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**Power and participatory politics in the digital age : probing the use of new media technologies in railroading political changes in Zimbabwe**  
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**Power and participatory politics in the digital age**

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Zimbabwe**

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## List of Acronyms

AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
ANZ	Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe
AU	African Union
BAZ	Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe
BIPAs	Bilateral Investment Protection Agreements
BSA	Broadcasting Services Act
CFUZ	Commercial Farmer Union of Zimbabwe
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JOC	Joint Operations Command
LOMA	Law and Order Maintenance Act
LSZ	Law Society of Zimbabwe
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai.
MIC	Media and Information Commission
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
POSA	Public Order and Security Act
RBZ	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
RF	Rhodesian Front
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UN	United Nations
WOZA	Women of Zimbabwe Arise
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZFL	Zimbabwe Federation of Labour
ZFTU	Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions
ZICOSU	Zimbabwe Congress of Student Unions
ZIDERA	Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act
ZIPRA	Zimbabwean People's Revolutionary Army
ZLHR	Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
ZNA	Zimbabwe National Army
ZTUC	Zimbabwe Trade Union Congress
ZUM	Zimbabwe Unity Movement

## **Acknowledgements**

Writing a PhD dissertation is no easy task. It is a very long journey, as most PhD graduates will likely attest. Overall, I am thankful to Mirjam de Bruijn and Menno de Jong, who worked tirelessly, guiding me as I endeavoured to put the pieces of this research together. They were both always there when I needed them. You always need some experienced minds to assist you through the daunting process. Their experience was invaluable. With both I have developed a very cordial relationship, which I am quite confident will endure. I am also thankful to Prof. Raphael Cohen-Almagor, who provided initial supervision for this research, resulting in an MPhil dissertation at the University of Hull. Arthur Max deserves special mention too because he read through the manuscript and provided some advice. Birgitta Vai-Vai Sodenberg and Marloes Janssen also offered their insights in the early and later stages of this research, while editorial freaks Tammie Nolte, Vanessa van Cleef and Connie Hopkins had the last word, proofreading parts of this manuscript. Special thanks to Simon and Iris, who contributed to one of the chapters. At long last, I am glad I managed to finish my PhD as an externally-registered candidate, which means I had to work full-time next to my research engagements. That was perhaps the hardest part in the process of pursuing a PhD.

To Cyprian, Vennah, Philda, Precious and Shylet

**This dissertation has been approved by Prof Dr. Mirjam de Bruijn and Prof Dr. Menno de Jong**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of acronyms ..... iii

Acknowledgements ..... iv

1 INTRODUCTION ..... 1

1.1 Politics in the digital age..... 4

1.1.2 Role of new media in democracy..... 9

1.2 Rationale behind the study..... 11

1.3 Research aims ..... 13

1.4 Structure outline..... 14

2 METHODOLOGY ..... 17

2.1 Introduction..... 17

2.2. Content analysis ..... 18

2.3 Interviews..... 20

2.4 Qualitative approach ..... 30

2.5 Ethical considerations ..... 34

3 ZIMBABWEAN POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION ..... 40

3.1 Opportunities for Democratic Change ..... 44

3.1.1 Zimbabwean politics: A historical perspective..... 53

3.1.2 Who is Robert Mugabe? ..... 55

3.1.3 Media law in Zimbabwe ..... 58

3.2 Media ownership in Zimbabwe ..... 60

3.2.1 Uneven landscape: Broadcasting in Zimbabwe ..... 62

3.2.2 Change paradigm: MDC’s call for change ..... 64

3.3 Breaking the taboos: Introducing New Zimbabwe.com ..... 69

3.3.1 An acid test for ZANU PF: The Zimbabwean meets Zimdaily ..... 72

3.3.2 Zimbabweguardian.com: Mugabe fights back..... 74

4 PROPPING UP PROPAGANDA..... 76

4.1 Introduction..... 75

4.2 Problem Identification: Research Questions..... 78

4.3 *The Herald’s* role in Zimbabwean politics ..... 79

4.3.1 Historical Overview ..... 82

4.3.2 Conceptual Framework..... 88

4.3.3 Discussion of Results: Representation and coverage ..... 85

4.3.4 Conclusion ..... 90

5 PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM IN ZIMBABWE.....92

5.1 Introduction..... 92

5.2 Review of existing body of research..... 94

5.3 Conceptual and theoretical discourses ..... 97

5.4 Citizen Journalism: Roles and Criticism..... 105

5.5 Conclusion ..... 107

6 AFRICAN CITIZEN JOURNALISTS’S ETHICS AND THE EMERGING NETWORKED PUBLIC SPHERE ..... 109

6.1 Introduction..... 109

6.2 Citizen Journalism in Africa ..... 111

6.3 The digitally networked public sphere..... 116

6.4 Traditional theories of press..... 120

6.5 Citizen Journalism ethics ..... 126

6.6 Methods..... 128

6.7 Results..... 129

6.8 Discussion ..... 135

7 EMERGING PATTERNS IN CITIZEN JOURNALISM .....	139
7.1 Introduction.....	139
7.2 Citizen Journalism in sub-Saharan Africa .....	144
7.3 Participatory Journalism in Africa: Issues at stake .....	152
7.4 Current state of Affairs: Zimbabwe .....	155
7.5 Conclusion .....	158
8 DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION .....	161
8.1 Results overview .....	161
8.2 Reflections and Implications.....	161
8.3 Content analysis results.....	165
8.4 Citizen Journalism in Zimbabwe: Key lessons.....	168
8.4.1 Theoretical contribution.....	172
8.4.2 Conclusion .....	174
8.4.3 Possibilities for further research .....	176
8.4.4 Limitations of this research.....	179
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	180
<b>Appendix 1:</b> Zimbabwean Diaspora speaks out .....	204
<b>Appendix 2:</b> Face-to-face with tyranny victims in Zimbabwe .....	209
<b>Appendix 3:</b> Zimbabweans air participation views.....	211
<b>Appendix 4:</b> Citizen journalists share thoughts.....	212
<b>Appendix 5:</b> Journalists views on Citizen Journalism.....	215

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the context, many people, from bloggers and veteran journalists to prominent academics, provide stimulating views on the political quagmire that has engulfed Zimbabwe for the past dozen years. But opinion has never been this varied and divided. There are varied solutions to problems that range from President Robert Mugabe's alleged disregard for human rights and democracy to his assumed role in the country's seemingly unmatched economic meltdown between 2000 and 2010. There have been repeated calls for Mugabe's ouster while others argue that only the 89-year-old leader has what it takes to hold the country together. Critics question why the United Nations Security Council has been "silent" on Mugabe's alleged disregard for human rights.

Some suggest the International Criminal Court should investigate allegations of torture and criminal misrule in Zimbabwe, while others argue Zimbabwe needs an African solution. They assert that the typically defiant Mugabe would not listen to Western resolutions to the predicament facing his once economically celebrated country. The Twitter and the Facebook worlds have been tormented with questions, largely from Western citizens, who cannot understand why Zimbabweans have failed to produce their own "spring", with reference to the seemingly effervescent Arab Spring which saw long-time Middle Eastern leaders deposed in popular uprisings in what the West hopes is a move towards democracy, whatever that means. All these views evidently point to increasingly divided opinion insofar as finding workable solutions to Zimbabwe's political difficulties is concerned.

The continued availability of new media technologies have forced some to thoughtlessly suggest, without bothering to give any empirical evidence whatsoever, that the Internet can help bring democratic changes in Zimbabwe. In fact, some are already suggesting that Zimbabwe is on the brink of a political revolution. To this day, there is little or no scientific research interrogating the potential relevance of social media insofar as Zimbabwe's political problems are concerned. Thus, talk of a Twitter Revolution

remains just street talk, evidently lacking foundation. The only reason why several people in the NGO and media worlds believe such a scenario may be possible is by alluding to the credit new media has received in spurring revolt against other autocratic regimes elsewhere.

Opinion may thus be divided, but there is at least one captivating notion: Zimbabwe is a scientifically virgin territory, suffering from a lack of top-notch social research, especially the exploration of new journalism and its impact on the country's political and social landscape. Politically speaking, there is a lot that can be said about Zimbabwe, but not everyone who has an opinion about this southern African nation of 13 million people can systematically back those views with traceable and travelable scientific data. This research seeks to modestly provide some key answers to complex questions by bridging the gap between what some consider as being part of the solution to the country's problems along with the hopefully original scientific findings of this study. This largely interdisciplinary study in the field of social sciences thus endeavors to examine the contribution of the Internet, specifically new media technologies, in railroading democratic changes in Zimbabwe.

When it comes to Zimbabwe, several narratives that cannot be ignored are connectedly at play. You could start with citizenship and identity. Who exactly is Zimbabwean and what constitutes being Zimbabwean? Think about Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. Are these people Zimbabweans? Circumstances at home have forced some of them to move and live in other countries for many years. Some have maintained ties with their country of birth; some have decided to cut those ties. President Mugabe's government has long outlawed dual citizenship but it is no secret that the majority of Zimbabweans living abroad have adopted the citizenship of their host countries. What constitutes citizenship then? You have to first consider what actually forced these people to move abroad. For many, political and economic instability was the main factor. There are many who lied about alleged political persecution and repression at home in a bid to seek greener pastures in the West. It is fair to say the country's widely covered economic problems were central to the migration en masse of Zimbabweans. Once settled in their new homes,

they found a way to read, analyse and disseminate information back home to friends and relatives, with the hope that those at home with supposedly reduced access to media diversity would see the “bigger picture” and come to terms with state media’s “lies”. To this end, mobility has never been this important, because it has redefined the real meaning of citizenship. According to the works of Mirjam de Bruijn, Francis Nyamnjoh and Inge Brinkman, this mobility is centred on the role of the sense and feeling of belonging propagated by the peoples themselves or the state.<sup>1</sup>

Legally, most of these people are no longer Zimbabweans, yet they still consider themselves Zimbabwean citizens. Even for those who have chosen to maintain their Zimbabwean citizenship while living abroad, problems are aplenty: Zimbabwean nationals living in a foreign country are by law not allowed to vote in national elections. So again, what exactly is citizenship if you are not allowed to cast your supposedly democratic vote simply because you choose to live in another country? Which country do you represent then? For its part, the government has argued that since most of its high-ranking officials are subjected to European and Western sanctions barring them from traveling to the West, campaigning would unfairly favour other parties if Zimbabweans living abroad would be allowed to vote. It is important to highlight these multifaceted issues because they point to the lopsided and variegated nature of Zimbabwean politics. For example, all of the four news sites that were used for content analysis as part of this research are run by Zimbabwean journalists, some of whom were chased away by the government or are not allowed to return to their country of birth. Zimbabwean journalists such as Gerry Jackson of the ferociously anti-Mugabe SW Africa radio station have been declared persona non grata in Zimbabwe. Can these people be expected to report anything objective about a government that has cancelled what they believe is their legal right to citizenship? Again, who are these people? They are Zimbabweans, yes, but on what grounds? Who determines what constitutes Zimbabweanness? Again, why do they choose to fight the regime using Western means such as digital technologies? What really are their motives?

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<sup>1</sup> Mirjam de Bruijn, Francis Nyamnjoh & Inge Brinkman (eds.) (2009) *Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa*, Bamenda/Leiden: Langaa Publishers/African Studies Centre.

But then again several journalists forced into exile by President Mugabe's government claim to have found a voice when they turn to the Internet and other digital technologies to disseminate information back to their home country. In as much as you might appreciate their desire for media diversity and freedom, you certainly have to question their motives. Whose voices do they represent? Take SW Africa for example. It is important to note that the radio station was initially, and still could be, funded by the US government. You then have to wonder whether they are not an extension of the West's regime change agenda in Zimbabwe, a view strongly held by Mugabe and his followers. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair once publicly proclaimed that his government was working with partners in the region to effect regime change in Zimbabwe.<sup>2</sup> From a widely accepted journalistic perspective, when newsmen unethically accept funding from governments, then you have to question their independence and objectivity. At the same time, the situation is not entirely unique. Media and politics are inseparable. Politicians over the world try to directly or indirectly coerce media attention. However, it is important to carefully assess the motives of new media players in Zimbabwe before celebrating their potential contribution toward full democratic participation in the country.

### **1.1 Politics in the digital age**

Political parties have increasingly turned to computer technologies since the 1980s, both for internal organisational purposes as well as for direct communication with members and voters.<sup>3</sup> In today's globalised world, the growth of digital media is bringing about fundamental changes in the way people think and act. ICTs have radically changed the way cultures, economies, governments, and human beings interact with each other. Similarly, the development of global information and communication infrastructures has briskly transformed ways in which knowledge and content are created, produced, and distributed. Also, recent technological innovations are rapidly changing political and democratisation processes across the world. Menno de Jong and Thea van der Geest, for example, are adamant that the Internet has risen to become one of the most widely used

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<sup>2</sup> Zimbabwe: I am working with MDC, admits Blair, (The Herald, 25 June 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Wainer Lusoli, Stephen Ward & Rachel Gibson, "Political organizations and online mobilization: different media - same outcomes?" New Review of Information Networking, Vol. 8. (2002), pp. 89-108.

forms of communication.<sup>4</sup> To that effect, Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors propound that “technologies have great implications for the content as well as the social relations through which communication is organized.”<sup>5</sup>

This study presupposes the view that as digital technologies become more accessible and affordable, more people are able to easily coordinate, organise and advance their interests. It aims to critically examine the overall role played by the Internet in propelling democratic reforms in Zimbabwe and recognise how similar patterns have also dominated the African democratic space. To this end, the March 2008 national elections are used primarily as a reference period in the first primary study, scrutinising the extent to which Zimbabwean exiles made use of foreign-based news sites run independently by Zimbabwean journalists to channel pro-opposition information into the country, effectively leading to longtime President Mugabe’s unprecedented election loss. Still, the role that citizen journalism and social media are playing in supposedly democratising African states in the aftermath of the Arab Spring revolutions is one area that cannot be ignored. This study devotes three separate chapters to investigating and understanding the role and emerging trends of citizen journalism in Africa.

Scholars such as Herman Wasserman have hailed the ICT revolution for its enabling ability to facilitate political participation and create social change across the continent.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, political decisions, observes Dana Ott, tend to be reached through small-group, face-to-face communication, and that fact is set to remain despite the advent of the Internet. Nevertheless, Ott believes the Internet allows the citizenry to challenge the status quo. “(T)he Net can affect the process preceding decision making by establishing a new channel transporting the citizens’ wants to the elite.”<sup>7</sup> As shown throughout this research, that summation, it seems, best describes current trends and developments in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular.

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<sup>4</sup> Menno de Jong & Thea van der Geest ‘Characterising Web Heuristics’ *Technical Communication* Vol. 47 No.3 (2000) pp. 311-326.

<sup>5</sup> Birgit Meyer & Annelies Moors, *Religion, Media and the Public Sphere* (Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Herman Wasserman, ‘Mobile Phones, Popular Media, and Everyday African Democracy: Transmissions and Transgressions’, *Popular Communication* Vol. 9, No. 2 (2011), pp. 146-158.

<sup>7</sup> Dana Ott, *Power to The People: The Role of Electronic Media in Promoting Democracy in Africa*, [web page] [http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issues3\\_4/ott/index.html](http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issues3_4/ott/index.html), Accessed 5 February 2011

Internet usage has indeed been on the upswing since the Dakar Declaration on the Internet and the African Media of 1997. According to Alfred Kagan, the declaration specifically advocated the establishment of “a culture of online communications and ensuring African content on the Internet.”<sup>8</sup> Tendai Chari calculates that Africa has enjoyed unparalleled Internet growth of 1,030.2 percent between 2000 and 2008 compared with the average world growth of 280.6 percent.<sup>9</sup> Better still, Simon Columbus and Rebecca Heacock declare without hesitation: “Despite economic difficulties, Zimbabwe has one of the highest Internet penetration rates in sub-Saharan Africa.”<sup>10</sup> The continental growth of Internet in Africa has forced others, such as Mirjam de Bruijn, to assert that high access in mobile phones has risen from “1 in 50 persons in at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> C to 1 in 3 just a few years later in 2008”.<sup>11</sup> Despite these promising figures, I observe that the Internet is still very much controlled and accessed by members of an elite club, most of whom live in the major cities, thereby excluding the rural folk from participation. Buttressing this viewpoint is Sandra Nyaira’s assessment that “the only problem in using online media for a country such as Zimbabwe, and indeed much of Africa and the Third World, is that these countries are not wired enough to allow the majority of citizens, who live in poor rural areas, to access the news and be part of the public discourse on events which affect them”.<sup>12</sup>

The term ‘electronic democracy’ takes its roots from studies by a pool of scholars, including Rosa Tsagaraousianou, Damian Tambini, Cathy Brian, Andrew Chadwick and Christopher May.<sup>13</sup> Tsagaraousianou et al. claim electronic democracy best describes the intermediary role of digital technologies in augmenting citizen participation in the political stratum: “The way news is accessed is also changing. News can be down-loaded

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<sup>8</sup> Alfred Kagan, *The Growing Gap between the Information Rich and the Information Poor, Both Within Countries and Between Countries - A Composite Policy Paper*, presented at the 65th IFLA Council and General Conference (Bangkok, Thailand: 20-28 August 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Tendai Chari, *Ethical challenges facing Zimbabwean media in the context of the Internet*, *Global Media Journal (African Edition)* 3/1 (2009) 8.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Columbus, S. & Rebecca Heacock, (forthcoming) *Internet Access in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Working Paper, Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University.

<sup>11</sup> Mirjam de Bruijn, ‘The Telephone has gotten legs: Mobile Communication and Social Change in the margins of African Society’, professorial inaugural address (Leiden University, September 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Sandra Nyaira, *Mugabe’s Media War: How New Media Help Zimbabwean Journalists Tell Their Story*, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Discussion Paper Series (2009)

<sup>13</sup> Rosa Tsagaraousianou, Damian Tambini and Cathy Bryan, (eds.), *Cyber democracy Technology, Cities and Civic Networks*. (London: Routledge, 1998); Andrew Chadwick, and Christopher May, ‘Interaction between States and Citizens in the Age of the Internet: “E-Government” in the United States, Britain and the European Union’, *Governance* 16/2 (2003) 271-300.



as a podcast from news websites and watched at the audience's convenience".<sup>14</sup> In view of these notable changes, I was quite adamant that news distributed by Internet news sites were having an impact on the way the political battle was fought in Zimbabwe.

The flourishing usage of the Internet has, for example, helped Newzimbabwe.com establish itself as one of the leading providers of Zimbabwe-focussed digital news, drawing readers both in the West, Africa and beyond. Its concentration on social and political events has allowed it to provide the "Zimbabwean" viewpoint, as opposed to the mainstream news providers that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora have become accustomed to in their various locations across the globe. While the majority of Zimbabwean emigrants have moved to Western countries, some have opted to stay within Southern Africa. Many, especially academics, have moved to Botswana, Namibia and Lesotho.<sup>15</sup> But the reliability of news produced in a fast-paced digital environment has forced others like Jaap de Jong to revisit and reemphasise Aristotle's ethos paradigm, which credits image and reliability as fundamental cornerstones of any news organisation. Media representation of Mugabe, for example, has – as will be demonstrated in the later parts of this dissertation – not always been honest and accurate. De Jong concludes: "A good orator has to take three factors into consideration. First of all: ethos. He must appear to be reliable and honest. Secondly: pathos. He has to be able to touch the emotions of the public. Finally: logos. His reasoning must be sound".<sup>16</sup> The honesty and reliability of online news is one of the issues I have tackled in the final of the four empirical studies tied to this research.

