2013) has argued that the idea of an interpretive community holds in liberal Western nations, generally referred to as the Global North. This means, there is a need to ascertain

how journalistic interpretive communities are structured around the world. Thus, the concept of a fractured journalistic interpretive community provides a starting point.

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## **Appendix One: Interview Questions**

*To journalists, civil society organizations, and government officials*

1. We have heard so much about news media polarization in Zimbabwe. Is this something real in your view?
2. What do you think has driven news media polarization in Zimbabwe?
3. How has this polarization affected journalistic standards and the fight for press freedom in Zimbabwe?
4. The government argues that press freedom should be limited for the sake of national security, national sovereignty, national interest. In your view, are these legitimate reasons for limiting press freedom?
5. The public and the private press have advocated for different journalistic roles. The public press, alongside the government, has called for advancing the country's national interest, national sovereignty, helping protect the country's national security, and portraying a positive image of the country. On the other hand, the private press has called for holding the government accountable. Which do you think are the ideal roles that the news media should perform in Zimbabwe and why?
6. Publicly and privately controlled media journalists have been divided over whether they want self, statutory, or co-regulation. Which model, and why would you say is best for Zimbabwe?
7. Publicly controlled news media journalists have argued that news media laws are necessary to ensure responsible reporting. What exactly is the

meaning of responsible reporting? Do we have examples of irresponsible reporting?

8. In your view, do you think the government should have any role to play in news media ownership and regulation?
9. Hopewell Chin'ono has divided the news media in the country over his use of Twitter as a reporting platform. To what extent do you consider his activities journalistic?
10. Lastly, I wish to gather some biographical data about your background in terms of your age, gender, education, and political affiliation. It will be interesting to know if you are affiliated with any one of the dominant political parties in Zimbabwe: the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF), and the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) or any of the parties.

*Additional questions to academics*

1. The public and the private press have advocated for different journalistic roles. The public press, alongside the government, has called for advancing the country's national interest, national sovereignty, helping protect the country's national security, and portraying a positive image of the country. On the other hand, the private press has called for holding the government accountable. Which do you think are the ideal roles that the news media should perform in Zimbabwe and why? The Zimbabwean news media is very polarized. What challenges or opportunities does this pose to your roles in the country? As educators, which roles do you consider in teaching?

2. Often, there has been debate about the fall in journalistic standards in Zimbabwe. To what extent has this affected the way you teach students about journalistic ethics?
3. Would you say news media polarization has affected your training of aspiring journalists in any way?

## Appendix Two: Interviewee profiles

In the table below, this appendix gives a brief general profile of all 50 interviewees. These interviewees were granted anonymity as some of them gave sensitive details about the nature of their work. As such, they are identified using a combination of letters and numbers. The profiles given are also general so as not to reveal their identities.

**Table 1.2**

*Anonymized profiles of academics, press freedom activists, government officials and journalists interviewed for this research.*

<b>Letter of Identification</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Profile</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Head of a media studies department in his 30s with more than ten years of teaching experience. He has a Diploma in journalism, Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science in media and does not identify with any political party.
<b>B</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Senior Lecturer in media studies. Diploma in Education, BA Media Studies, Postgraduate Diploma in Media Studies, PhD Communication Studies. No political affiliation. Pessimistic about politics. In his early 40s.
<b>C</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Senior Lecturer in his 50s with a PhD in Media Studies. About 18 years of teaching experience. Does not have any political affiliation.
<b>D</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Media lecturer in his 30s with twelve years journalism experience with the public press. He holds a diploma in journalism, a Bachelor, and a Master of Science in media studies. He is currently studying for a PhD. No political affiliation.
<b>E</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Media lecturer in his 40s with about 17 years of journalism experience. He holds a diploma in journalism, a Bachelor, and a Master of Science in media studies. He is also currently pursuing a PhD in media. He does not identify with any political party.

<b>F</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Senior lecturer in media, in his 30s with about 11 years of teaching experience. Holds a diploma in journalism, Bachelor of Arts Degree and currently studying for a master's degree. Has worked with several publications in Zimbabwe and currently works as a freelance editor. He is apolitical.
<b>G</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Media studies lecturer in his 40s, with about 11 years of teaching experience. He is a department chairperson and holds a PhD in Media. He is undecided about his political party affiliation.
<b>H</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Former media lecturer in his 30s who now contributes as a political opinion writer while dabbling in media consultancy. He holds a diploma in journalism, degree in media studies as well as a master's degree in international relations. He is currently pursuing a PhD. Ideologically, he identifies with the ruling ZANU PF.
<b>I</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Senior media studies lecturer in his 50s who was one of the pioneering group of media students in Zimbabwe. He has a master's degree and a PhD in media. He is aligned with ZANU PF.
<b>J</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Part time media lecturer in her thirties with about four years of teaching experience. She is a journalist by profession. She holds a Bachelor and a Master of Science in Media Studies. She does not identify with any of the Zimbabwean political parties.
<b>K</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Media Studies lecturer in his forties with about four years of teaching experience. He is interdisciplinary – studied sociology, media and communication, political science, and law. He holds a PhD in Media Studies. He comes from a family of liberation war veterans but does not agree with ZANU PF. He supports a political party that defends human rights and would vote for the opposition Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC).
<b>L</b>	<b>Academic</b>	Coordinator of journalism programs in his forties with six years of training experience. He holds a Bachelor of Arts general degree, Postgraduate Diploma in Media. He also has a