It is assumed that in today's globalised world the emergence of new media technologies has jump-started the "democratisation" of media content in terms of its creation, publication, distribution and consumption. Andrew Chadwick and Nick Anstead argue that the Internet's increasingly influential role in election campaigning and voter

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<sup>14</sup> James Stanyer, Web 2.0 and the Transformation of News and Journalism: New Possibilities and Challenges in the Internet Age, in A. Chadwick and P N. Howard (eds.), *The Handbook of Internet Politics*. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> 'A crumbling education system', [web page] <http://www.educatedhorizon.org/news-events/81-a-crumbling-education-system>, accessed 2 February 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Jaap de Jong, Professorial Inauguration Leiden University [web page] (4 November 2011) <http://www.news.leiden.edu/news-2011/two-sides-to-the-reliability-of-news.html>, accessed 27 March 2012.

participation was long predicted in the mid-1990s.<sup>17</sup> Alluding to the American case, Aaron Smith states that a majority of American adults went online in “2008 to keep informed about political developments and to get involved with the election.”<sup>18</sup> While not every Zimbabwean citizen has access to the Internet, I was quite adamant that the nation’s expatriates had used their own access to spearhead campaigns that helped shape events at home. Electronic mailing lists, chat rooms and blogs centering on the political crisis emerged before, during and after the March 2008 vote. Ahead of the elections, I interviewed opposition candidate Simba Makoni, who even maintained a profile on social networking site Facebook, and then-opposition senator David Coltart, who reached out to voters on his personal website, to gauge their sentiments on the potential boost from Web. They were equally upbeat. As this research aspired to find out, their efforts were sustained by Zimbabweans abroad who sought to use their Internet spotlight to “educate” others back home.

Several organisations have also pointed to a potentially positive effect of new media technologies in Africa, especially on the democratic and economic front. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) for example concluded in a report that ICTs had proven to be the engine for economic and social development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It added: “Since the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003 and 2005, African governments have been far more proactive in pursuing policies and public-private partnerships that will bring affordable connectivity to their countries”.<sup>19</sup> But democracy, often understood as “rule by the people”, is a highly debatable process. Orwell argues that democracy is a difficult concept with no agreed definition,<sup>20</sup> as the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides. In theory, Robert A. Dahl’s view that democracy revolves around competition and participation – meaning candidates for public office compete in elections and citizens participate by determining who are the

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<sup>17</sup> Nick Anstead and Andrew Chadwick, Parties, election campaigning, and the Internet: Toward a comparative institutional approach, in Andrew Chadwick and Philip Howard *The Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Aaron Smith, ‘The Internet’s Role in Campaign 2008’, Pew Internet & American Life Project (Washington, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Theoretical Study, Democracy and ICTs in Africa, SIDA Report (Stockholm: Edita Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> George Orwell, Politics and the English Language  
[http://iis.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Politics\\_%26\\_English\\_language.pdf](http://iis.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/Politics_%26_English_language.pdf) Accessed 10 January 2012

winners and losers – appears comprehensible.<sup>21</sup> However, in practical terms there is a wealth of evidence revealing unequal patterns of voter access to balanced media, for instance. In addition, when everyone is claiming to respect democracy, how is a true believer or defender of democracy distinguished from the rest? Despite leading the country uninterrupted for more than 30 years, President Mugabe still maintains his allegiance and commitment to democracy, even though critics openly talk about his alleged failures to guarantee equality and freedom to members of the opposition.<sup>22</sup>

During the political crisis, Mugabe's government made decisions that some critics said demonstrated the regime's contempt for press freedom – another key element of democracy – by launching a crackdown on media firms perceived to be against Mugabe's policies. The president and his party have always maintained that they have done nothing wrong, arguing every country has its own sovereign laws by which citizens must abide. Mugabe argues that he is, in fact, a champion of democracy who overthrew the racist White regime of Ian Smith that never allowed Blacks to vote or to enrol in schools.<sup>23</sup> It's an argument that resonates among supporters at home and around Africa. Mugabe justly claims credit for not only bringing majority rule with independence in 1980, but instituting policies that have given Zimbabwe the highest literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the United Nations.<sup>24</sup>

### **1.1.2 Role of new media in democracy**

It has been repeatedly claimed that freedom of speech and expression is the lifeblood of democracy. Media and democracy appear inseparable, as the two words are often used interchangeably. “We should care about journalism because it's central to democracy, citizenship, and everyday life, and we should care about journalism studies because it

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Dahl, “Is Post-National Democracy Possible?”, In Sergio Fabbrini (ed) *Nation, Federalism, and Democracy. The European Union, Italy, and the American Federal Experience, 2001* (Bologna: Editrici Compositori).

<sup>22</sup> Sebastian Berger, ‘Blair: Mugabe should be toppled’, *The Telegraph* (22 July 2009) 7.

<sup>23</sup> Mugabe's speech at the United Nations 5 October 2007 <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-africa&month=0710&week=a&msg=eqG63ZfDaXjAqMI0P8gz7w&user=&pw=> Accessed 12 September 2012

<sup>24</sup> UNDP, ‘Zimbabwe has highest literacy rate in Africa’, *The Southern Times* (16 July 2010).

helps us understand this key social institution,” explain Karin Wahl-Jorgenson and Thomas Hanitzsch.<sup>25</sup>

The power of the media, however, is sometimes overrated. Can media alone instigate change? As noted, some have pointed to recent developments in North Africa to support the school of thought that media can indeed foster change. In the case of Zimbabwe, new media may certainly be helping advance democratic change, but it could also be argued that it takes a combination of factors. These include the political climate in the country, infrastructure, access to the Internet, and illiteracy. Eric Bucy and Kimberly Gregson are of the view that the emergent form of technology-driven democracy goes beyond net activism, taking into broader consideration the participatory engagement of citizens online and the wide exposure to political messages.<sup>26</sup> Their position further strengthens the view that even though new media has the power to effect change, people in a particular country still need to have access to the digital technology. This gap can, however, be drastically reduced if one considers the potential mediating role played by the Diaspora, as is the case in this research.<sup>27</sup>

Democracy, explains Benjamin Barber, is a process of learning and sharing information.<sup>28</sup>

This view strengthens the deep-seated relationship between media and democracy.

Martin Nkosi Ndlela concurs when he says, “One of the main justifications for freedom of expression is therefore that it is a vital part of democracy, facilitating participation in decision-making, facilitating the formation of public opinion”.<sup>29</sup> New media technologies are impacting this seemingly ever-changing relationship between the two paradigms.

Using China as a case study, Randolph Kluver and Indrajit Banerjee say they are supportive of using Internet as a good apparatus for promoting democracy. Online news and social media are considered democratising tools for the Internet. However, other

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<sup>25</sup> Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (eds.), *Handbook of Journalism Studies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) xi.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Bucy & Kimberly Gregson, ‘Media participation: a legitimizing mechanism of mass democracy’, *New Media & Society* 3/3 (2001), pp. 357-380.

<sup>27</sup> Kluver, Randolph and Banerjee, Indrajit, ‘Political Culture, Regulation, and Democratization: The Internet in Nine Asia Nations’, *Information, Communication & Society*, 8 (2005), pp. 30-46.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Barber, ‘Which Technology and Which Democracy?’ *Democracy and New Media* (ed.), Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn (Cambridge: MIT, 2003), pp. 33-48.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Nkosi Ndlela, ‘Mediating Democratic Engagement: Reflections on the role of the media in electoral processes’, paper presented at Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa conference (Maputo, Mozambique: 8-11 April 2010).

forces such as email also play a bigger role in communicating messages among activists. In 2006, the Zimbabwean government introduced the Interception of Communications Bill, which would have allowed the military, intelligence services, police and the office of the President to monitor email correspondence, and telephone conversations. Even though the bill became law in 2007, the lack of technological capability, manpower and monitoring equipment needed to intercept communication appears to have scuttled the government's plans. No arrests have been made.

## 1.2 Rationale behind the study

Covering the Zimbabwean elections in 2008 for *The Associated Press* indirectly influenced my decision to conduct this research. I was the news organisation's only accredited journalist on the ground on a secondment from the Amsterdam bureau. Rumours were spreading that journalists were either being abducted or facing imminent arrest. State security agents were scattered across the country as international interest in Zimbabwe's political landscape reached fever pitch, with the European Union and the United States clamouring for 'free and fair' elections. Mugabe ignored their calls, rhetorically arguing that Zimbabwe had successfully organised democratic elections since 1980 and therefore had nothing to learn from the West. It is common knowledge that Mugabe mocked former U.S. President George Bush's election victory after the disputed Florida recount in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

While in Zimbabwe, I talked to a number of people as part of my newsgathering tasks for the *Associated Press*, many of whom appeared eager to convince me that the source of their news went beyond the Zimbabwean borders. As a Zimbabwean, I knew that a state media monopoly was historically prevalent, if not accepted. The rural areas were technically less developed and marginalised, with some districts, such as the border town of Beitbridge, receiving no local television and radio signals until July 2011. Suddenly, these areas became hotbeds of political activism. What was causing this impulsive change? Opposition activists were making inroads in these areas, which traditionally had

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<sup>30</sup> Mugabe slams Bush Blair, (The Hindu, 6 August 2002)  
<http://greenhouse.economics.utah.edu/pipermail/rad-green/2002-August/004038.html> Accessed 16 March 2011

supported the ruling ZANU PF party. I was curious to find out what the main instigation of this sudden change was. NGO activity was quite noticeable, but as I had been confident of, there was more.

As someone who had lived outside Zimbabwe since 1999, I was well aware of the political crisis that was engulfing the country, forcing millions to flee. With such a huge Diaspora community, it was quite evident to me Zimbabweans were maintaining their roots by forging and extending ties with relatives back home. That meant those fortunate enough to have secure jobs abroad would send home money to support relatives and friends in then economically-ravaged Zimbabwe. I was in that situation myself so I knew exactly what was going on. I talked to a lot of Zimbabweans who expressed concern over a law that made it illegal for expatriate Zimbabweans to vote. For some, the government was taking away their democratic right to vote. Faced with this situation, many Zimbabweans, I concluded, found ample reason to support the opposition. In addition, it was common knowledge at that time that several Zimbabwean-run online newspapers were supporting the opposition's call for change. I was eager, then, to find out whether the expatriates were actively supporting the opposition and whether they had any influence on the political choices of their relatives back home. And if so, how did they sell their message?

Having spoken to Zimbabweans abroad as well as those living in the country, I established a direct correlation between what the anti- and pro-Mugabe camps were trying to achieve. Obviously, to have any sort of influence on their relatives back home, Zimbabweans abroad were using some form of communication, I concluded. Their rigorous exposure to the Internet meant they not only knew what was happening in the country but they also had the means to relay the information to their family and friends back home. That assumption alone helped me establish my initial hypothesis, which asserted that the Internet had a major influence on the outcome of the elections, which saw President Mugabe lose an election for the first time. As a researcher, however, I was quite convinced there was no room for unsubstantiated and unverifiable assumptions such as this, so I sought to corroborate my claims by pursuing this PhD.

### 1.3 Research aims

Generally speaking, the research seeks to answer two key questions: Did the Internet in broad terms, and online news media specifically, play a role in Mugabe's election loss to Morgan Tsvangirai; and if so, then to what extent, how and with what impact? Furthermore, in what way and with what success and potentiality is the Internet influencing and enhancing democratic reforms in Zimbabwe and Africa at large? The four empirical chapters led the way by identifying and proving through data analysis what roles the digital media was playing in enhancing democratic participation in Zimbabwe. These chapters also helped back or disprove the overall hypothesis, which sought to share positive views regarding the Internet's role as a potential game changer in Zimbabwean politics. My initial research used the first round of voting won by Tsvangirai – and not the run-off of 27 June 2008 – as a point of departure in my attempts to understand the impact of new media developments in Zimbabwe. Simon Badza dismisses the June 27 runoff as “inexcusably flawed and therefore discredited, particularly by the West,”<sup>31</sup> which is perhaps one reason why I chose to disregard it. A critical analysis of news articles published by so-called dissident websites also helped this research investigate the overall influence of the Internet in shaping the 2008 outcome.

As noted above, the first part of the empirical section was based on an already-developed hypothesis asserting that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora played a crucial role in determining the first-round result in March 2008, and thus were essentially exerting great influence on politics at home. Facing a grim future because of a struggling economy back home and angry that Mugabe had denied them the right to vote, they hammered friends and relatives with anti-Mugabe messages. It is in this context that this research is dedicated to proving or disproving the contention that the largely Britain-based community of Zimbabweans, deliberately or not, used the Internet as a communications tool to discredit the Mugabe government and encouraged relatives back home to vote for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Additionally, further research sought to explore the role that citizen journalism is playing in helping to free up the African democratic space. It also sought to test whether this pro-opposition Internet

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<sup>31</sup> Simon Badza, ‘Zimbabwe’s 2008 Harmonized Elections: Regional & International Reaction’, *African Security Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2009), pp. 149-175.

onslaught, which led to Mugabe's first electoral loss since independence, effectively enhanced democratic participation in a country where local publicity was dominated by the pro-Mugabe, agenda-setting dogma. Overall, the research seeks to establish the contribution of all Internet facets such as social media and citizen journalism in the democratisation process in Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe.

The introduction of ICTs, powered principally by the ever-increasing usage of Internet and mobile phone networks and based on their perceptible potential, provides an excellent opportunity for changing the operations of political landscapes in Africa and beyond. The digital media's potential is indeed detectable. In 2009 alone, there were an estimated 2.2 billion mobile phones in the developing world and 305 million computers.<sup>32</sup> This research questioned and sought answers to the view that widespread exposure to online news could have promoted citizen participation in the 2008 election and that the Internet was used effectively as a platform for political change. It also sought, as noted, to establish the contribution of citizen journalism to African democracy. Under e-democracy, participating citizens have the sovereignty to use information and communications technologies to influence a political process. Indeed, cyber democracy could be seen as an essential element of free expression that could be used in Zimbabwe or elsewhere as a building block of public participation. Brian Loader argues that the ICT revolution has offered citizens a chance to engineer change in democratic institutions and practices.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the new media, just like the voters, could play a critical role in influencing political and governmental change. Is such a scenario applicable to the Zimbabwe case?

#### **1.4 Structure outline**

In the first part of this dissertation, I will explore the historical aspects of Zimbabwean politics and media. This is a significant part of the research, as it introduces the reader to the roots of political and social despondency in contemporary Zimbabwe. This historical perspective elucidates on how and why things have politically gone badly in contemporary

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<sup>32</sup> Help desk Research Report, New ICTs for Development, Governance and Social Development Research Centre (2010) [www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HD691.pdf](http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/HD691.pdf), accessed 1 February 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Brian Loader, 'The Citizens' Voice in a Wired World: Experiments in e-democracy', paper presented at the ANA Hotel, Tokyo, (14 November 2001).



Zimbabwean society. The British colonial involvement is the crucial backdrop to the nation's present politics.. I will introduce Zimbabwe's contested land reforms, in which the bone of contention stems from a 1980 conference in Britain that laid the groundwork for the establishment of the state of Zimbabwe. This chapter, which also includes an up-to-date profile of President Mugabe, will also explore Zimbabwe's media history, critically looking at its supposedly stringent media laws and the role they play in society. Literature related to changes in political communication, as a direct result of the market penetration of ICTs, will then be analysed, after which I will profile dissident news websites run by Zimbabweans in the Diaspora and assess their impact and contribution towards political participation at home.

The methodological part of this study will explore the key research methods, largely reviewing qualitative research mechanisms in social science research. This chapter provides a broader perspective on research methods in communication sciences, which is also one of my key research interests. This part only explores literature and key concepts in qualitative research and is not entirely integrated with the methodological practicalities and findings employed in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. Conceptually, this chapter feeds into the findings from the four empirical chapters, but structurally it seeks to justify, through an analysis of relevant literature related to social science research, why I chose to use ethnographical interviews and observational research stemming from my role as an active participant and member of the Diaspora, as well as a comparative content analysis of dissident and pro-government and citizen journalism news sites to measure the impact they had on the electorate.

Chapter 4, which is the first empirical chapter, looks at the gaps and ideological differences between new and traditional media. Through an article analysis of a newspaper criticised by some for allegedly being a Mugabe mouthpiece, I intend to show the importance of traditional media to regimes with a traditional school of political thought such as Mugabe's. As a method of research, I analysed the content of the articles it publishes, evaluating headlines, pictures and choice of words. Interesting for this research, traditional media such as *The Herald* have also been forced to adopt new media

characteristics. I question: What does this mean, then, for a conventional political leadership, which is skeptical about the influence and power of the Internet and new media voices? *The Herald* assessment will go as far as looking at the paper's historical ties with Mugabe, how it is surviving in the digital age and whether it has supposedly lost its monopoly as the country's provider of news. While the Internet has been credited with disseminating information on the victims of violence as the government attempted to suppress the media, this research will specifically look at the Internet's role in empowering the electorate with pro-opposition news material. Chapter 5 will be based on a slightly transformed version of a paper I co-wrote and presented with Simon Columbus and Iris Leijendekker, at the 13<sup>th</sup> Symposium on International Journalism at the University of Texas, Austin in April 2012. Two more empirical chapters will examine trends in citizen journalism, one focussing on Zimbabwe and the other giving a critical reflection of ethics in African online journalism. In short, one overarching research aimed at investigating the Internet's role in the Zimbabwean democratic space is supported by four more quasi-independent empirical researches, which also sought to verify the contribution of Internet in buttressing democratic participation in Zimbabwe specifically, and Africa in general. In Chapter 8, the reflection and conclusion discuss the overall general, scientific, theoretical and empirical assessment attached to this research. I will attempt to revisit the main questions raised earlier in this research as well. The conclusion will also summarise arguments on why I think the Zimbabwean Diaspora has played a major role in democratic participation, and how this has occurred. The chapter will also provide an analysis on how dissident journalists as well as citizens living in the Diaspora could maintain and reinforce their momentum on the Internet and help sustain democracy at home, while also reflecting on the major challenges they face. Here, I will also assess opportunities for future research in this field and discuss its limitations.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces and assesses the methods that were used in this research, which was conducted in a contemporary situation. As such it reveals the potential challenges and differences between contemporary and traditional research, given the idea that new methods such as questionnaire interviews can, as was the case in this research, be conducted digitally. The Zimbabwean case is a very difficult one considering the political polarisation in the country. To this end, not everyone who was asked to participate in the research did so openly. Some people sought evidence that I was indeed enrolled as a PhD student, while others wanted written guarantees that their names would not be published. This chapter also reviews literature related to qualitative research methods, which were used in this research. The vigorous analysis of literature became somewhat of a method on its own since the work of key scholars in the field of research methodologies, digital journalism and participatory media were critically assessed.

In his assessment of the use of interviews in qualitative research, William Trochim singles out preparation as one of the key elements in gathering data.<sup>34</sup> That view is supported by Zina O’Leary, who goes on to refute the idea that some research methodologies are superior to others. Ensuring that one gets the right supervisory advice and guidelines is also crucial to the success of the research, O’Leary argues.<sup>35</sup> Following O’Leary’s lead, I elected to principally use face-to-face interviews as principally the main research methodology, along with a content analysis of selected news sites. For the initial research, I resolved to carry out 50 interviews, 25 of which were questionnaire-based and the other 25 in person, with Britain-based Zimbabweans. In Zimbabwe, I also conducted 20 interviews with policy-makers and politicians, journalists and members of the NGO community, as well as Zimbabweans with relatives living abroad, in a bid to corroborate hypothetical conclusions of the Internet’s contribution with realistic assessments on the ground. Engaging them would serve to verify or reject the hypothesis that Zimbabweans

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<sup>34</sup> William Trochim, *The Research Methods Knowledge Base* (2nd edn.; Cincinnati: Atomic Dog Publishing, 2000) 23.

<sup>35</sup> Zina O’Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research* (London: Sage Publications 2004) 18.

in the Diaspora made use of their exposure to the Internet to discredit Robert Mugabe in the 2008 elections, leading to his unprecedented loss. Since content analysis of websites is also a key methodology for my PhD, I elected to analyse four Zimbabwean websites. Altogether, I assessed 80 news items, including readers' comments, columns and editorials focussing on the period, February to March 2008. I decided to look into articles only in the month leading up to the elections simply because it is during this period that the sites were completely geared towards reporting election-related news. The same method of analysis also applies to the websites mentioned below. Multi-methodological approaches were used in this research, which not only used article analysis in *The Herald* newspaper, but also randomly selected online-based articles from Zimbabwean newspapers to examine the extent to which they were contributing to full democratic participation in the country. The following online newspapers, all run by Zimbabwean journalists living abroad, were explored: [www.swafrica.com](http://www.swafrica.com), [www.newzimbabwe.com](http://www.newzimbabwe.com), [www.zimdaily.com](http://www.zimdaily.com), and [www.thezimbabwean.co.uk](http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk).

## 2.2. Content analysis

The foundations of content analysis can easily be attributable to Harold Lasswell's assessment: "Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect".<sup>36</sup> John Vivian brings forward the view that content analysis involves measuring media content to establish a database for analysis.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Werner Severin and James Tankard contend that content analysis is a "systematic method of analysing message content".<sup>38</sup> While agreeing with Vivian along with Severin and Tankard, Joseph Turow puts emphasis on the fact that content analysis allows the researcher to "present the results quantitatively".<sup>39</sup> Perhaps a broader, all-inclusive definition of content analysis is provided by Kimberly A. Neuendorf, who says "content analysis is a summarising, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity, intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalisability,

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<sup>36</sup> Donald H. McBurney, Theresa L., White, *Research Methods*, Eighth edition, (8th edn.; Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2009) pp.234.

<sup>37</sup> John Vivian, *The Mass Media of Mass Communication*, Seventh edition (7th edn.; Boston: Pearson Education Inc, 2006) pp.354.

<sup>38</sup> Werner Severin and James Tankard, *Communication Theories: Origins, Methods and Uses in the Mass Media* (5th edn.; New York: Pearson Education Inc, 2010) pp.35.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Turow, *Media Today: An Introduction to Mass Communication* (3rd edn.; New York: Routledge 2010) pp.46.

replicability, and hypothesis testing) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented”.<sup>40</sup>

My research attempted to cover every aspect of Neuendorf’s definition from the design to the analysis stage, incorporating key attributes such as the generalisability and replicability of data. Content analysis, according to Steve Stemler, also allows “inferences to be made which can then be corroborated using other methods of data collection”.<sup>41</sup> Stemler’s assumptions also fit well in my research since, apart from content analysis, I used other forms of data collection and analysis. Klaus Krippendorff and Mary Angela Bock suggest that six questions are central to the success of a content analysis: which data are analysed, how are they defined, what is the population from which they are drawn, what is the context relative to which the data are analysed, what are the boundaries of the analysis, what is the target of the inferences.<sup>42</sup> Content analysis of the four Zimbabwean websites in the period leading up to the elections was used as part of my research methodology. The main purpose of employing this methodology was to quantitatively measure the extent to which these websites published articles that had a slant towards the MDC, the results of which were assessed to see if they matched with outcomes of the interviews and questionnaire. For instance, if the website had content favouring the opposition and there is confirmation from a respondent that he/she disseminated such information to family and friends and home, that would mean the hypothesis has been affirmed.

I therefore looked at 80 articles (20 from each of the four news sites) published between 1 February 2008 and 29 March 2008, the day the elections were held. I carefully perused them and placed the results of my assessment into referential units for coding. These can be found in the discussion part of this dissertation. Referential units, posits Stemler, are useful when a researcher is pursuing inferences on attitudes, values or preferences. My research sought to investigate the values and attitudes of the four websites, which were then measured to see if the way they represented news allowed Zimbabwean exiles to

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<sup>40</sup> Kimberly Neuendorf, The Content Analysis Guidebook Online [web page] (2002) <http://academic.csuohio.edu/kneuendorf/content>, accessed 7 February 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Steve Stemler An overview of content analysis: Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 7/17 [web page] <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>, accessed 16 February 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Klaus Krippendorff and Mary Angela Bock, The Content Analysis Reader (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2008).

circulate and share the news with voters at home, which is why I made a case to follow Stemler's lead. All articles were read and analysed with a view to gathering the extent to which they may have influenced reader perception of President Mugabe, and then coded into subsets that included the introduction, headline, length of article, presence of a photo and reader comments. Content related to broadcasts by SW Africa was also analysed using the same method, because even though the station transmitted broadcast material, it also has a website that is constantly updated with news. The assumption, according to Stemler, is that "the words that are mentioned most often are the words that reflect the greatest concerns".<sup>43</sup>

### **2.3 Interviews**

One of my initial research targets was to ensure that the interviews would be complete. To reach that goal, one has to record and transcribe the interviews making sure that each and every interviewee's views are correctly represented. How accurate are the interviews, and more importantly how accurate is the interview sample? Good preparation appears very important in ensuring that the results obtained from interviews are accurate. There is a need to educate and inform the interviewees on the purpose of conducting this research, the contents of the research, as well as the implications of participating in the research. This is in line with Steinar Kvale's view that both parties involved in the interview process should value human interaction for knowledge production.<sup>44</sup> It is likely that when interviewees are informed of what is expected of them, they will be more inclined to provide accurate answers. Next to that, there is need to prepare and put together questions capable of allowing those interviewed to reveal their true feelings or assessment of the situation. These questions can normally be both descriptive and explanatory, requesting the interviewee to cover the 'what' and 'why' and 'how' aspects. From my professional journalism experience, I had learned that the manner in which a question is formulated subsequently plays a role in the accuracy of the responses one gets. Considering an estimated three million Zimbabweans were said to be living outside the country, a representative sample, which involves the selection of a small number of individuals

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<sup>43</sup> Steve Stemler An overview of content analysis: Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 7/17 [web page] <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>, accessed 16 February 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Steinar Kvale, An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996) p.14.

capable of representing a larger population, was used in the first, comprehensive overall study.

Gabriella Rundblad pinpoints the rationale for selecting a representative sample as a two-way argument, since firstly: “no one can test an entire population because even the smallest population would take too long to recruit and test and secondly most researchers seek general conclusions that apply to a population and not just a few individuals”.<sup>45</sup> To that effect, results were extrapolated, allowing me to make generalisations about the entire Zimbabwean community in the UK. The biggest challenge of using a representative sample without a doubt is ensuring that all aspects of the population are being studied. Can the views of 50 people fully represent those of all Zimbabweans in the UK? To ensure accuracy, I endeavored to interview people from across the political, educational and racial divide. To be more precise, students currently studying in the UK on a Zimbabwean government scholarship; a Zimbabwean diplomat; Zimbabwean professors lecturing on UK Universities; nurses and factory workers; as well as undocumented Zimbabweans living in the UK, were all interviewed. Interviews were also conducted with former White farmers, representatives and supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change in London, Zimbabwean musicians and several Zimbabwean journalists. In Zimbabwe, random selections of people with relatives abroad were used, as well as representatives of all of the country’s ten provinces, even though they were not necessarily related to Zimbabweans interviewed abroad.

Of fundamental importance was my acknowledgement that my views about the subject under study were not relevant. To acquire the much-needed peer acknowledgment, every researcher needs to disregard any forms of bias in the research process. It is possible to question whether one cannot be biased in my case, considering the fact that I am a Zimbabwean. I obviously researched and wrote this dissertation according to my own worldview. Nevertheless, as a responsible citizen, I attempted to fairly represent views and ideas according to the way I received them. According to Mugo Fridah, sampling

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<sup>45</sup> Gabriella Rundblad, ‘Recruiting a representative sample’, [web page] (2006) [www.appliedlinguistics.co.uk](http://www.appliedlinguistics.co.uk), accessed 16 February 2011.

bias is defined as a tendency to favour the selection of units that have particular characteristics.<sup>46</sup> It is thus the researcher's responsibility to obtain informed consent from the respondents before the research process starts and to ensure that, among other things, their confidentiality is respected.

Structured and semi-structured interviews, which collect qualitative data by setting up a two-way communication-based interview with the respondents, who have the time and scope to reveal their opinions, were of particularly great value to my research design. According to Christa Wessel, Fredric Weymann and Cord Spreckelsen, semi-structured interviews signify two corresponding aspects: (a) the interviewer is aware of the topics and (b) the interviewee has the opportunity to talk freely on a certain point.<sup>47</sup> The use of semi-structured interviews is preferred largely because of their ability to get the respondent's opinion through the use of open-ended questions. The Zimbabwean elections provide an intricate situation due to the political sensitivities involved. From experience, many Zimbabweans, including those in Diaspora, are unwilling to openly discuss their political preferences with strangers. In such a given context, semi-structured interviews could be used because they can deal with complex questions and give informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms while – thanks to their flexibility – allowing the researcher to build trust and a rapport with potential interviewees ahead of the interview.

After a thorough analysis of literature related to research methods, I came to the conclusion that I would use both semi-structured and structured interviews to increase the likelihood of objectivity, even though my role as a participant seemed to confirm the inter-subjective approach. When all participants are asked to respond to a uniform set of questions and given an identical timeframe for interview engagement, their answers are likely to provide an objective analysis. Furthermore, providing a uniform context of questioning allowed me to aggregate the responses. To my own advantage, the use of a

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<sup>46</sup> Fridah Mugo, 'Sampling in Research', (2008) [web page] [http://neumann.hec.ca/sites/cours/51-651-02/Sampling\\_in\\_Research.htm](http://neumann.hec.ca/sites/cours/51-651-02/Sampling_in_Research.htm) Accessed 16 April 2011

<sup>47</sup> Christa Wessel, Fredric Weymann and Cord Spreckelsen Streamlining Qualitative Research Methods for Medical Informatics – A methodological approach, Publikationen, Aachen University, 2006 (London: Sage Publications, 2006) p. 2.



common format made it easier to analyse, compare and contrast interview results. The overall applicability of the same tone of voice during all interview sessions is important according to David Gray, who argues that uniformity in this aspect ensures that the respondents' answers are not influenced by the interviewer's tone, perhaps another key element to ensuring accuracy.<sup>48</sup>

My main goal was to ensure objectivity in my research; therefore, I recorded, transcribed and analysed the non-verbal elements of the interview including gestures and pauses. I was aware of the constraints and limitations of structured interviews, including the fact that by using an interview guide I would possibly miss out on questions excluded in the guide, hence the assumption that restrictive questioning may also lead to restrictive answers. However, a structured interview was the best method to use in this particular research since it turned out to be relatively easy to quantify data that came from a uniform set of questions. I also, and more crucially, believe that data obtained from this particular type of interview is more reliable because the same questions were asked of all respondents. Of particular importance was also the fact that a standardised form of interview bode well with the generalisation element of representative sample, which, as already stated, was chosen in this research.

In addition, I used semi-structured interviews, even though Matthew David and Carole Sutton argue that they are primarily used when a researcher has no intentions of testing a specific hypothesis.<sup>49</sup> I do not fully subscribe to the idea that semi-structured interviews are better than structured ones because they allow the interviewer to probe all aspects of the research. It is also possible to look into several issues of the research when employing structured interviews, especially when the researcher has factual knowledge of the research under study. The key element, I suppose, is good preparation, for there is no guarantee a researcher will acquire some important data simply because he/she has engaged in a particular type of interview. An unstructured interview, on the other hand, did not seem ideal for this particular type of research because it does not allow the

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<sup>48</sup> Gray, David, *Doing Research in the Real World*. (London: Sage Publications 2004) pp. 215.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew David & Carole Sutton, *Social Research the Basics*. (London: SAGE Publications, 2004) pp. 87

possibility of replicating data and, as O’Leary argues, unstructured interviews are not particularly generalisable to a wider population.

Face-to-face interviews were supplemented by questionnaire interviews sent directly to Zimbabweans living in the UK. I did not want to make a distinctive sample in this case because I feared results from the respondents would not be representative. I did this to ensure that separate methodological approaches were used with the view of comparing the different results. Through a network of friends and students, a [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) questionnaire link was sent to Zimbabwean expatriates previously unknown to me through digital means. Respondents were asked to indicate their age, gender and professions. They were then asked to indicate whether they, directly or indirectly, participated in influencing relatives in Zimbabwe to vote against Mugabe; how frequently they read Internet news sites, and which ones specifically; how often they spoke with their relatives, and using which method; whether they felt it was unfair that they were not allowed to vote simply because they were not living in Zimbabwe; and to further elucidate their political preferences and their views on the economy, as well as which candidate they would have voted for had they been allowed to vote in the March 2008 elections. As stated earlier, Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe were interviewed so as to corroborate or deny the results of the data obtained in Britain. I wanted to know whether their voting choices were influenced by what was fed to them by relatives in Britain; who they voted for and why they voted for a particular candidate; what influenced them to vote for a particular candidate; how informed they were about the candidates; whether they attended any rallies; and whether they would vote for the same candidate again.

An interview is a qualitative data collection tool. According to Kvale, qualitative research interviews attempt to establish the meaning of people’s experiences on a particular subject.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the main task in interviewing is attempting to make sense of what the interviewees say. Carter McNamara concurs with Kvale’s observation, stating that interviews are principally useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences.

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<sup>50</sup> Steinar Kvale, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996) pp. 15.

Interviews, argues McNamara, allow the interviewer to comprehensively pursue information about a given topic.<sup>51</sup> For a research that seeks to expound the role played by the Internet in the Zimbabwe, interviews seemed more valuable as a qualitative method of research because they allow the respondents to freely share their opinions and impressions. Working directly with the respondent makes the interview personal and open, potentially boosting the quantity of information an interviewer can get as respondents share their opinions without restraint, further improving the quality of the interviews. However, quantity does not always reflect the quality of the material that an interview may bring to a researcher.

Kvale describes seven stages of an interview investigation as thematizing, designing the study so it addresses the research questions, the interview itself, transcribing, analysing, verification and reporting.<sup>52</sup> Thematization, which largely involves the formulation of the rationale behind the investigation, also seeks to illustrate the concept for the topic under investigation. It must be clear in the opening stages why the interview is being conducted and what the subject matter under investigation is. Explaining vividly why the interview is being conducted makes it easier to move on to how the interview will be pursued, argues Kvale. For the purpose of this research, in seeking to appreciate the role of the Internet in the Zimbabwean elections, research interviews were conducted to determine whether Internet-exposed Zimbabweans in the Diaspora had a hand in deciding the national elections in 2008. Since this is a comparative research, the same question was applied to the British case, albeit with a few alterations.

The planning stage centres on designing the questions to be used in the interview. Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison say this stage involves the translation of research objectives into the questions that will make up the main body of the schedule.<sup>53</sup> Questions should thus reflect the objectives of the research. The format and response mode – taking into consideration the aims of the interview, nature of the subject under

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<sup>51</sup>Carter McNamara, PhD research General guidelines for conducting interviews, Minnesota [web page] (1999) <http://www.managementhelp.org/evaluatn/interview.htm>, accessed 11 September 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Steinar Kvale, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996) p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (London: Routledge Ferner, 2000) p. 274.

investigation, kind and circumstances of the respondents to be used, and anticipated information to come from respondents – should also be considered. David Morgan mentions focus groups as another method that allows for considerable flexibility in how questions are asked.<sup>54</sup> Unlike targeted interviews, he argues, focus groups give respondents a chance to supply in-depth answers. In a focus group, respondents are grouped together and they answer questions at the same time. According to Fatemeh Rabiee, focus groups aim to understand, and explain, the meanings, beliefs and cultures that “influence the feelings, attitudes and behaviours of individuals”.<sup>55</sup> I considered the possible engagement of focus groups, separately sampling groups of Zimbabwean-educated nurses who had moved to the UK in search of greener pastures upon graduation. Even though on paper they seemed more likely to be willing to openly give their views because they felt they shared similar backgrounds and experiences, I felt I would be not be able to gain credible, open and unbiased data since naturally Zimbabweans tend not to openly enjoy discussion about their political affiliations in public.

I also considered using purposive sampling to bring together Britain-based victims of alleged Zimbabwean repression. The reason for purposive sampling was to investigate how many Zimbabweans were exposed to the Internet and how many of them visited, read and then shared political information from news websites with family members who then voted out President Mugabe. Selecting a smaller, more manageable number of people to interview seemed more logical simply because talking to the entire population is not only impossible, but would require more time and perhaps more interviewers. Purposive sampling limits the researcher to only a specific group of people one feels will be beneficial to the research. While a certain group of people, for instance Zimbabwean nurses, may have been considered under purposive sampling, it could have proven difficult to elucidate on how their views represented the entire exile community with people from various professions. Nurses may have represented the views of educated or degree-holding members of the community, meaning Zimbabweans without a university degree would have been excluded under purposive sampling. The advantage of using a

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<sup>54</sup> David L Morgan, *The Focus Group Guidebook*, edited by Morgan, D. L. and Krueger, R. A. Vol. 1, *The Focus Group Kit*. (London: Sage Publications, 1998) p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Fatemeh Rabiee, ‘Focus-group interview and data analysis’, *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* (2004), pp. 63, 655–660.

random selection is its ability to eliminate potential bias, but using it as a methodology also means one needs be prepared to come across citizens who have not been exposed to the Internet and are thus not useful for the purposes of this research.

It was also my responsibility to clearly spell out the target groups of people to be interviewed, in addition to clarifying reasons for their inclusion or exclusion. To put this into context for the research, I looked at the circumstances that forced expatriate Zimbabweans out of the country in order to fully comprehend their contribution in the elections. For instance, it is highly unlikely that a Zimbabwean studying in the UK on a bursary from the Zimbabwean government would be involved in spreading an anti-Robert Mugabe tirade to relatives back home, since he or she may be thankful for Mugabe's generous funding. On the other hand, those who were allegedly forced out of their jobs by the regime or those whose relatives were supposedly killed by the militias linked to the president, had a higher chance of pursuing a strong, anti-Mugabe agenda. Moreover, considering the sensitivity of the subject matter, some people may be uncomfortable giving their full names and addresses or some may not actually like the idea of tape-recording the interview.

Laying down the research design allows the researcher to determine what kind of questions are to be used. Information sought attempted to ascertain the respondent's opinion, background, behaviour, feelings or knowledge on the subject matter, hence the need to define whether the questions used in the interview were open or closed questions and whether they should be direct or non-direct questions. An example of an open question which was asked to the respondents is: "Do you see the Internet as a major factor in improving democratic participation in Zimbabwe?" An indirect question posed was: "Why do you not trust news reports on Zimbabwe?" Specific and non-specific questions were also employed. "Do you think Zimbabweans should be left to sort their own problems?" amounted to a general question while, "What is your major source of news?" was rather more specific. One also needs to decide the types of interviews to be conducted. If it is a standardised, open-ended interview, then the question is whether an identical set of questions should be used for each interviewee. Is it an informal,

conversational interview with no clearly thought-out questions, or is it a telephone interview? Highlighting the importance of clarity prior to, during and after the interview, William Foddy introduces the symbolic interaction theory, arguing that if questions are not clear, respondents will constantly try to reach a mutually shared definition of the situation to which the research may or may not ascribe.<sup>56</sup>

In the interviewing stage, Kvale notes that the interview should have a reflective approach to the knowledge sought. Important at this stage is the setting. The interviewee needs to be comfortable with the setting of the interview. Some may want privacy, so it is important to ensure that their privacy is guaranteed. Body language may also play a role. Obviously, if you cannot look into the interviewee's eye, some people may see that as lack of interest. However, it should be noted that while in the West making eye contact while talking to someone is a sign of interest and attention, in some African and Asian countries this could be offensive. Planning is also important. The interviewer needs to ask one single question at a time. It also is important to check if your audiotape is working. Taking notes is also encouraged. I followed these steps as given by Kvale, which obviously helped improve the quality of my interviews, considering it was very clear to the interviewees what the purpose of the study was and what their participation meant to the success of the research.