		master's degree in journalism and communication in addition to his PhD in journalism and communication studies. He is sympathetic with the opposition CCC.
<b>N</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	Trained journalist in his 40s with about 20 years of journalistic experience. He has done advocacy work locally and internationally, rising to the post of an Executive Director. He has a BA and a master's in media studies. He said he is apolitical because Zimbabwean politics is dishonesty, unrealistic, and lacks ideological clarity.
<b>O</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	Program manager in his 50s with one of Zimbabwe's civil society organizations representing journalists. He started working in magazine journalism in the mid-1990s, rising to the position of Editor before joining the civil society organizations working as a research and media monitoring officer. He said he is apolitical to maintain professionalism, but normally sympathizes with the downtrodden.
<b>P</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	Press freedom activist in his mid-40s who works in international media advocacy, assisting journalists in post-conflict transitional contexts with professionalization and advocacy for news media reform. He trained as a journalist and has a Diploma in Journalism, BA and master's degree in journalism. Has also worked as a journalist. He identifies with the CCC but insists he is not a fanatic.
<b>Q</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	Journalist in his 50s with more than 30 years of journalism experience. He leads one of the journalists' forums. He has worked with various advocacy and civil society organizations and currently involved media reform activities. He has a diploma in journalism. He said he is apolitical to protect his professionalism.
<b>R</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	A coordinator of various media advocacy groups, including international professional journalism training programs in his 30s. He is also engaged in media reform debates. He studied international relations and the news media. He has journalism experience but apolitical for the sake of his advocacy work.

<b>S</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	A leader of one of the journalists' representative organizations in his forties. He is also a senior member of one of media advocacy groups. He has worked as a journalist with the public and private news media organizations for more than 20 years. He has a diploma in journalism, a BA in political science and a master's degree in public policy and development management. He said he is politically conscious but prefers to keep political affiliation a secret. He said he also sees positives and negatives in both the ruling and the opposition parties.
<b>T</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	A senior research officer in his 30s who works with one media advocacy organization where he has been for about 10 years. He has a background in media, communication, and journalism. He holds a diploma in journalism and a degree in media. He said he does not identify or sympathize with any political party.
<b>V1</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	A director with one of the media advocacy organizations in her 30s with a degree in business management and IT. She has eight years of experience in media advocacy. She said she has no political affiliation.
<b>U</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	Media freedom activist in his 40s who once worked with media advocacy groups as a director. Currently, he is a board member of one news media organization. He once contributed as a columnist to the private press. He has also worked as a communications officer for one advocacy group. He holds a BA in political science, an Msc in African studies. He identifies as a democratic socialist and cannot affiliate with any of the political parties in Zimbabwe. Likens himself to Bernie Sanders.
<b>V</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	A director with one of the media advocacy groups in his 40s with a PhD in business administration in addition to his MA in business administration and a BA marketing and a diploma in journalism. He said his political inclination is promotion of freedom of expression and does not identify with any political party.
<b>W</b>	<b>Press freedom activist</b>	A director with one of the media advocacy groups in her forties. She has worked with



		several media advocacy groups. She holds a diploma in journalism, a BA in History, and a master's in media. She said she has no political affiliation.
<b>X</b>	<b>Government Official</b>	One of the directors in the Ministry of Information Publicity and Broadcasters in his fifties. He has a background in communication, a BA communication, English and media. He also has a master's degree in media. He said he has no political affiliation but identifies with visions and ideas instead of political organization.
<b>Y</b>	<b>Government Official</b>	One of the other directors in the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services in his 30s. A Pan Africanist who identifies with the ruling ZANU PF.
<b>Z</b>	<b>Government Official</b>	A commissioner with the Zimbabwe Media Commission in her 50s. She is involved in capacity building for media publishers in Zimbabwe and in Africa. She also works with media advocacy groups. She holds a BA in Media and English, a diploma in communication and currently pursuing a PhD. She has been a media lecturer with different academic institutions. She has also worked with different news media organizations rising to the position of Managing Director. She said her political affiliation is complicated as she identifies with good elements from all political parties. She also said she is not a political being, but a typical Zimbabwean.
<b>A1</b>	<b>Government Official</b>	Born and bred in rural Rhodesia, she is a Commissioner with the Zimbabwe Media Commission. She holds a BA general degree, a Special Honors in English and a master's in English, and a DPhil. She has more than 20 years of university teaching experience and does not identify with any political party.
<b>B1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	One of the directors in the public press in his 40s. He has also worked in various positions with the public press for about 18 years. He said he does not identify with any political party.
<b>C1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	A former editor with the public press in his 40s, who is now a publisher after being pushed out of Zimpapers. He is also a media lecturer.