Kvale's transcribing stage involves preparing the interview material for analysis, which normally involves the time-consuming process of dictating the oral speech into written text. Justifying tape-recording and transcribing the data, Alan Bryman argues that qualitative researchers do not just need to focus on what people say, but also on the way in which they say it.<sup>57</sup> Verbatim transcription means everything recorded in the transcript is typed up, including possible coughing or pauses. It allows the researcher to have the interview as it is, word-for-word with no edits. In an intelligent verbatim transcription, the typist edits out repetitions or laughter, paying attention mostly to what he feels is important. This research uses verbatim transcription in order to remain accurate and focussed on everything that the interviewees say, thereby staying in line with Daniel G.

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<sup>56</sup> William Foddy, *Constructing Questions for Interviews* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) 21.

<sup>57</sup> Alan Bryman, *Interviewing in qualitative research: Social Research Methods* (2nd edn.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 321.

Oliver, Julianne M. Serovich, and Tina L. Mason's argument that transcribing data could strongly affect the way participants are understood, the information they share, and the conclusions drawn.<sup>58</sup>

The analysing stage follows next with the researcher having to decide on appropriate methods of analysis. Scholars like Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen consider coding, shaped by one's central questions or hypotheses, as a first step in analysing interviews.<sup>59</sup> Coding becomes apparent when the interviewer analysing data comes across words and phrases that highlight an issue of importance to the research. The process of assembling these words is defined as coding. Daily interpretive analysis is one way of looking at interviews; it involves assembling and analysing data collected on each day.<sup>60</sup> Content analysis could also be employed in assessing interviews. Steve Stemler suggests that the most commonly accepted notion in qualitative research is that a content analysis involves engaging in a word-frequency count. He argues that when conducting a word-frequency count an assumption is made that the words that are mentioned most often are the "words that reflect the greatest concerns".<sup>61</sup> The material needs to be analysed step by step, following rules of procedure and devising the material into content-analytical units.<sup>62</sup> Philipp Mayring argues that the objective of qualitative content analysis can be all sorts of recorded communication including transcripts of interviews, discourses, and protocols of observations, videotapes or other documents.<sup>63</sup> The verifying stage of the interview ascertains what Kvale calls the generalisability, reliability, and validity of the interview findings. Reliability is based on the consistency of the results while validity tries to establish whether the intended goals of the research have been met by the interview. The final stage involves communicating the findings of the study and the methods applied.

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<sup>58</sup> Daniel G. Oliver, Julianne M. Serovich, and Tina L. Mason, 'Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research', *Journal of Social Forces*, 84/2 (2005) pp. 1273-1289.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods* (3rd edn.; Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998) p. 67.

<sup>60</sup> Charles H Wood, *Collecting and Analysing Interview Data*, [web page] (2000) [http://www.rsmas.miami.edu/IAI/Inst2000/lectures/wood\\_jul20/reading/qual\\_appr\\_2.pdf](http://www.rsmas.miami.edu/IAI/Inst2000/lectures/wood_jul20/reading/qual_appr_2.pdf), accessed 14 September 2010.

<sup>61</sup> Stemler, Steve, *An overview of content analysis. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation* [web page] (2001) <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>, accessed 8 March 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Philipp Mayring 'Qualitative Content Analysis', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung*, Vol, 1, No. 2 [web page] (2000) <http://217.160.35.246/fqs-texte/2-00/2-00mayring-e.htm#g2>, accessed 8 March 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Phillip Mayring *Qualitative Content Analysis* *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol 1, No 2 (2000) [web page] <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/rt/printerFriendly/1089/2385> Accessed 16 June 2011

## 2.4 Qualitative approach

Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman agree that when thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspective worlds that can only be captured through face-to-face interactions.<sup>64</sup> But in a changing environment, new methods are presently the order of the day thanks to technology. In the digital age, interviews are conducted online. There is no evidence as far as I am concerned to suggest that the inner feelings of a person can only be accessed through the use of face-to-face interactions. When people are on their own, they also freely express their own views in writing. I do not think the authenticity and reliability of a research should be focussed on whether respondents reacted online or through face-to-face interactions. Realising these difficulties, I employed both means, the more traditional face-to-face interviews and the digital questionnaires, which are increasingly used by new researchers. I decided to employ both measures because I was well aware of the fact that some Zimbabweans would not be comfortable speaking in person with a stranger about their political choices. Randomly sampled respondents thus shared their views online. By any means, it is difficult for researcher to deal with a deeply politically-sensitive case like mine. I was not particularly afraid of being targeted by any political party, given the fact that academic researchers are well respected in Zimbabwe. Academics have been spared from arrests or threats in Zimbabwe, something that is not a common trend for journalists, for example. To the best of my knowledge, no academic has been arrested for criticising the president since the political upheavals began in 2000. In fact, one of Mugabe's staunchest critics was the late University of Zimbabwe Political Science Professor John Makumbe.

Qualitative methods have thus been preferred largely because of the nature of the research, which inherently lends itself to a qualitative investigation based on the view that it is the 'how' instead of 'how many' question that needs to be explored. According to Mildred Patten, qualitative methods should be used when little is known about the topic,

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<sup>64</sup> Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, (4<sup>th</sup> edn., London: Sage Publications, 2006) 14-56.



when participants belong to a culture that is secretive, and when potential participants are available for extensive interactions and observations.<sup>65</sup>

The research objectives fit well into Mildred Patten's description if one considers that this study was carried out with the hope of establishing the first thought-provoking assessment of the way Zimbabwean exiles have used the Internet to influence voting patterns in Zimbabwe. Studies on the momentum that the Internet has gained over the years, especially with specific reference to citizens' political participation in Africa and particularly Zimbabwe, are limited. Zimbabweans in the Diaspora tend to remain secretive when it comes to issues concerning their political association, possibly for fear of reprisals. Furthermore, it can also be concluded that there was plenty of time to conduct interviews with Zimbabweans at home. It goes without saying that human experience is a strong characteristic of qualitative methodology, which I was keen to explore.

Making a simple distinction between quantitative and qualitative empirical research, Keith Punch concludes that the two are separated by the fact that numbers, which are central to the success of the former, have no major part to play in the latter.<sup>66</sup> Be it in a quantitative or qualitative research, question development is key to understanding the process. A researcher needs to clearly identify and lay out the questions to be researched, also explaining robustly the motive of the research before deciding which methodology to use. According to Punch, different questions require different methods to answer them. Patten agrees with Punch's view. Arguing that observations and empirical research are inseparable, she says that prior to a research engagement, a researcher needs to clearly outline the main motives for undertaking the research, who is to be observed, how and when to carry out the observations. The significance of well-defined objectives cannot be over emphasised, she argues, adding that the 'why' question establishes the main motive for the research and outlines its potential. For example, funding bodies are more inclined to assess the research aims before deciding whether to fund it or not. In fact, clarity on

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<sup>65</sup> Mildred L Patten, *Understanding Research Methods*, (Greendale CA: Pyczak Publishing, 2005), pp. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Keith F Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, (London: Sage Publications 2005) pp. 24.

the questions to be investigated is largely in the researcher's interest as it simplifies the process of looking for answers.

Patten sees case studies as research strategies that focus on the exploration of a complex phenomenon and related contexts, stating they are mostly useful when exploring the 'why' and 'how' questions. This research's main objective has been clearly spelt out as intending to explore the extent to which Internet exposure may have helped Zimbabweans in the Diaspora share and spread anti-Mugabe information, effectively discrediting the long-serving president. The intervention of online journalism – especially websites run by Zimbabwean journalists living in the Diaspora – in presumably discrediting President Mugabe's candidacy was also explored. Thus, can the Internet influence the outcome of an election, and if so, to what extent? There were plenty of questions that logically could not be ignored. For example, how many Zimbabweans have left the country? Where have they gone to? Why did they leave the country? How many of them had access to the Internet before and during the elections? How many of them encouraged relatives to vote out President Mugabe? Was that decision based on what they had read on the Internet? How many of them would be willing to disclose their political affiliation? What evidence is there to prove that their relatives and friends followed their advice not to vote for President Mugabe?

Having outlined the research questions, one has to consider the methods to be used. Following Immy Holloway and Stephanie Wheeler's assertion that the aim of a qualitative researcher is to explore people's experiences, feelings and beliefs, this research chose to prioritise qualitative research methods.<sup>67</sup> An ethnographic approach was effectively used as a form of methodology in this research, considering the interviews were embedded in ethnography. In addition to analysing the data, I spent an extended period of time identifying, studying and observing any cultural trends and patterns among exiled Zimbabweans that helped me explain, approve or dismiss the above-mentioned hypothesis. I concluded that community engagement played a crucial role in sharing information among Zimbabweans. Churches provide good examples of this. While

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<sup>67</sup> Immy Holloway & Stephanie Wheeler *Qualitative research for Nurses* (Oxford: Blackwell Science, 1996) pp. 4.

people may be entitled to their own opinions, visiting the same church meant that people shared the same ideology and values. One such example is a confirmation by a church pastor during an interview that while his congregation tried as much as they could to stay away from politics, the majority of its members were openly critical of Mugabe's policies.

Ethnography is a multi-purpose qualitative methodology involving participant observation, interviewing, and discourse analyses of natural language. Defined by David F. Fetterman as a credible, rigorous and authentic story, ethnography thus involves extensive fieldwork under which one abandons any preconceived assumptions of a particular group of people in order to effectively learn something about them.<sup>68</sup> Punch says listening to what people say, asking questions and collecting any relevant data is central to understanding ethnography, which he argues is based on the assumption that the shared cultural meanings of a group of people helps define their actions and behaviour.<sup>69</sup>

Some scholars, however, believe ethnographical work cannot be separated from grounded theory, which assumes one has to abandon any preconceptions or hypotheses before engaging in research. To this end, Fetterman argues that the beginning phase of an ethnographic study often involves considering all biases and preconceived notions that the ethnographer may have. Arguing that biases may have both a positive and negative impact on the research and are indeed part of the research process, he says the choice of a problem, geographical area or the people to study, in itself demonstrates a degree of bias. Grounded theory, which largely involves the inductive discovery of theory from data collected, has indeed been considered as a potential research methodology for this research. However, since a clearly defined hypothesis has been developed, engaging grounded theory would possibly conflict with the hypotheses to be tested. However, as a theoretical contribution of this research, it is inductively provided in the final chapter of this research.

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<sup>68</sup> David F Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step*, (London: Sage Publications, 2010) pp. 1-10.

<sup>69</sup> Keith F Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, Sage Publications (2005) pp. 150.

Interviews were aligned to ethnography, as the researcher in the field does not just make observations but also talks to the people involved. As noted earlier, face-to-face and computerised questionnaire interviews were also used in this research. Using web-based questionnaire interviews, I attracted respondents to questions by randomly sending survey questions to readers. The use of questionnaires was driven by the view that information from a large portion of the group would be potentially collated. Also considering my own budget constraints, I chose web-based interviews as they were considerably less expensive to administer. Besides, I felt it would be more interesting to see if results based on two contrasting methodologies would draw the same conclusions.

## **2.5 Ethical considerations**

Social science scholars need to make several ethical considerations when studying human behaviour and attitudes. In a broad sense, they safeguard the interests and rights of the people involved in or affected by their research. David B. Resnik defines research ethics as standards of conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in the process of conducting research. John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles consider mutual respect, non-coercion and non-manipulative support for democratic values to be the most basic codes for good ethical practice in social science research.<sup>70</sup> The issue of the researcher's moral integrity is thus important insofar as the general understanding of research ethics is concerned. Fundamental ethical guidelines for the conduct of research were codified by the Nuremberg Code.<sup>71</sup> The code, which emerged in 1947 in the aftermath of the gruesome atrocities conducted under the guise of scientific research on Jews in the Nazi concentration camps, gave birth to ten conditions to justify research involving human subjects. Chief among these are the voluntary consent of the subjects involved in the research, and that 'something good' for society has to emerge from the research.

Ethics not only promote best practice among researchers but they also help establish and maintain accountability. Research misconduct involves what Denise Carter calls

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<sup>70</sup>John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles, Visual Research Ethics at Crossroads Realities Working Papers, Working Paper 10, p.10

<sup>71</sup>Nuremberg Code Accessed <http://www.cirp.org/library/ethics/nuremberg/>  
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“fabrication, falsification or plagiarism in proposing, performing or reviewing research or in reporting research results”.<sup>72</sup> Fabrication involves making up data or results and recording and reporting them. In order to reign in potential cheating, professional bodies have developed specific guidelines for ethical codes of conduct for researchers. For example, many universities have a research ethics policy, which all researchers must adhere to. These policies are mostly intended to help researchers appreciate the rights of the participants, consider a risk assessment of their research and observe equally important matters such as confidentiality and informed consent.

While deception should always be avoided, Jamie McIntosh argues that researchers frequently use it nonetheless.<sup>73</sup> This possibly explains why not only scholars but also educational entities across the world have developed norms and guidelines for making research practice more acceptable. McIntosh argues that deception should be kept out of any form of research unless one determines that there is no other way of getting information. Thus, the potential use of any form of deception needs to be justified before the research is carried out. However, the question is: can deception be defended when honesty is considered a paramount academic virtue?

McIntosh is of the opinion that researchers conducting a study on how students of different races interact would be excused if they chose not to reveal the purpose of the study, so as to counter the possibility of participants acting unnaturally during the research.<sup>74</sup> However, researchers would still have an obligation to inform participants about the use of deception no later than at the conclusion of the research. Deception is potentially dangerous because it may harm participants. Afflicting harm on someone may point to a failure by the researcher to respect human dignity and privacy. Eleanor Singer observes that failure to guarantee confidentiality is the most serious harm to which

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<sup>72</sup> Dennis Carter delivering a lecture during the University of Hull’s 2010 Easter School

<sup>73</sup> Jamie McIntosh, Ethics in Social Science Research: Scholars Must Follow a Code of Ethics to Maintain Integrity. [http://scientificethics.suite101.com/article.cfm/ethics\\_in\\_social\\_science\\_research#ixzz0icShoWdj](http://scientificethics.suite101.com/article.cfm/ethics_in_social_science_research#ixzz0icShoWdj) Accessed 16 April 2010

<sup>74</sup> Jamie McIntosh, Ethics in Social Science Research: Scholars Must Follow a Code of Ethics to Maintain Integrity. [http://scientificethics.suite101.com/article.cfm/ethics\\_in\\_social\\_science\\_research#ixzz0icShoWdj](http://scientificethics.suite101.com/article.cfm/ethics_in_social_science_research#ixzz0icShoWdj) Accessed 16 April 2010

participants in social research are exposed.<sup>75</sup> Harm resulting from participating in research may be physical, social, psychological, emotional, financial or legal.<sup>76</sup> To put this ethical requirement into context of this PhD research, there was always a chance that participants in a politically-centred probe into the influence of Internet in the 2008 election would risk victimisation from either members of the president's party or opposition cadres if the research findings were publicised without their consent. Insensitive exposure of attributes and opinions could lead to the political marginalisation of the participants, their friends or families, which is why various scholars including McIntosh argue that it must be avoided.

While informants and other research participants should be accorded the right to remain anonymous and to have their privacy and confidentiality respected, it is the researcher's responsibility to obtain informed consent from the respondents before the research process starts. The procedure involves an agreement reached with the participants to take part in the research after potential risks, benefits, purposes and uses of the research have been thoroughly explained to them. Prosser, Clark and Wiles argue that not only is gaining consent a key requirement to the process of getting good quality data, but it also helps develop and maintain a rapport of trust between a researcher and participants.<sup>77</sup> Consent could come in various forms. It could be written or implied, meaning if someone for instance agrees to an interview and answers the questions, then implied consent has automatically been obtained. Prosser, Clark and Wiles argue that consent may have different meanings in other cultures and worse still, it may be not be possible to gain consent from every participant in the research. Such a development leaves a researcher in a position where he/she has to evaluate the need to continue with the research.

According to David B. Resnik, publishing one's work should be in the interest of the advancement of research and scholarship, not the researcher's own career. That way,

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<sup>75</sup> Eleanor Singer Ethical issues in surveys in Edith de Leeuw, Joop Hox and Don Dillman, (2008) International Handbook of Survey Methodology p. 90. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

<sup>76</sup> Chris MacDonald and Nancy Walton, Research in the Social Sciences & Humanities. Available on the Internet <http://www.researchethics.ca/social-science-humanities.htm> Accessed 16 April 2010

<sup>77</sup> Jon Prosser, Andrew Clark, and Rose Wiles "Visual Research Ethics at Crossroads" Realities Working Papers, (University of Manchester 2008).

wasteful and duplicative publication should be avoided.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, there should be no economic exploitation of individual informants, translators and research participants. This principle aligns itself with the need to consider conflicts of interest when conducting research. For a researcher who is on the payroll of the opposition party in Zimbabwe, conducting research that involves the ruling party may attract issues involving conflict of interest. Equally important is the thorny issue of objectivity. Resnik suggests a researcher should avoid bias “in all aspects of research including experimental design, data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, personnel decisions, grant writing, expert testimony, and other aspects of research where objectivity is expected or required”.<sup>79</sup> Debriefing is another important element of the research ethical framework. According to Pattern, debriefing takes place when the researcher reviews the purposes and procedures used in the research or shares research results with the participants.<sup>80</sup> One key element of debriefing is an assurance that data will remain confidential, further stressing the importance of confidentiality in research.

I made sure that the right to privacy and informed consent was guaranteed to the interviewees and survey participants. Guaranteeing participants their right to informed consent also offers them the right to refuse being surveyed or interviewed. My research therefore ensured that participation in the interviews was purely on a voluntary basis. This procedure involves reaching an agreement with the participants after the purposes, procedures, time period, risks and benefits of the research have been thoroughly explained to them. In a cover letter inviting candidates to participate, I explained how interview data was to be used, how harmful it could be for them if their privacy were not maintained and how I intended to safeguard their privacy. The cover letter also gave assurances that their privacy was to be respected, as they would not necessarily need to give their full names and addresses, and all information gathered would likely not be shared publicly. However, I also explained to them that unless they had reservations, research data could be made available for use by other researchers.

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<sup>78</sup> David B Rensik, What is Ethics in Research & Why is It Important? Available on the Internet <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis.cfm>, Accessed 17 December 2011

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Mildred L Patten, *Understanding Research Methods* (Los Angeles: Pyrczak Publishing, 2005) p. 25.

The issue of confidentiality underpins all qualitative research, according to Jack Fraenkel.<sup>81</sup> It is also one element I strongly feel should be guaranteed to potential participants because it is highly likely most of them will seek those assurances before participating. The failure to respect the principle of confidentiality may expose their political affiliation, potentially leading to political marginalisation back home. Since all interviews were audio-taped, I explained to them that transcripts would identify interviewees by coding and not by name to protect their privacy in the unlikely event of the tape or transcript getting lost or stolen. I also gave them a guarantee that I took the sole responsibility for transcribing the interviews, as some may feel uncomfortable with hiring third parties for the transcription process. Fraenkel is of the view that the return of interview transcripts to interviewees is another way of showing concern about protecting their interests. I also intend to return the transcripts as a sign of courtesy. They may choose whether to receive the transcripts or not. A cover letter also gave details on the interviewee's rights during and after the interview. These included their right not to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable as well as their right to abandon the interview whenever they felt it was appropriate to do so. It was also in their right to choose the interview location.

Angelica Orb, Laurel Eisenhauer and Dianne Wynaden argue that researchers have the obligation to anticipate the possible outcomes of an interview and to weigh both benefits and potential harm.<sup>82</sup> Research involving Zimbabwean politics is normally considered delicate among citizens both at home and abroad. For this reason, the ability to enlighten respondents with sufficient information is important, as participants will base their decision to take part or not after evaluating the information they receive. It has to be clear to participants that the purpose of the research is to investigate the contribution played by the Internet in the Zimbabwean electioneering process of March 2008. The potential benefits of conducting this research, the participants were informed, were to gain knowledge, understanding and insight into previously uncovered information on the

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<sup>81</sup> Fraenkel, Jack, *How to design and evaluate research in education* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1990) pp. 43.