		Diploma in media and communication. He holds an MA in media and communication. He identifies with ZANU PF.
<b>D1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	A former CEO and editor with the public press in his 50s who has worked in the media for about 30 years. He has also been a media consultant. He holds a BA in political science and an MA in international relations. He identifies with ZANU PF.
<b>E1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	A veteran journalist in his 50s with 30 years' experience in the news media. Has held any position one can think of in the media. Currently, he is an editor with the public press. He also leads one of the journalists' unions. He holds a BA degree, MA English and Communication, media, and journalism. He identifies with Black emancipation as someone who grew up as part of the deprived Black majority. He said he agrees with ZANU PF on many things.
<b>F1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	A group editor for Zimpapers in his 40s who has worked in journalism for almost 21 years. He holds a Diploma in Mass Communication. He was born in Chimoio, Mozambique, at a refugee camp that also accommodated Zimbabwean freedom fighters. His parents are war veterans. He said he is a Pan Africanist before journalistic identity. He also identifies with socialism. He said he is not sure about the ideology that informs the private press.
<b>G1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	Former editor with the public press in his 40s with about 20 years of journalism experience. He holds a diploma in Mass Communication. He is also Pro-ZANU PF.
<b>H1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	Public press journalist in his 50s who works as a general manager with the public press. He has worked in the public press for more than 30 years. He holds a Bsc in Sociology, master's in business administration, and a PhD in education. He also witnessed the last part of the liberation struggle and aligns with the ruling party.
<b>II</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	A former public press editor in his 50s who now owns a publishing company. He holds a Bsc and an Msc in Media Studies and is currently

		studying for a PhD. He is one of the few journalists who advanced the idea of patriotic journalism and believes in the ZANU PF ideology.
<b>J1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	One of the public press CEOs with more than thirty years of journalistic experience in his 50s. He holds a diploma in journalism. He experienced the liberation struggle in his young age and believes in ZANU PF principles courtesy of his understanding of the goals of the liberation war goals.
<b>K1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	Veteran Zimbabwean journalist in his 70s with more than 40 years of journalism experience. He holds a BA in English and History. He also holds a diploma in Journalism. He is a war veteran who lost his brothers to the war of liberation. He identifies with ZANU PF.
<b>L1</b>	<b>Public press journalist</b>	Freelance journalist in his 40s who once worked with the public press for about 10 years. He holds a diploma in journalism. He also has a Bsc in political science. He sympathizes with the ruling party out of habit, having worked for the state media.
<b>M1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	A head of news and current affairs in his 40s, working with one of the private press publications. He has worked with the private press and community newspapers for about 17 years. He holds a diploma in journalism and is currently pursuing a degree in media. He said he is not aligned with any political party, but not neutral and claims to identify with the truth. Also pointed out that he is not satisfied with the ruling party.
<b>N1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	Veteran Zimbabwean journalist, in his 60s and worked in journalism for more about 40 years before he retired. He is now involved in training. He first trained in-house at Moto before pursuing a postgraduate degree program in journalism. He said he is apolitical and looks at both political parties as just political animals.
<b>O1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	News media entrepreneur and managing editor in his 40s with about 25 years of journalistic experience with the private press. Currently, he is a leader in one of the journalists' representative organizations. He holds a

		diploma in journalism. He does not identify with any of the political parties in the country.
<b>P1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	A sub-editor in his 40s, working with one of the private press news media organizations. He has worked with both the public and private press for close to 20 years. He holds a BA degree, post-grad diploma in journalism. He identifies with the CCC.
<b>Q1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	A private press editor in his 40s who has also worked in the public press and has more than 20 years of journalism experience. He holds a Bsc in Media and does not identify with any political party.
<b>R1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	Veteran journalist in his 60s who has practiced for more than 30 years. He has edited four different newspapers in the private press. He has also done media consultancy. He holds a BA in English and does not identify with any of the country's political parties.
<b>S1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	An Assistant Editor with the private press in his 40s. He has worked with both the public and the private press. He holds a diploma in journalism and has more than 25 years of journalism experience. He holds a BA in media studies and an Msc in development studies. He does not identify with any of the political parties in Zimbabwe but would vote for CCC.
<b>T1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	Veteran journalist and news media entrepreneur in his 50s who has practiced as a journalist for more than 30 years. He is also a former leader of a journalists' representative organization. He identifies with the CCC.
<b>U1</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	Another journalist, in his 40s, who currently works as a news editor in the private press. He has worked with both the public and private press. He has about 20 years of journalism experience. He holds a diploma and a degree in media and journalism. He does not identify with any political party.
<b>M</b>	<b>Private press journalist</b>	A director and editor in one of the privately controlled news media companies in his 50s. He has worked for both the publicly and privately controlled press. He has more than 20 years of experience. He holds a diploma in journalism

		and does not identify with any of the political formations.
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