<sup>82</sup> Angelica Orb, Laurel Eisenhauer, Dianne Wynaden, 'Ethics in Qualitative Research', *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33/1 (2000) pp. 93-96.



contribution of Internet news sites to the Zimbabwean elections, thereby contributing to overall national political scholarship on the subject.

John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles argue that not only is gaining consent a key requirement to the process of getting good quality data, but it also helps develop and maintain a rapport of trust between a researcher and participants.<sup>83</sup> I believe developing trust is an important element in my research. Since some may have considered the topic sensitive, participants sought assurances that anything they said would not potentially endanger their lives or that of their relatives or friends back home, which is why establishing a good working relationship with them was crucial. They were, as I noted, most likely to share their true feelings and opinions when they felt comfortable and confident that there were no prospects of being targeted by political opponents back home. While attempting to determine the role that the Internet plays in national elections, the Zimbabwean case specifically analyses content on websites set up by its citizens in the Diaspora including [www.newzimbabwe.com](http://www.newzimbabwe.com)

Without any doubt, ethics are important. They helped me establish a path for conducting research. Defining a sample involved a strict adherence to research ethics and so did selecting the subjects for interviews. For example, I needed to give respondents assurances that I would not use the interviews for journalistic purposes. It obviously was difficult to keep all the data for a long time knowing for sure that I could have caught the eye of several readers by publishing a newspaper account from my interviews. Attempting to be objective was a difficult task. However, I would like to believe that I fairly represented the views of the subjects interviewed in the research. I obviously made assumptions and generalisations based on my own assessment of the data, so one could question if I were entirely objective.

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<sup>83</sup> John Prosser, Andrew Clark and Rose Wiles, *Visual Research Ethics at Crossroads, Realities Working Papers*, (University of Manchester 2008) pp.10.

### 3 ZIMBABWEAN POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe, a landlocked country in southern Africa, attained its independence from British colonial rule on 18 April 1980. The British presence in Zimbabwe, which began when ambitious colonial entrepreneur Cecil John Rhodes arrived in the country in 1888, was not without controversy. Under colonial rule, the British settlers introduced a racially skewed agricultural policy that gave the vast majority of the country's fertile land to the new arrivals at the expense of the then ten million poverty-stricken Blacks. At independence – nearly 100 years later – around two-fifths of the total land area was still occupied by the minority White commercial farmers.<sup>84</sup> Reflecting on the colonial agrarian imbalances, James Hlongwane, Daniel Gamira and Richard S. Maposa, calculated that the minority White “commercial community owned 51% of the total arable land in the country, whilst the majority of African peasants owned about 22%”.<sup>85</sup>

Susan Booysen observes that the legacy of colonialism was directly challenged in the post-independence years, chiefly through land seizures and rightful discourses of pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism.<sup>86</sup> Mugabe launched an accelerated land reform programme in 2000. He rejected a colonial-era law, demanding respect for property rights as an obstacle to what he described as a necessary correction of historical and social inequalities. The land reform forcefully seized fertile land and property from White farmers for redistribution to landless Black peasants. The move showed the extent to which land was – and remains – a potent tool of political manipulation in contemporary Zimbabwean politics.

Hoping to capitalise on the momentum of the reform, Mugabe drafted a new constitution that would have extended his powers. Put up for a popular vote in a referendum, it was soundly rejected. In a surprise turn of events, 578,000 voted in favour of the new

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<sup>84</sup> “Zimbabwe land conflict” <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/zimbabwe.htm>  
Accessed 12 September 2009

<sup>85</sup> James Hlongwane, Daniel Gamira and Richard S Maposa, ‘Land As Sacrificial Lamb: A critical Reflection on the Effects of Colonial and Post-Independent Land Management Policies in Zimbabwe,’ *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* Vol. 12 No.6 (2010) pp. 192-207.

<sup>86</sup> Susan Booysen, ‘The Dualities of Contemporary Zimbabwean Politics: Constitutionalism versus the Law of Power and the Land, 1999-2002’, *African Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2&3 [web page] <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i1.htm>, accessed 6 June 2011.

constitution while 697,754 voted against. Commentators said the result would strengthen the MDC party, formed just several months earlier.<sup>87</sup> In his 20 years in power until then, Mugabe had not lost any vote, and his defeat in the referendum was a massive victory for his opponents.

The land reform had supporters in Zimbabwe and beyond, but it was also widely criticised at home and abroad. Mugabe reminded his critics that land acquisitions in what was then Rhodesia allowed the minority White settlers to grab the country's most productive areas for occupation without compensation. This process inevitably triggered a succession of forced resettlement for poor Blacks while resource exploitation gathered pace. Mugabe vowed to correct these historical injustices, insisting his government was right to claim back for the Blacks what was historically theirs. But his detractors, as suggested by Anne Hellum and Bill Derman, have argued that the policy led to a sharp decline in food and export crop production, rising inflation, loss of jobs, food shortages and a battered health and education system.<sup>88</sup>

Mugabe had been widely admired in the West, enjoying a rather positive coverage in the Western press normally bestowed for political idols such as Nelson Mandela. He was seen as the liberation fighter who had fought successive White regimes to bring freedom and justice to Zimbabwe. His democratic credentials were rarely questioned, and he was praised for pursuing a free market economy. But the land reform cost him his media backing. He had come under severe criticism earlier for sending 11,000 Zimbabwean troops to protect his ally in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the late President Laurent Kabila. But the seizure of White farms seemed to be the last straw. The reform programme of 2000 was indeed the turning point in Mugabe's political career, as he faced unprecedented media and political scrutiny and eventually isolation from his erstwhile Western allies.

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<sup>87</sup> Edmond Musengi Jaricha, *The Politics of Food in Zimbabwe*, unpublished MA Thesis (University of Alberta: 2009).

<sup>88</sup> Anne Hellum and Bill Derman, 'Land Reform and Human Rights in Contemporary Zimbabwe: Balancing Individual and Social Justice through an Integrated Human Rights Framework', *World Development*, Vol. 32, No.10 (2004) pp. 1785-1805.

Mugabe retaliated by targeting the independent media, closing down newspapers critical of his policies and throwing out Western correspondents. Andrew Meldrum, an American-born correspondent for *The Guardian*, was a notable victim of this process. Prior to his deportation, Meldrum had covered Zimbabwe for 23 years. *The Telegraph*'s David Blair was also expelled. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the US-based Cable News Network (CNN) were banned from covering Zimbabwe from within as Mugabe intensified his war on Western media. Mugabe became a media pariah in the West. Britain's diplomatic relations with Zimbabwe have yet to recover since the land reform. Any association with Mugabe attracts an outcry from the British press, as Prince Charles learned when he offered his "golden handshake" to Mugabe at Pope John Paul's funeral.<sup>89</sup> Mugabe also lost his knighthood as well as an honours degree from the University of Edinburgh, further constraining British-Zimbabwean relations.

While criticism of Mugabe's policies are almost universal, articles are rarely found in the West critically exposing the British role in the Zimbabwean mess. It all appears as if Mugabe is to blame, while the British, as will be argued in the latter part of this dissertation, have played a significantly bigger role in Zimbabwe's political downfall.

Despite the political instability that ensued from the land reform, Mugabe successively won two national elections in 2002 and 2005. He has long maintained that these elections were 'free and fair.'<sup>90</sup> However, independent observers have questioned the outcome of these elections by pointing to the lack of evidence of certain freedoms, both during and after the elections.<sup>91</sup> These include the freedom of political expression, the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. Then, in March 2008, President Mugabe lost to then-opposition leader Tsvangirai, leading to a disputed run-off election. Tsvangirai later joined the Mugabe government as Prime Minister. The coalition government's tenure will come to an end at the end of June 2013 culminating in another national election. Both Mugabe and Tsvangirai and other candidates are due to take part. But the 2008 defeat for

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<sup>89</sup> Press Association, 'Charles shakes hands with Mugabe', *The Guardian* [web page] (8 April 2005) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/apr/08/zimbabwe.catholicism1>, accessed 1 June 2011.

<sup>90</sup> Chris McGreal & Ewen MacAskill, 'Mugabe's victory leaves west policy on Zimbabwe in tatters', *The Guardian* [web page] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/mar/14/zimbabwe.chrismcgreal>, accessed 14 July 2011.

<sup>91</sup> 'Mugabe wins "rigged" Zimbabwean poll', *BBC World News* [web page] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1870864.stm>, accessed 11 July 2011.

Mugabe, the nation's sole ruler since independence, was a landmark, the first time apart from the national referendum in 2000 that he had lost a vote. It was this extraordinary event that inspired this research, to see what lay behind it and to assess its overall effect on the process of democratic change in Zimbabwe.

While emigration figures are certainly contested, since 2000 an estimated three million Zimbabweans have left the country seeking greener pastures in countries such as Britain, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.<sup>92</sup> During the ten-year political crisis, remittances from the Diaspora to family members in Zimbabwe to pay rent, buy food and cover school tuitions contributed significantly to keeping the country going, as the formal economy shrunk and unemployment soared.<sup>93</sup> Under Zimbabwean election laws, nationals living abroad, as noted already, were and still are not allowed to vote. Despite this setback, this research assumed that Zimbabweans living abroad still played a crucial role in Mugabe's loss. While the rise and overall popularity of the anti-Mugabe sites may have played a significant part in his defeat, this study also sought to investigate the extent to which these websites were contributing to democratic participation in Zimbabwe. Given that Zimbabweans abroad had more exposure to the Internet, did they promote the opposition's campaign messages while discrediting Mugabe, who enjoyed privileged exposure in the tightly controlled government media in Zimbabwe?

"Infighting" is a word many followers of Zimbabwean politics would certainly be familiar with. The disputed 2008 elections led to a South African-mediated Global Political Agreement to end a five-month political stalemate. Mugabe and Tsvangirai agreed to share power, with the former retaining most of his authority as president and the latter becoming the country's new prime minister. While the deal was expected to pave the way for Zimbabwe's reconstruction, little on that front has been achieved. Notably, however, within days of taking over as new finance minister, Tendai Biti of the

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92 Daniel Molokele, 'Let the Diaspora Vote', Zimbabwe Metro, [web page] (19 May 2009) <http://www.zimbabwemetro.com/current-affairs/daniel-molokele-let-the-diaspora-vote/>, accessed 16 May 2010.

93 'Potential Contribution of the Zimbabwe Diaspora to Economic Recovery', United Nations Development Programme, working paper [web page] (2010) [http://www.kubatana.net/docs/econ/undp\\_contribution\\_diaspora\\_eco\\_recovery\\_100511.pdf](http://www.kubatana.net/docs/econ/undp_contribution_diaspora_eco_recovery_100511.pdf), accessed 4 July 2011.

MDC introduced the US dollar and the South African rand as official legal tender in a bid to rescue the country from crippling inflation.

While the economy has improved slightly and food is back on supermarket shelves, the West has refused to drop sanctions against Mugabe and his associates, arguing that the president has refused to honour his part of the agreement with the MDC. By March 2013, only 10 officials, including Mugabe, remained on the list after sanctioned against 81 officials were suspended. It is important to note that opposition to the sanctions has also been voiced in the US Senate, with Senator Jim Inhofe leading the campaign.<sup>94</sup> Also during a trip to Zimbabwe in early 2012, the top UN diplomat for Human Rights Navi Pillay urged Western leaders to drop the sanctions.<sup>95</sup> Mugabe has vowed not to step down despite the fact that he turned 89 in 2013. He has continued to attack the MDC as a Western-backed party. For its part the MDC has accused Mugabe of disregarding human rights and democracy. Zimbabwe's political future is difficult to predict. Two factions have traditionally sought to take over the presidency should Mugabe resign, retire or die in office. As long as Mugabe is still alive, it appears no one from within his party is prepared to openly oppose him. Tsvangirai has got a tough task to convince hardliners, among them the army and security chiefs, that he is not a Western stooge.

### **3.1 Opportunities for democratic change**

“Revolution in information, and communication and technology and production, all these things make democracy more likely”, former US President Bill Clinton famously said in an address to Russians.<sup>96</sup> Predictably, digital technologies have had, and will it seems, unavoidably continue to have, profound impacts in information-gathering and content-sharing on a global scale as more and more people embark on the fight for democratic participation. According to Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward, new media

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<sup>94</sup> ‘US senator fights to get US to remove sanctions on Zimbabwe’  
<http://www.insiderzim.com/stories/2471-us-senator-fights-to-get-us-to-remove-sanctions-on-zimbabwe.html> Accessed 12 June 2012

<sup>95</sup> ‘UN Human Rights Chief: Sanctions Against Zimbabwe Are Backfiring’  
<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/05/25/153706791/un-human-rights-chief-sanctions-against-zimbabwe-are-backfiring> Accessed 12 June 2012

<sup>96</sup> Bill Clinton, ‘Live Telecast to Russian People’, Ostankino TV Station, 9Moscow, Russia: January 14, 1994).

technologies are transforming the engagement of political participation across the globe.<sup>97</sup> The way the media operates in a society, argues Jacob Enoch-Eben, remains “a very strong maxim pitting the relationship between the two, media and society”.<sup>98</sup>

Primarily using content analysis of the Zimbabwean news websites as well as interviews with citizens, this research sought to document the political relevance of Internet usage in determining the overall participation of the electorate in national elections, effectively investigating the websites’ role in potentially providing a powerful platform for political participation. The qualitative interviews sought to either confirm or deny the conclusions of a content analysis of four online newspapers owned and edited by Zimbabwean journalists living in the Diaspora.

With prospects for independent journalism diminishing due to the government’s supposed media-unfriendly laws,<sup>99</sup> several Zimbabweans in the Diaspora set up mostly pro-opposition web-based magazines. Since 2000, these web-based magazines have freely and openly reported on issues affecting the country, allowing the nation’s citizenry to participate in debates aimed at finding solutions to problems at home. When an authoritarian ruler loses an election, questions will be raised, especially when the defeat is the first in nearly 30 years of uninterrupted rule. That happened when President Mugabe lost the first round of voting in March 2008 to Tsvangirai of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This research will question the extent to which, and with what impact, the opposition benefited from openly biased, anti-Mugabe websites, which appeared to have outfoxed the perceived repressive media laws. The hypothesis is crucially supported by statistical evidence of the growth of Internet penetration in Africa, which as shown in Figure 3.1, has been enjoying a remarkable rise since 2001 in spite of the fact that comparatively, the region is still behind the world average.

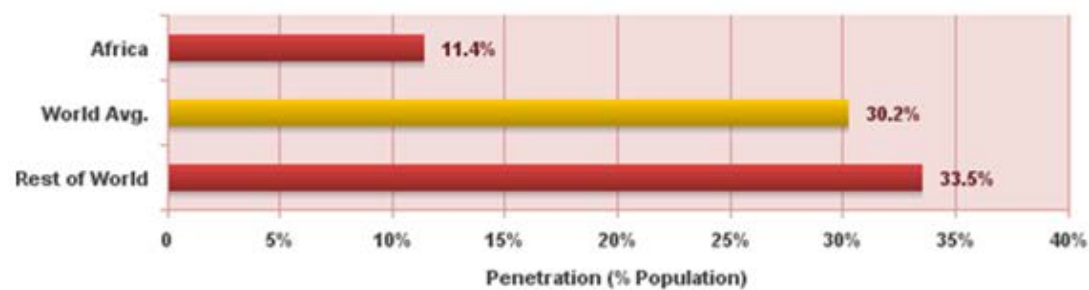
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<sup>97</sup> Rachel Gibson, & Stephen Ward, ‘U.K. political parties and the Internet: prospects for democracy’, European Studies Research Institute, working papers in Contemporary History & Politics, Series 2, No. 13 (Salford: University of Salford, 1997); See also Pippa Norris, *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty, and the internet worldwide*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 4-14; Graeme Browning, *Electronic democracy: using the Internet to influence American politics*. (Wilton, CT: Pemberton Press, 1996) pp. 23-40.

<sup>98</sup> Jacob Enoch-Eben, ‘Ethical challenges in media coverage of the Zimbabwe crisis’, *Peace and Conflict Review* Vol. 5, No. 1, [webpage] (2008) [http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id\\_article=483](http://www.monitor.upeace.org/archive.cfm?id_article=483), accessed 4 March 2010.

<sup>99</sup> Chris Mhike, ‘Press Freedom Remains Elusive’, *The Standard* (2 May 2009) 8.

**Figure 3.1: Internet penetration in Africa, March 31, 2011**



Source: *Internet World Stats* – [www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm)  
118,609,620 estimated internet users in Africa for March 31, 2011  
Copyright © 2008, Miniwatts Marketing Group

Depending on one’s definition of democracy, democratic participation has had a long history of constrained success in Africa. But it seems likely the waves of change, marshaled by innovation and Internet technology, are set to dominate the continent’s political and social state of affairs over the next decades. In the case of Zimbabwe, various websites, including [swradioafrica.com](http://swradioafrica.com), [newzimbabwe.com](http://newzimbabwe.com), [thezimbabwean.co.uk](http://thezimbabwean.co.uk) and [Zimdaily.com](http://Zimdaily.com), seem to have given Zimbabweans an unlikely podium to read, debate, criticise and, through interactive forums, even suggest ways to solve the problems they face. In fact, “community stations and individuals print out stories from these websites for friends and family, thereby providing information to those without access to newspapers”, says Zimbabwean journalist Sandra Nyaira.<sup>100</sup> To determine the level of effectiveness of this seemingly potent online presence and participation, the research sought to investigate the nature of reactions by politicians when they read news published or broadcast through these sites, some of which may have been considered ‘illegal’ around the time of the 2008 elections.

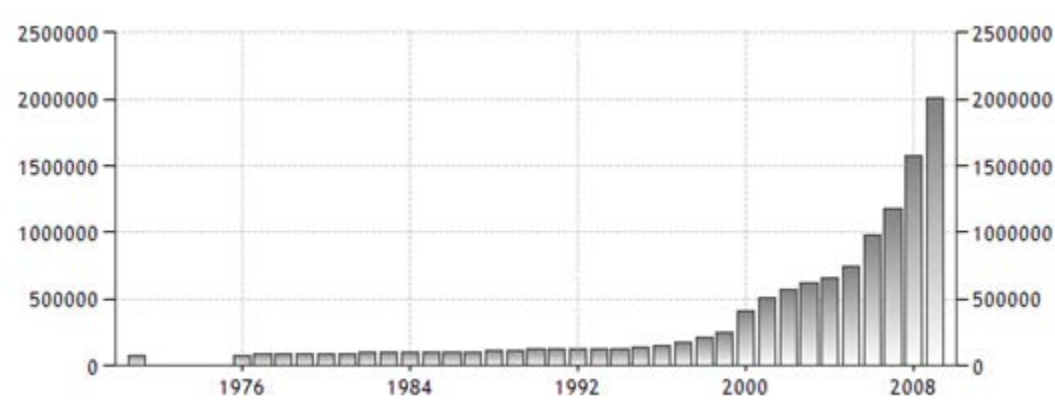
Compared with other continents, Africa has historically had limited connectivity options and low initial traffic volumes. However, the last decade alone witnessed explosive expansion, with 13.5 percent of the world's total Internet users being in Africa in December 2011, according to Internet World Stats.<sup>101</sup> There is growing evidence that Zimbabweans are increasingly making use of the Internet. In a 2009 report, the Internet World Stats ranked Zimbabwe 10th in Africa in terms of the citizens’ access to Internet,

<sup>100</sup> Sandra Nyaira, ‘Mugabe’s Media War: How New Media Help Zimbabwean Journalists Tell Their Story’, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Discussion Paper Series [web page] (2009) [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/discussion\\_papers/d51\\_nyaira.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/discussion_papers/d51_nyaira.pdf), accessed 15 May 2010.  
<sup>101</sup> ‘Internet in Africa’, [web page] [http://www.child-sponsorship.com/internet\\_in\\_africa.html](http://www.child-sponsorship.com/internet_in_africa.html) Accessed 1 October 2011.



stating that about 1.4 million out of the nation’s 12 million people had access.<sup>102</sup> This figure does not include Zimbabweans living abroad. Eight years before these statistics were released, the penetration rate was only 0.4 percent.<sup>103</sup> Several factors, including the formation of the ICT Ministry in the coalition government, have facilitated the rapid growth of Internet presence in Zimbabwe. The ministry has not only introduced the ICT Strategic Plan covering 2010-2014, but it has also published plans to set up Internet cafes at post offices in the nation’s rural areas, which have historically been marginalised,<sup>104</sup> and are widely considered hotbeds of political violence. Official World Bank statistics showed there were 2,002,721 mobile and fixed-line telephone subscribers in Zimbabwe in 2008. At the same time, TradingEconomics.com suggested, as shown in Figure 3.2, that the number was pegged at 1,5200,000.

**Figure 3.2: Mobile and fixed-line telephone subscribers**



Source: *TradingEconomics.com*

Internet World Stats says Zimbabwe has one of the highest rates of Internet usage in Africa. Bearing in mind the fact that there are currently no laws restricting Internet use in Zimbabwe, one has to consider the notion that new media technologies may have played a role in the widely unexpected results, which showed Tsvangirai gaining 1,195,562 (47.9 percent) votes to Mugabe’s 1,079,730 (43.2 percent). A February 2011 survey conducted by the Zimbabwe All Media Products and Services Survey (ZAMPS) claimed that 24 percent of adults living in urban areas were now using the Internet, a “2 percent increase

<sup>102</sup> Chipso Kadzere, ‘New report says 1.4m Zimbabweans use Internet’, *Newzimbabwe.com* [web page] (11 December 2009) <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/email21.18645.html>, accessed on 14 August 2010.

<sup>103</sup> International Telecommunications Union, ‘ITU Internet Indicators 2000’, [web page] <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/icteye/Reporting/ShowReportFrame.aspx?ReportNam....>, accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Internet Cafes Planned for Zimpost Rural Depots’, *The Herald* [web page] (29 April 2009) <http://allafrica.com/stories/200904210070.html>, accessed 1 October 2011.

in the last 3 months alone”.<sup>105</sup> An expected 83 percent of the Internet users go online at least once a week. The social networking site Facebook is the most popular destination, frequented by people of all age groups.<sup>106</sup> With a global trend indicating a rise in mobile cellular subscriptions, as shown in Figure 3.3, mobile telephony is the main provider of Internet access in Zimbabwe.

Long before the 2008 elections, Zimbabweans abroad were already making use of the Internet to assist relatives and friends back home in various ways. It was common practice to purchase products and foodstuffs online for delivery to relatives in Zimbabwe through a third party. Zimbabwean physician Dr. Brighton Chireka started a pioneering project allowing Zimbabwean expatriates to electronically transfer cash into a UK-registered account to pay for “ambulance services, a private doctor and even send life-saving drugs to their relatives back home”.<sup>107</sup> While there are no known statistics to confirm the number of Zimbabweans making use of online services at that time, it is widely known and accepted among Zimbabweans that the country’s citizens abroad made use of online services to assist relatives and friends back home. The Canadian daily *Globe and Mail*, for instance, quoted the owner of [www.zimbuyer.com](http://www.zimbuyer.com) as saying, “You’ve got Zimbabweans who are economic migrants all over the world. What they have in common is that everyone wants to support their families”.<sup>108</sup> Back in Zimbabwe, Internet users (per 100 people) were reported to be at 11.40 in 2008, according to official World Bank statistics as shown on Figure 3.3.

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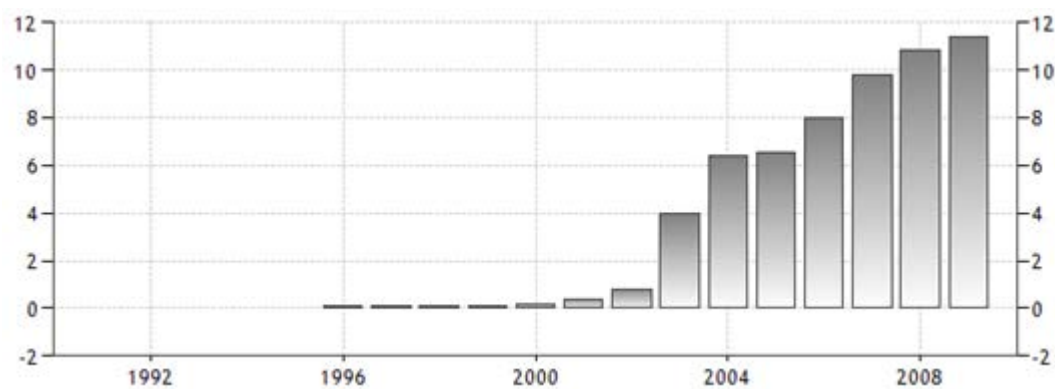
<sup>105</sup> Lance Gama, ‘Survey reveals increase in internet use in Zimbabwe’, SW Radio Africa [web page] (18 February 2011) <http://www.swradioafrica.com/news180211/survey180211.htm>, accessed on 1 June 2011.

<sup>106</sup> Dingilizwe Ntuli, ‘Zimbabwe: Internet’s Fantasy, Porn Sites Hook Youths’, Zimbabwe Independent [web page] (20 April 2011) <http://allafrica.com/stories/201104220512.html>, accessed 1 June 2011.

<sup>107</sup> Staff Writer, ‘Expatriate Zimbabweans use internet to deliver health care back home’, Newzimbabwe.com, [web page] (11 December 2009) <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/featuredbusiness10.16773.html>, accessed 2 May 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Stephanie Nolen, ‘Expatriate Zimbabweans use the Internet to arrange care packages for the folks back home’, *Globe and Mail* (4 July 2007) p. 8.

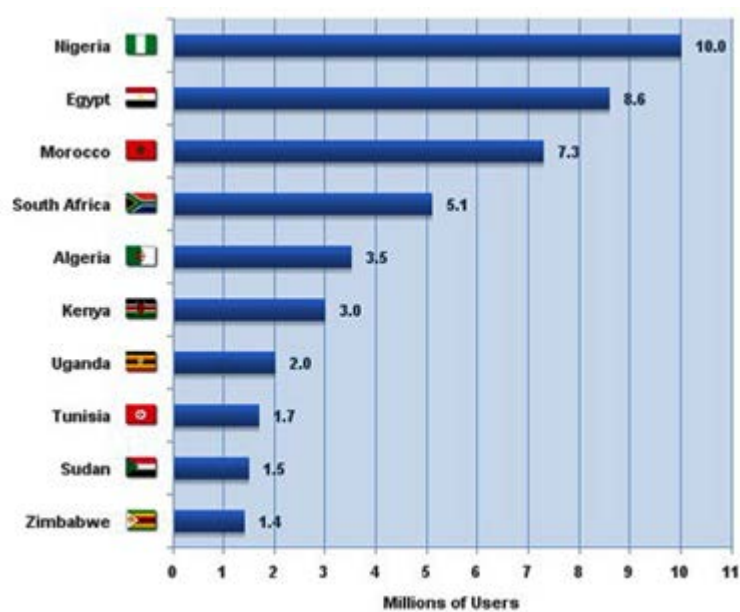
Figure 3.3: Internet users (per 100 people) in Zimbabwe



Source: *TradingEconomics.com*

In general, during an election, the media plays an immense role in informing the public about the promises being made by candidates, as well as giving a reality check for those promises.<sup>109</sup> Considering the fact that the nation’s one and only influential state broadcaster and its various daily newspapers all ran pro-government news, it should be a mini-mystery how Tsvangirai managed to win the elections. Furthermore, Mugabe lost in most of his long-established rural strongholds, which traditionally have had little or no Internet access. Thus hypothetically, it can be concluded that the Zimbabwe Diaspora community, the majority of whom live in Britain and South Africa, benefited from the supremacy of the World Wide Web, using their digital exposure to read news before disseminating anti-Mugabe information into the country.

Figure 3.4: Africa top 10 internet countries, March 2008



Source: *Internet World Stats* – [www.internetworldstats.com](http://www.internetworldstats.com), Copyright © 2008, Miniwatts Marketing Group

<sup>109</sup> Harego Bensa, ‘What media should do in the upcoming Ethiopian elections’, Hebrezema Addis Ababa [web page] [http://www.hebrezema.com/files/A\\_free\\_and\\_independent\\_media\\_plays\\_a\\_crucial\\_role\\_in\\_consolidating\\_democratic\\_process.pdf](http://www.hebrezema.com/files/A_free_and_independent_media_plays_a_crucial_role_in_consolidating_democratic_process.pdf), accessed 19 May 2010.

Daniel Garcia claims that citizens in a democratic society count on the media to articulate and circulate “a full and open discussion of ideas and issues that provide them with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their government and their lives”.<sup>110</sup> However, recent events in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa suggest a tense relationship between Garcia’s rationalisation and what exists in practice. Correspondingly, Robert McChesney defines democracy as “rule of the many”,<sup>111</sup> a view ostensibly defied by many regimes in Africa, among them Zimbabwe, where some scholars have argued that democracy appears to be tailor-made with the aim of defending the political power of the ruling ZANU PF party.<sup>112</sup> Several Western nations vigorously criticise Mugabe’s regime for allegedly failing to implement democratic reforms. Mugabe brushes such criticism aside, arguing that he is not prepared to take democracy lessons from the West since it was from his fight against White minority rule that a new, democratic Zimbabwe was born.<sup>113</sup> If democracy thus has different meanings for different people, is there any room to investigate what exactly is “real democracy?” Indeed, the real meaning of democracy is the subject of heated debate. However, according to what we observe in Western countries, a nation’s democratic credentials can be measured by its ability to hold “free and fair” elections, a measurement this research keenly applied to the Zimbabwean case, especially insofar as the role of media is concerned.

This study suggested and sought to validate the claim that websites sponsored and edited by Zimbabwean journalists living in exile influenced Mugabe’s loss, critically expounding the wider role of the Internet in ushering democratic changes in Zimbabwe. It is often said among Zimbabweans that every citizen has a relative or friend or at least knows someone who has left the country to escape the economic and political crisis that engulfed the country between 2000 and 2010. With inflation officially pegged at 2 million percent at the time of the 2008 election, one cannot help but conclude that this catastrophe was central to Mugabe’s defeat. Many Zimbabweans may have been

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<sup>110</sup> Daniel Garcia, ‘Newt, Ted, and Rupert Take on Democracy’, Harvard Digitas, (November 1995).

<sup>111</sup> Robert McChesney, Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Munamoto Chemhuru, ‘Democracy and the Paradox of Zimbabwe: Lessons from Traditional Systems of Governance’, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol.3, No.10 (2010) pp. 180-191. See also Jonathan Moyo, ‘State, Politics and Social Domination in Zimbabwe’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1992) pp. 305-330.

<sup>113</sup> Mike Nyoni, ‘Mugabe Uses UN Speech to Attack West’, Institute of War & Peace Reporting [web page] (14 April 2008) <http://iwpr.net/report-news/mugabe-uses-un-speech-attack-west>, accessed 12 June 2010.

confused about who exactly to castigate, whether it was Mugabe's fault or whether, as the president repeatedly argued, economic sanctions by the West were to blame. What little remained of economic life at that time, according to analysts, was being boosted by remittances sent to relatives by the country's Diaspora community.<sup>114</sup> Drawing upon my own experience and knowledge based on community engagement with fellow Zimbabweans living abroad, I noted that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora were warning friends and relatives that rations would be discontinued if Mugabe stayed in power. With unemployment officially running at 90 percent, I assumed, and indeed sought to scientifically prove, that those at home had to react because they were relying chiefly on the remittances sent from abroad.

One of the key aims of this research was therefore to contribute to the overall understanding of the role of Internet in political and democratic participation with specific reference to Zimbabwe. The Internet, it can be argued, has forced dictators to rethink their positions, particularly in terms of maintaining monopolies over the media. Nowhere was this more evident than after the political unrest in 2011 throughout the Middle East known as the Arab Spring. The research explored similarities and differences in articles published by state media and those published by anti-Mugabe websites in order to determine the relative influence they had on the electorate. Similarly, shortwave broadcasts from an openly anti-Mugabe, Western-sponsored London-based radio station, SW Africa, was assessed. According to Nyaira, the popular station's website receives up to 250,000 hits a day – just under two million a week.<sup>115</sup> Against the backdrop of its classification as an 'illegal pirate radio' station and the government's decision to ban its Zimbabwean-born broadcasters from visiting the country, SW Africa may have played – as will be shown in chapter 8 – an enormous role in shifting voting patterns in the country's rural areas, which were traditionally a bastion of Mugabe's ZANU PF party.

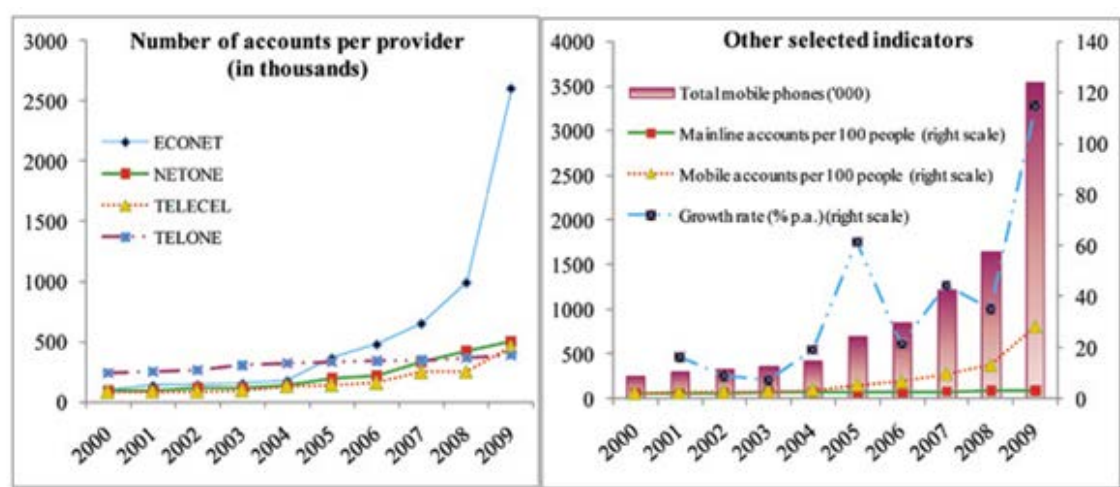
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<sup>114</sup> Daniel Tevera & Lovemore Zinyama, 'Zimbabweans who move: perspectives on international migration in Zimbabwe', Southern African Migration Project, Migration Policy Series 25. (Cape Town: IDASA and Kingston, Ontario: Queen's University, 2002).

<sup>115</sup> Sandra Nyaira, 'Mugabe's Media War: How New Media Help Zimbabwean Journalists Tell Their Story', Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Discussion Paper Series (2009).

As already noted, the state-run Zimbabwean Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) is the only broadcaster allowed on the Zimbabwean airwaves. SW Africa successfully challenged ZBC’s broadcasting monopoly in the Supreme Court, winning the right to open the country’s first independent radio station in 2000. Within six days of its existence, it was forced to close shop after gun-toting policemen stormed its office and ordered journalists to shutter the office. However, the station reemerged a few months later operating from London, thanks to funding from the US State Department. The station says its broadcasts are “also available as MP3 podcast downloads and our news headlines are sent three times a week, via SMS, to tens of thousands of mobile phones in Zimbabwe”.<sup>116</sup>

**Figure 3.5: Growth in subscriber accounts with main service providers**



Source: PORTRAZ

Subscriptions for mobile telephones have seen an unprecedented rise between 2004 and 2009, as shown by Figure 3.5. The Financial Gazette newspaper reported in January 2011 that the mobile phone industry garnered in excess of “117, 500 percent mark up on SIM card sales during the hyper-inflationary period between 2007 and 2008”.<sup>117</sup> Since the Internet is accessed primarily via mobile phones, it is reasonable to conclude that SW Africa, just like Newzimbabwe.com and Zimdaily.com, had a broad reach by the time of the election. Zimbabwe is one of the five African countries listed by Mike Jensen as known to have “pervasive local dialup facilities outside of the capital city while Benin, Botswana, Egypt, and Kenya have services in the second major city”.<sup>118</sup> Hence, its telecom services are not centred only on the capital, Harare. The radio’s significance as a dissemination weapon also cannot be understated, especially in rural areas. A survey

<sup>116</sup> SW Africa’s Aims and Objectives, [web page] <http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/mission020609.htm>, accessed 1 February 2011.  
<sup>117</sup> Shame Makoshori, ‘Zimbabwe: Sim Card Shocker’, Financial Gazette, [web page] (27 January 2011) <http://allafrica.com/stories/201101271074.html> Accessed 14 April 2011.  
<sup>118</sup> Mike Jensen, ‘Internet Connectivity for Africa’, [web page] <http://demiurge.wn.apc.org/africa/afstat.htm>, accessed 1 February 2011.

carried out by global media research company InterMedia showed 85.3 percent of the surveyed Zimbabwean population saying that they had been listening to the radio in the year 2005.<sup>119</sup> It is understandable why some political establishments are not eager to free the airwaves. In the case of Zimbabwe, broadcasting is restricted in line with communist theory of press, which is discussed at length in chapter 6, while the print media is allowed to criticise the regime. There is skepticism over freeing the airwaves considering, as noted, that more and more people are easily reachable by radio networks; thus restricting access stifles alternative voices.

### **3.1.1 Zimbabwean politics: A historical perspective**

A nation haunted by its own past, Zimbabwe celebrates the day it became an independent state on 18 April. While the Britain is applauded for promoting human rights and democracy across the world, the same cannot be said of its record of questionable practices in colonial Rhodesia. Among Zimbabweans, including Mugabe's opponents, Ian Smith, the one-time prime minister of Southern Rhodesia, is a loathed man. After rejecting British conditions for independence in 1964, the following year he unveiled the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), ruling out Black majority rule, despite Britain's threat to withhold recognition.<sup>120</sup> Gerald Horney has argued that the United States secretly supported the Smith regime.<sup>121</sup> Knox Chitiyo and Martin Rupiya have pointed out that the British government rejected calls by Nigeria, Zambia and Tanzania to censure Rhodesia, and used its veto powers to block an anti-Smith resolution before the UN Security Council.<sup>122</sup>

With apartheid South Africa the only country openly recognizing his state, Smith was forced to open negotiations with opposition Black leaders Joshua Nkomo of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union

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<sup>119</sup> Alex Wooley, 'Understanding how the world understands', InterMedia Report on the Proliferation in New Media and Communication Technologies throughout the Developing World [web page] (Washington DC: InterMedia, 2006) [http://www.intermedia.org/press\\_releases/release\\_2006-01-12.pdf](http://www.intermedia.org/press_releases/release_2006-01-12.pdf), accessed 1 August 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Peter Stearns and William Leonard Lange, *The Encyclopedia of World History: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern, Chronologically Arranged*, (2001) 1069.

<sup>121</sup> Gerald Horne, *From the barrel of a gun: The United States and the war against Zimbabwe 1965-1980*, (Chapell Hill: University of Carolina Press, 2001) p. 6.

<sup>122</sup> Knox Chitiyo & Martin Rupiya, 'Tracking Zimbabwe's political history: The Zimbabwe Defence Force from 1980-2005', in Martin Rupiya (eds.), *Evolutions & Revolutions A contemporary history of militaries in southern Africa*, (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute for Security Studies, 2005) p. 332.

(ZANU). The 1979 elections led to the country's first Black Prime Minister, Abel Muzorewa, and in the same year Britain invited Zimbabwean leaders to a conference that was to shape the future of the country. The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 – a document that I personally believe should be faulted for its failure to deal with the thorny issue of land reform – gave Zimbabwe its independence. At the end of the conference, it was agreed the government would only take possession of land from Whites on a “willing buyer willing seller basis”. On closer look, that agreement was virtually meaningless since the majority of White farmers, most of them Zimbabweans by birth, would be unlikely to sell their homes and only source of income. To understand Zimbabwe's political problems, one has to look at the way the country handled the battle for land ownership in the aftermath of the conference. The majority of Blacks, who had been victims of the racial colonial past and whose fertile land had been forcibly taken by the new White arrivals from Britain, saw Mugabe's ascension to power in 1980 as a sign that they would for the first time enjoy the economic advantages of the nation's natural wealth. They were wrong.

Even though the Land Acquisition Act gave the government the first right to purchase excess land for redistribution to the landless,<sup>123</sup> the Act had an inadequate impact, largely because the government did not have adequate funds to recompense the White landowners. In addition, White farmers understandably mounted a spirited opposition to the Act. As a result, between 1980 and 1990 only 71,000 families out of a target of 162,000 were resettled.<sup>124</sup> In 1998, the government called a donor conference in Harare on land reform, which was attended by 48 countries and international organisations, with Britain fine-tuning it with a 44 million pound “land resettlement grant”.<sup>125</sup> The objective was to inform and involve the donor community in the programme. The donors, including the UK, unanimously endorsed the land programme, saying it was vital for poverty reduction, political stability and economic growth. However, after the World Bank pulled out, no one was prepared to fund the programme, further enraging the war veterans, who, following the rejection of the referendum in 2000, led the dramatic,

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<sup>123</sup> Encyclopedia on Zimbabwe land reform, chronicling the important dates and events.

<sup>124</sup> Encyclopedia on Zimbabwe land reform chronicling the important dates and events.

<sup>125</sup> Manby Bronwen, ‘Fast Track land reform in Zimbabwe’, Human Rights Watch, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2002)1-44.



chaotic land invasions. Mugabe's decision not to condemn the land invasions, most of which became violent, has made him a man vilified and admired in equal measure.

### 3.1.2 Who is Robert Mugabe?

Since the land reform of 2000, opinions about Mugabe have sharpened. He is seen by many Africans as a hero who robustly and fearlessly fought for the justice and independence of Blacks and continues to empower them with previously White-owned land. In the West he is largely seen as a failed political figure whose authoritarian rule is condemnable.<sup>126</sup> But Mugabe is no fool. Imprisoned by the White minority government between August 1964 and December 1974 for his political activities and opposition to colonial rule, Mugabe used detention and prison time to pursue his education, acquiring three degrees in the process. He currently holds nine university degrees, six of which were earned through distance learning. He has a Bachelor of Administration and Bachelor of Education from the University of South Africa, and a Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Laws, Master of Science, and Master of Laws, all from the University of London's External Programme.<sup>127</sup> A Jesuit-educated secondary school teacher by training, as the nation's leader he sponsored robust educational policies. According to UNICEF, the country has Africa's highest number of primary school enrolment.<sup>128</sup>

As noted previously, up until 2000, when the land invasions began in earnest, Mugabe was rarely criticised in the West. Human rights activists point to the Gukurahundi, a term used to describe the Matabeleland Conflict of 1982-87. Estimates of the number of dead range from 700 to 20,000, a figure impossible to pin down. The victims were mostly anti-Mugabe people from Zimbabwe's minority Ndebele tribe.<sup>129</sup> Mugabe and most of his party cadres deny any knowledge of these killings. Despite the scale of the slaughter, the massacres only received attention in the Western media after 2000.<sup>130</sup> Some of Mugabe's

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<sup>126</sup> 'EU sanctions tighten screw on Mugabe', [web page] <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/articles/17098>, accessed 12 May 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Christine Kenyon Jones, *The People's University: 150 years of the University of London and its External students* (University of London External System, 2008) p. 148.

<sup>128</sup> UNICEF country statistics [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zimbabwe\\_statistics.html#67](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zimbabwe_statistics.html#67), accessed 3 February 2011.

<sup>129</sup> Report on the 1980s disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, (March 1997).

<sup>130</sup> 'The Art That Robert Mugabe Doesn't Want You to See', The Huffington Post, [web page] (27 January 2011) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/27/the-art-that-robert-mugabe\\_n\\_814899.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/27/the-art-that-robert-mugabe_n_814899.html), accessed 5 February 2011.

closest political allies, including those from the Ndebele tribe, have called Gukurahundi a “Western conspiracy”.<sup>131</sup> Clearly aware that his support was waning and media criticism was on the rise, Mugabe strategically brought the Western-educated Professor Jonathan Moyo into the government in 2000, assigned to the task of revamping media policies to protect the government from criticism and scrutiny.

Before joining the government, the widely-published Moyo had been known in the Zimbabwean media and academic circles for his fearless, **acerbic** criticism of and opposition to Mugabe. Referring to Mugabe, he wrote in 1999: “His uncanny propensity to shoot himself in the foot has become a national problem which needs urgent containment”.<sup>132</sup> Under Moyo’s reign, foreign correspondents, including Meldrum and the BBC’s Joseph Winter, were expelled and the BBC and CNN were banned from reporting from within Zimbabwe. In addition, the nation’s only independent daily, *The Daily News*, which was openly critical of Mugabe’s policies, was shut down after it refused to apply for a license. Scores of journalists who worked without a state license were either arrested or risked spending two years in prison. A tactician at heart and blessed with imaginative spin abilities, Moyo in 2002 introduced the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). The law gave a commission comprised of handpicked Mugabe defenders powers to handle accreditation applications for both local and international journalists. This way the government took command of who could or could not practice journalism in Zimbabwe. In a 2004 report, the Media Institute for Southern Africa argued that AIPPA may “accurately be described as the leading weapon of the government and the ruling ZANU PF party in their ongoing campaign to stifle independent media reporting in Zimbabwe”.<sup>133</sup>

With Moyo watching his back and capable of crushing negative views in the media, Mugabe rode his political luck. Moyo operated in conformity with Zimbabwean law. The legislation that he sponsored was all backed by the then ZANU PF-dominated parliament.

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<sup>131</sup> Staff Reporter, ‘Gukurahundi storm envoy posted to SA’, Newzimbabwe.com, [web page] (24 July 2010) <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-2906-Gukurahundi+storm+envoy+posted+to+SA/news.aspx>, accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Moyo’s new party to challenge Mugabe’, Newzimbabwe.com, [web page] (11 December 2009) <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/sky73.12357.html>, accessed 6 February 2011

<sup>133</sup> Rushweat Mukundu, Toby Mendel, ‘Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act: Two years on’, Article 19 (London: 2004).

One such law was POSA, which in its present state makes it a criminal offence to publish or communicate “false statements prejudicial to the state”.<sup>134</sup> It must be noted that even though several journalists feared arrest and fines under POSA or AIPPA, the nation’s two independent weeklies, *The Standard*, and *Independent* newspapers, known for their full-bodied criticism of Mugabe, continued to publish without much hassle. I think the government never saw them as threats because they are weeklies publishing on Friday and Sunday, respectively. Hence they were not seen as a major threat even though notably *The Standard*’s late editor, Mark Chavhunduka, and reporter Ray Choto were arrested in 1999. It became a high-profile case that saw the pair bringing up allegations of torture against state agents.<sup>135</sup> The story for which they were arrested claimed some sections of the army had plotted to get rid of President Mugabe in a coup.

Among other restrictions, AIPPA and the Broadcasting Service Act (BSA) banned foreign participation in the country's broadcasting industry. Despite being largely seen as draconian in the West, such laws were roundly defended by Moyo and Mugabe’s ZANU PF party. After he was fired by Mugabe, Moyo defended AIPPA in an interview conducted by prominent Zimbabwean journalist Dumisani Muleya: “Aippa has been misrepresented and demonised but I can tell you without qualms it is a very good law. The situation needed such a law to curb bad media practices”.<sup>136</sup>

I believe in a free press but I also firmly believe in a system that has checks and balances. The Western media has demonstrated some double standards in their coverage of Zimbabwe. When Mugabe was allegedly involved in the Matabeleland massacres, the Western media outlets were silent because at that time he was a positive figure in the West. Soon after he launched the land reform, they started attacking him. Moyo, thus, to some extent has got a point because of what I believe are acrimonious levels of double standards at the hands of the Western media.

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<sup>134</sup> ‘2008 Human Rights Report: Zimbabwe’, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, US Government document (25 February 2009).

<sup>135</sup> ‘Tortured Zimbabwean journalist dies’, [web page] (13 November 2002) <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2461387.stm>, accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>136</sup> Dumisani Muleya, ‘Moyo bares it all’, *Zimbabwe Independent*, [web page] (4 March 2005) <http://www.theindependent.co.zw/local/10398.pdf>, accessed 16 June 2011.

### 3.1.3 Media law in Zimbabwe

Media in Zimbabwe operate in one of the most repressive environments on the continent according to media rights organisation Media Monitoring Project in Zimbabwe (MMPZ). “Media workers are regularly harassed, detained and beaten by the police; with the cumulative effect, that self-censorship prevails in the media”, claims MMPZ.<sup>137</sup> How then is it possible for the government to stifle media, going by MMPZ’s assessment? Section 20 (1) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe reads: “No person shall be prevented from exercising his or her freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and/or communicate ideas and information without interference”.<sup>138</sup> But there are exceptions under Clause 2, which says freedom of expression can be controlled if needed: i) in the interest of defense, public safety and economic interest of the state, public morality/ public health; ii) to protect the independence of courts and parliament; iii) to protect the freedoms and reputation of others.<sup>139</sup>

These provisions were quoted by Moyo to justify the legislation of the controversial media-regulating laws. The Lancaster House conference – which, as I argued earlier, failed to deal with the Zimbabwean land crisis – is again the reference document for these laws. The provisions, while explicitly guaranteeing freedom of expression, it can be argued, do not unambiguously give an assurance of press freedom, which I believe again, was a mistake on the side of those who drafted the constitution. Geoff Feltoe provides an excellent assessment of the current media law: “There is no specific guarantee of freedom of the press in the Zimbabwean Constitution. By contrast, Article 21(1) (a) of Namibia’s Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and expression, makes explicit reference to the freedom of the press and other media. Similarly, the freedom of the press and other media is expressly guaranteed in Article 16 of the South African Constitution”.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> ‘Reclaiming the People’s Voice: Broadcasting reforms in Zimbabwe’, MMPZ Report [web page] <http://www.mmpz.org/category/resource-centre/pamphlets/reclaiming-people%E2%80%99s-voice-broadcasting-reforms-zimbabwe>, accessed 17 August 2011.

<sup>138</sup> Constitution of Zimbabwe [web page] <http://www.sokwanele.com/zimbabweconstitution/sections/221>, accessed on 27 January 2011.

<sup>139</sup> Constitution of Zimbabwe [web page] [www.parlzim.gov.zw/cms/.../ZimbabweConstitution.pdf](http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/cms/.../ZimbabweConstitution.pdf), accessed on 27 January 2010.

<sup>140</sup> Geoff Feltoe, ‘A Guide to Media Law in Zimbabwe’, Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) (2002) 5.

Indeed, in closing down the *Daily News*, Moyo argued that “freedom of expression is guaranteed, not freedom of the press”.<sup>141</sup> This assertion is in direct contrast to E.B. White’s call for an unfettered media when he says, “The press in our free country (US) is reliable and useful not because of its good character but because of its great diversity. As long as there are many owners, each pursuing his own brand of truth, we the people have the opportunity to arrive at the truth and dwell in the light. ...There is safety in numbers”.<sup>142</sup>

While a band of political theorists stresses the significance of both freedom of expression and freedom of the media as basic and priceless components of democracy, I believe the two have underlying differences in contextual and practical meaning. Freedom of expression could literally refer to an individual’s right to convey or articulate a message, while freedom of media is much more complicated because it involves an additional third party that takes the role of disseminating the message. For example, three opposition activists may freely criticise Mugabe while sipping a cup of tea. However, as Moyo could argue, the transmission, broadcast or reportage of that criticism via a media outlet such as television or newspaper, would be considered illegal in the Zimbabwean case because it is not guaranteed in the constitution.

Faced with an uncompromising media onslaught, one could see why President Mugabe was left with no option other than to act. Laws were enacted under the constitution to help the president escape scrutiny. Section 16 of POSA, for example, makes it an offence to publicly discuss or produce a statement that knowingly or intentionally challenges the “authority of, or insults, the President”.<sup>143</sup> As such, publicly making statements that may cause “hatred, contempt or ridicule” of the president, or any “abusive, indecent, obscene or false statement”<sup>144</sup> about his person or his office is considered a crime, punishable by a minimum of one-year imprisonment. Indeed, scores of people have been arrested under

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<sup>141</sup> Friedrich Ebert Foundation and Media Institute of Southern Africa (eds.), ‘African Media Barometer’ [web page] (2006/07) <http://www.misa.org/mediabarometer.html>; [http://www.fes.de/in\\_afrika/pl\\_namm.htm](http://www.fes.de/in_afrika/pl_namm.htm), accessed 4 February 2011.

<sup>142</sup> Howard Cincotta, ‘What is democracy?’ Policy paper, (US Embassy China, 2009).

<sup>143</sup> POSA 2007 [web page] [http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa\\_amd\\_071214.pdf](http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa_amd_071214.pdf), accessed 11 August 2011.

<sup>144</sup> POSA 2007 [web page] [http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa\\_amd\\_071214.pdf](http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa_amd_071214.pdf), accessed 11 August 2011.

this law.<sup>145</sup> The Interception of Communications Act, passed in August 2007, decriminalised the surveillance of all communication including Internet traffic. Due to lack of advanced technology, it would appear as if the law has yet to spring to full force.

### 3.2 Media ownership in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe's first newspaper, the *Mashonaland and Zambesian Times*, was published on 27 June 1891, making it one of the first newspapers in Africa.<sup>146</sup> Following British Colonial statesman Leander Starr Jameson's preference for Rhodesia in place of Zambesia, the newspaper was rebranded the *Rhodesia Herald*, effectively replacing the *Mashonaland and Zambesian Times* as the country's only daily newspaper in October 1982.<sup>147</sup> The South African-based Argus Company later took over the newspaper through its Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company subsidiary. Argus spread its control of the country's media landscape by launching the *Bulawayo Chronicle* in Bulawayo, the nation's second largest city after Harare, which was then called Salisbury. When Smith declared a UDI state of emergency, his government censored the news published in the two newspapers.<sup>148</sup> Today, interference with the press, undoubtedly inherited from the Smith era, is systematically practiced by politicians in Zimbabwe. In Smith's time Rhodesian media promoted the interests of the White minority, while negative news dominated the coverage of the Black population. This uneven practice is still commonplace in Zimbabwe. *The Herald*, although a good source of quality news, is also a master of partisan reporting, largely directed at the opposition MDC.

One year into independent Zimbabwe, the government bought *The Herald* and all other newspapers owned by Argus group thanks to a generous \$20 million grant from the Nigerian government. The government established the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), which was tasked with running the day-to-day operations of the paper.<sup>149</sup> The Trust in turn established Zimbabwe Newspapers, Ltd., which to this day is the chief

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<sup>145</sup> Angus Shaw, 'Anti-Mugabe Artist Arrested', Associated Press (30 March 2010).

<sup>146</sup> Peter Fox, Cambridge University Library: The Great collections, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 176.

<sup>147</sup> Arthur Keppel-Jones, Rhodes and Rhodesia: The white conquest of Zimbabwe 1884-1902, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1983) 225-289.

<sup>148</sup> Last Moyo, 'Status of Media in Zimbabwe', National University of Science and Technology (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe).

<sup>149</sup> Tim Nyahunzvi, 'The Zimbabwean Mass Media Trust - an experiment that failed', Media Development Vol. XLVIII, No. 2 (2001) 31-36.

publisher of the former White-owned newspapers. The ZMMT holds overriding shares in Zimbabwean Newspapers, often referred to as Zimpapers, which publishes dailies *The Herald*, *The Chronicle*, *The Manica Post* and weeklies *The Sunday Mail*, *The Sunday News*, and the local vernacular newspaper, *Kwayedza*. The Mass Media Trust also had interests in The Community Newspaper Group (CNG), which publishes five regional titles. The country’s sole national news agency, Zimbabwe Inter Africa News Agency (ZIANA) is also 100 percent government controlled.<sup>150</sup> The Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), which went on to publish the country’s first daily, the *Daily News*, was formed in 1998. Other private weeklies that have flourished for decades are *The Financial Gazette*, *The Independent*, *The Standard* and the now defunct *Mirror*.

**Table 3.1 Overview of shareholders at The Herald**

Herald shareholders	Percentage
Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust	51.09%
Old Mutual Life Assurance	23.80%
Intermarket Nominees	3.38%
National Social Security Authority	3.10%
Zimpapers Pension Fund	2.28%
EFE Securities Nominees	1.53%
Munich Reins, Co of Africa Ltd	1.04%
Edwards Nominees Private Ltd	11.36%
NNR& FCA	0.91%
Shara Sheperd	0.82%
Glenhazel Investments	0.69%

*Source: Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2005*

<sup>150</sup> Guthrie Munyuki, Media ownership in Zimbabwe, paper presented the International Conference on Media Support Strategies for Zimbabwe, (Johannesburg, 28-30 November 2005).

**Table 3.2 Overview of newspaper circulation figures**

Zimbabwe newspaper circulation figures			
Daily Papers	Readership	Weekly Papers	Readership
The Herald	45,000	The Sunday Mail	60,000
The Chronicle	20,000	The Sunday News	18,000
		Manica Post	8,000
		Kwayedza	5,000
		Umthunywa	2,000

*Source: Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2005*

**3.2.1 Uneven landscape: Broadcasting in Zimbabwe**

According to Dumisani Moyo, broadcasting in Zimbabwe has been the subject of enormous debate since its introduction in the then-colonial Rhodesia in the 1930s.<sup>151</sup> It is remarkably ironic that the state that championed Black independence still uses the same colonial laws that it once criticised as unfair. In Zimbabwe, broadcasting services, both radio and television, remain firmly in the hands of the government. Even though some changes have been forced through over the last few years, broadcasting is still based on the monopolisation and regulatory laws of the Rhodesian era, which only allowed state-sanctioned material to be broadcast. The Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) was founded in 1957 under the auspices of the Broadcasting Act of the same year. At Independence in 1980, it was renamed the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). The 1957 Act remained in force until the introduction of the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) in 2001, also credited to former minister Moyo.

A major restructuring exercise, again Moyo’s brainchild, paved the way for the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Commercialization Act in 2001. As a direct result of the Act, ZBC was split into two entities, ZBH and the state-controlled Transmedia, a signal

<sup>151</sup> Dumisani Moyo, ‘From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: Change without Change? Broadcasting Policy Reform and Political Control in Henning Melber Media Public Discourse and Political contestation in Zimbabwe’, *Current African issues*, 27 (Nordic African Institute, Uppsala, 2004) pp. 12-29.



transmission service provider.<sup>152</sup> Munyuki says the Act was designed to boost the state broadcaster's commercial stamina. ZBH has continued to enjoy domination of the broadcasting services industry through its radio and television stations, although a new law to regulate and open the airwaves – the Broadcasting Services Act – was unveiled in 2001. Any changes to the broadcasting sector have been made to strengthen the ruling party, argues Martin Nkosi Ndlela. He says, “In Zimbabwe, despite pressures from both domestic and external actors, the government has maintained a monopoly-like situation in the broadcasting sector, albeit in a legal framework that established a three-tier system of broadcasting – public service broadcasting, commercial and community broadcasting”.<sup>153</sup>

The state-owned ZBH owns eight entities: Spot FM, Power FM, Zimbabwe Television, Sportnet, Radio Zimbabwe, National Languages, Newsnet, and Production Services. Before Moyo's reign, BBC news bulletins were aired on ZBC or by a separate short-lived station called Joy TV. However, when Moyo rose to power, he banned all BBC-related content on local television networks. Discussing broadcasting regulations in Africa and specifically in Zimbabwe, James Zaffiro posits that for many political regimes on the continent, broadcasting has proven to be the one useful instrument of “political reality definition and self-promotion, through its capacity to collect, articulate, select, and disseminate political information state-wide, while controlling access and terms of use”.<sup>154</sup> Zaffiro's observation explains why political regimes in Africa are always keen to control the airwaves.

For Susan Manhando-Makore, deregulation of broadcasting in Zimbabwe is long overdue. She says “the ZBC has failed to fulfill its role as public service provider because of lack of autonomy to formulate policies and control its budget. Its pay-television project has failed to take off because of interference from government”.<sup>155</sup> A 2003 parliamentary investigation into the conduct of the ZBC concluded that opponents of the state and

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid

<sup>153</sup> Martin Nkosi Ndlela, ‘Mediating Democratic Engagement: Reflections on the role of the media in electoral processes’, paper presented at Election Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa conference (Maputo, Mozambique: 8-11 April 2010).

<sup>154</sup> James Zaffiro, ‘Political Change, Regime Legitimation and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation: Lessons for a Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *Critical Arts* 6/1 (1992) pp. 61-83.

<sup>155</sup> Susan Manhando-Makore, ‘Free for all? The case of Zimbabwe's media’, *Political Communication for Social Change* [web page] <http://www.waccglobal.org/en/20012-media-scenarios-in-southern-africa/740-Free-for-all-The-case-of-Zimbabwes-media.html>, accessed 17 June 2011.

greater civil society were less likely to have their views aired by a state broadcaster. In this regard ZBC was failing to fulfill its national mandate as a public broadcaster. The inquiry found there was outright interference in its editorial process from the responsible government ministry, and that no official Code of Ethics was operational at ZBC. The same sentiments were echoed by yet another parliamentary probe, this time under the new coalition government that included both ZANU PF and MDC. “There were concerns that ZBC was wholly controlled by the Minister of Media, Information and Publicity who appoints the body and issues directives to the board and management and that it was highly regarded as a state controlled broadcaster, serving the interests of the state rather than those of the public”, the committee said in a report.<sup>156</sup>

### **3.2.2 Change paradigm: MDC’s call for change**

Say “opposition party” in Zimbabwe and people either laugh or cry, observes Sara Rich Dorman.<sup>157</sup> Over the past ten years electoral politics have been characterised by violence and intimidation, plunging Mugabe’s opponents into a sea of despair. It must be noted though that members of Mugabe’s party have also been victims of violence allegedly perpetrated by MDC elements. During the 1980s, the government’s intention was to establish a one-party state.<sup>158</sup> That was not to be. The labour-backed MDC was formed in 1999, motivated by the state’s failures to deal with workers’ concerns. Before its entrance on the political scene, several small-scale parties had tried without success to challenge Mugabe’s dominance. These included Edgar Tekere’s Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) and Margaret Dongo’s Zimbabwe Union of Democrats (ZUD), the latter formed a year before the MDC. These parties embody what Wondwosen Teshome meant when he concluded that opposition politics in Africa “appear or become active only during an election, and disappear when the election is over”.<sup>159</sup> Teshome’s assessment explains why real challenges to Mugabe’s power had been limited before the formation of MDC.

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<sup>156</sup> ‘Parliamentary group calls for end of ZBC monopoly’, The Zimbabwean [web page] (26 June 2011) <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/news/zimbabwe/50303/parliamentary-group-calls-for-end.html>, accessed 6 July 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Sarah Rich Dorman, ‘Going it alone: Opposition politics in Zimbabwe’, Southern Africa Report SAR, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1997)24.

<sup>158</sup> Liisa Laakso, Opposition Politics in Independent Zimbabwe, African Studies Quarterly, Vol. 7, No. 2&3 [web page] (2003) <http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2a6.htm>, accessed 14 December 2010.

<sup>159</sup> Wondwosen Teshome, ‘Opposition Parties and the Politics of Opposition in Africa: A Critical Analysis’, *International Journal of Human and Social Sciences* Vol. 4, No. 5 (2009).

The MDC takes its origins largely from the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions and coalition of civic society groups, which sought to challenge Mugabe's reign. Having just finished high school and facing a gloomy future because of the rising unemployment rate, I attended the "historic launch" of the MDC party at Rufaro Stadium on 11 September 1999. Anyone opposed to Mugabe was invited, and the gathering was well attended. The crowd came from diverse groups such as trade unions, the unemployed, university and polytechnic students, women, the disabled, informal traders, academics, business people, community associations, diplomats and human rights defenders. I was far from convinced the MDC would usher in a new era of hope, but nonetheless the venue was just 200 metres away from home. Arousing cries of delight and hope, Tsvangirai gave an invigorating speech promising that Mugabe's days in office were numbered. More than a decade later, Mugabe is still in power. But the MDC has had an impact. A few months after its launch, Mugabe lost the vote on the constitutional referendum due to the MDC's "NO" campaign. It was only after the referendum that Mugabe realised that the MDC, unlike the previously ineffective ZUM or ZUD opposition parties, had to be taken seriously.

I believe the MDC has faced serious challenges from the day it was formed. Political leaders are defined as much by what they oppose as what they propose, argues John Uhr.<sup>160</sup> Tsvangirai has deservedly earned praise for his vigorous opposition to Mugabe, yet he has failed to convincingly defend his stance on his perceptible association with the West. Among those who sat alongside Tsvangirai at the high table at Rufaro Stadium were many White dignitaries, some of whom may have been Western embassy officials. Standing in the public arena among the 15,000 people who packed the stadium were also hundreds of White opposition activists. The MDC carefully chose to launch the party in Mbare, a historically poor suburb of Harare, which had been a centre of opposition to Mugabe. But the ubiquitous presence of Whites and Westerners on the suburb's dusty

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<sup>160</sup> John Uhr, 'The Power of Opposition: Reconsidering Bolingbroke's Political Theory of Opposition', paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Marriott, Loews Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Convention Center, 31 August 2006).

roads offered Mugabe's supporters a platform to attack the very basis of the party's existence.

The MDC's policy of White inclusivity – while being remarkably equitable considering the country's historical ties to Britain – set the party on a rough road to recognition as Mugabe sought to dismiss it as a Western-sponsored party. Tsvangirai made a huge mistake by associating the party with the West, or as he normally says, the “international community”. Mugabe's party has used every chance to represent itself as the real “people's party”. Tsvangirai has always been depicted in the dominant state press as being “unAfrican”. Much of what is said about him is outright propaganda, but it has proven to be effective. I attended a rally at Murewa Business Centre on 10 March 2008, in which a ZANU PF official told the crowd that Tsvangirai was “White”. Some people I interviewed after the rally believed it. There is little doubt that Tsvangirai's agenda for change suffered from its grassroots association with Britain and the US. Indeed, the two nations, along with several other Western countries, have publicly backed Tsvangirai in his quest to end Mugabe's reign, opening the way for ZANU PF to brand him “a Western puppet” at every opportunity. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's public admission that he was working with Tsvangirai to effect regime change in Zimbabwe undermined the MDC's fight against Mugabe.<sup>161</sup>

After the formation of the MDC, Mugabe's party severed ties with its own White party cadres, including long-serving ministers Dennis Norman and Timothy Stamps. While the two ex-ministers have remained unswerving in their support of Mugabe, publicly they have stayed silent. There should be no doubt that the MDC, in spite of its infinite problems, remains the only party that can strongly mount any challenge to Mugabe's rule. But strategically the party remains considerably weakened because of its choice of allies. Mugabe is convinced the West is ready to re-colonise Zimbabwe by fronting the MDC party. While this populist view may sound far-fetched, it cannot be ignored. It is espoused not only by the ordinary man on the street but also by the country's academic

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<sup>161</sup> ‘Zimbabwe Prime Minister Tsvangirai brings out autobiography’, VOA News, [web page] (30 September 2011) <http://www.voanews.com/zimbabwe/news/Zimbabwe-Prime-Minister-Tsvangirai-Publishes-Autobiography-130859653.html>, accessed 1 October 2011.

community, which by all standards is resolutely behind Mugabe. The MDC strongly rejects this assumption, yet some of the party's own actions have not helped the situation. Fearing for his life, Tsvangirai, for example, sought refuge at the Dutch embassy in 2008. Considering the Zimbabwe capital Harare is home to nearly 30 African embassies, this proved to be a strategically unwise move, once again offering Mugabe a chance to denounce the opposition leader as representing White interests.

Many pundits and activists are at loss to explain the peculiar circumstances leading to the MDC's failure to gain power. The struggle has been rocky for the opposition party even though it has indeed made plenty of inroads in the dozen years of its existence. Tsvangirai's defeat of Mugabe in March 2008 was celebrated as a 'big victory,' yet despite moving into the prime minister's office he is still marginalised. The formation of the MDC nearly coincided with the arrival of the *Daily News* on the Zimbabwean media landscape. The newspaper claimed to be the country's first 'independent daily,' but it set out clearly in defiance of the government and sought to challenge the status quo. Its refusal to register with the accreditation commission gave the government an excuse to forcefully close it down. Without any doubt this forced closure of the *Daily News* robbed the MDC of its main ally.

Tsvangirai also has publicly called for Western countries to enforce sanctions against Mugabe's regime imposed after the disputed 2000 elections.<sup>162</sup> The sanctions issue has attracted immense debate in Zimbabwe. Many people, especially those aligned to Mugabe, are convinced that the sanctions were wholly responsible for crushing the Zimbabwean economy, while Tsvangirai and his supporters have said the sanctions are "only targeted" at ZANU PF and its allies. Using my role as an active participant in Zimbabwean social and political life, I strongly disagree with that view. One has to question the real meaning of "targeted" sanctions, as European and American officials have called their restrictive measures. You cannot escape the fact that they have hurt

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<sup>162</sup> 'Zimbabwe: Tsvangirai warned not to call for further sanctions', IRIN News Johannesburg [web page] (18 November 2004) <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=52099>, accessed 2 February 2011.

ordinary Zimbabweans, rather than those in Mugabe's circle who were supposedly targeted.

There is plenty of evidence supporting this argument. In a testimony to the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs on 2 December 2010, Zimbabwean-born journalist and known Mugabe critic Sydney Masamvu said the sanctions had been ineffective: "The objectives of restrictive measures placed on top government officials, their associates and affiliated entities for undermining the rule of law, perpetuating flawed elections, inciting violence, and creating an overall environment of instability have largely failed to curb the undemocratic behavior of these individuals".<sup>163</sup> Heather Chingono says EU measures on Zimbabwe "are not near 'sanctions' in the traditional sense, despite sanctioning Zimbabwean beef and tobacco exports into Europe, its long-established, conventional and largest market".<sup>164</sup> Additionally, donor countries froze their funding to Zimbabwe in the aftermath of the sanctions. Zimbabwean students, who for years had benefited from European and American university scholarships, suffered as funds were withdrawn or Zimbabwe was simply removed from the list of countries eligible for funding. Several prestigious educational initiatives, including the Fulbright Program, were suspended, despite Zimbabwe having one of the highest numbers of scholars and students sent to American colleges in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>165</sup> When I applied for the Collins Cannon Trust scholarship in 2009 to support my PhD studies, I was notified in an email that due to "ongoing EU sanctions", Zimbabwe had been struck off the list of beneficiary countries. European supermarket giants such as Britain's Tesco dumped Zimbabwean products, arguing they were coming from farms 'illegally' seized from White farmers.<sup>166</sup> All this fuels ZANU PF propaganda blaming the MDC for its position for sanctions. However, while the MDC should certainly take its share of blame, it cannot be forgotten that the sanctions were imposed after a disputed election, for which

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<sup>163</sup> Sydney Masamvu, 'Testimony to the US Committee on Foreign Affairs', [web page] (2 December 2010) [foreignaffairs.house.gov/111/mas120210.pdf](http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/111/mas120210.pdf), accessed 2 February 2011.

<sup>164</sup> Heather Chingono, 'Zimbabwe sanctions: An analysis of the Lingo guiding the perception of sanctioners and sanctionees', *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 4/2 (2010) 66-74.

<sup>165</sup> 'List of Zimbabwean beneficiaries of the Fulbright programme', US embassy, Harare Zimbabwe [web page] [http://harare.usembassy.gov/fulbright\\_zimbabwean\\_scholars.html](http://harare.usembassy.gov/fulbright_zimbabwean_scholars.html), accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>166</sup> 'Tesco to end trade with Zimbabwe', [web page] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/7482383.stm>, accessed 2 February 2011.

despite Tsvangirai's alleged victory, the result was rigged to prolong Mugabe's presidency.<sup>167</sup>

Despite its problems, the MDC's successes cannot be undervalued. In June 2000, just a year after its creation, the party claimed 57 seats against Zanu-PF's 62 in Parliament, in the first serious challenge to the ruling party. In 2008 Tsvangirai's MDC took 99 seats, two more than Mugabe's party, while a breakaway faction of the MDC, then led by Arthur Mutambara, had ten. These results denied ZANU-PF a legislative majority for the first time in the country's then 28-year history. Mugabe's party became an opposition party in parliament. However, infighting has afflicted the MDC, leading to the formation of the Mutambara faction in October 2005 and lending momentum to ZANU-PF. Mutambara himself acknowledged the need for the opposition parties to work together when he said: "There is no alternative to all democratic forces working together to bring about democratic change".<sup>168</sup>

### **3.3 Breaking the taboos: Introducing New Zimbabwe.com**

Established in 2003, Newzimbabwe.com takes a tabloid slant in reporting its news, which is largely focussed on Zimbabwean sports, entertainment and political news. To improve its competitive market position, it also unveiled a print version in 2007, with the distribution focussed on the UK. The increasing significance of Newzimbabwe.com among Zimbabweans in the Diaspora may be measured by the contributions of op-ed pieces by prominent Zimbabweans including Jonathan Moyo, businessman Mutumwa Mawere, and emerging academics such as Alex Magaisa and Brilliant Mhlanga.

The online newspaper's editor Mduduzi Mathuthu came to the UK to do a short-term journalism course in Cardiff before he acquired political asylum, settling in Wales in 2002. The *Daily News* was closed down after Mathuthu had already left the country. In Zimbabwe, he had made a name for himself as a rising news star at the newspaper from his hometown base in Bulawayo. Mathuthu also covered events in Harare, especially football matches. He was in his early 20s, and one of the newspaper's leading reporters,

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<sup>167</sup> Robert Mugabe is poised to rig a general election once again' <http://www.economist.com/node/3793417> accessed 5 February 2011.

<sup>168</sup> International Crisis Group interview with Arthur Mutambara, (Harare, 19 October 2006).

when he was arrested “five times on trumped-up charges and beaten by Mugabe loyalists”, according to the version he gave to Steve Tucker of the *South Wales Echo*. Mathuthu told Tucker his publication was “privately funded” without elaborating. Explaining his reasons for moving to the UK, he said, “It was terrifying, incredible pressure to try to work in that way. You have to ask yourself if you want to be a dead hero or a living coward. I’m afraid I chose the latter”.<sup>169</sup> Mathuthu, whose name appeared on the online of University of Glamorgan’s Bachelor of Laws graduates for 2008,<sup>170</sup> claimed in the same article that his publication attracted a “staggering 250,000 hits” a day.

A 2006 IOM report claimed that the majority of Zimbabweans in the UK “are highly skilled in accessing the Internet, having become so in their homeland. A significant finding of this research is the extent to which the Zimbabwean Diaspora uses the Internet”.<sup>171</sup> While Mathuthu’s publication continues to influence public opinion, it also is the target of criticism, much of it stemming from the editor’s rough tabloid-styled reporting. Mathuthu openly declares himself to be a disciple of Piers Morgan, the former editor of Britain’s *Mirror* newspaper: “The reality is that I am a strong-headed character who thinks independently and is not afraid to say what I think. I have been variously described as cold-hearted, brutal and arrogant. I can’t disagree with any of that, but I am also a very sensitive and caring individual”.<sup>172</sup>

Mathuthu’s Newzimbabwe.com has broken taboos by offering readers an electronic podium to discuss issues, not only on politics but on tribalism. Zimbabwe is dominated by two tribes: Shona and Ndebele. With its origins in South Africa, the minority Ndebele tribe, from which Mathuthu hails, is based in the country’s south. The Ndebeles believe they have traditionally been politically and socially marginalised. Mathuthu’s publication has thrown the issue into the public domain, allowing hate messages and responses to

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<sup>169</sup> Steve Tucker, ‘The man who’s fighting for democracy in Zimbabwe from his humble flat in Cardiff’, *South Wales Echo* (29 June 2005).

<sup>170</sup> Katie Bodinger, ‘University of Glamorgan results 2008’, [web page] <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2008/07/16/university-of-glamorgan-results-2008-91466-21344574/>, accessed 1 February 2011.

<sup>171</sup> Zimbabwe: Mapping Exercise, International Organization for Migration 2006 report [www.iomlondon.org/doc/mapping/IOM\\_ZIMBABWE\\_MR.pdf](http://www.iomlondon.org/doc/mapping/IOM_ZIMBABWE_MR.pdf), accessed 16 February 2011.

<sup>172</sup> Mduduzi Mathuthu, [web page] <http://www.myspace.com/mathuthu>, accessed 6 February 2011.



thrive on his website. That has made Mathuthu a divisive figure. His perplexing pride has not helped his cause either. He refers to himself as “one of the best writers of the 21st century”.<sup>173</sup> But the importance of allowing Zimbabweans to air these political and social issues cannot be underestimated. Winston Mano and Wendy Willem provide figures that show the number of registered participants on the website: “Apart from news articles and advertisements, visitors are also encouraged to join ‘the debate’ on the discussion forum section of the website, which proved very popular with the 8,152 members registered by May 2006”.<sup>174</sup>

**Figure 3.7: Common Sources of Information for Zimbabweans in the UK**

Word of Mouth	36%
Radio	14%
Newspapers	9%
Internet	19%
TV	11%
Leaflets in English	11%

*Source: International Organization for Migration 2005*

Figure 3.7 provides evidence that the majority of Zimbabwean living in the UK use the Internet as one of their main sources of information. Word of mouth is still the most important channel for disseminating information, followed by the Internet. Although NewZimbabwe.com claims to offer a balanced view, the IOM report said “it is generally biased towards Matabeleland and the Ndebele people. On the other hand, Zimdaily.com is biased towards Mashonaland and the Shona people”. Both publications benefit from the larger use of the Internet as the second source of news after word-of-mouth communication, as suggested in Figure 3.7. Newzimbabwe has ventured into the untapped ICT market, using technology to open doors for freedom of speech, thereby providing an escape from the widespread censorship to which Zimbabweans are accustomed. Mathuthu has on several occasions defended his publication as one catering to both sides of the political divide. But his historical background and association with the *Daily News* contradict this claim. As a regular visitor to the site, I recall reading countless stories portraying MDC in a positive light. The content analysis will show that

<sup>173</sup> Mduduzi Mathuthu profile [web page] <http://km-kh.hi5.com/friend/p39716208--Mduduzi--html>, accessed 16 February 2011.  
<sup>174</sup> Winston Mano and Wendy Willems, ‘Emerging Communities, Emerging Media: the Case of a Zimbabwean Nurse in the British Big Brother show’, *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 22.1 (2008) pp. 101-128.

Newzimbabwe.com published more anti-Mugabe stories than any other online publication surveyed in the period leading up to the 2008 elections.

### **3.3.1 An acid test for ZANU PF: *The Zimbabwean* meets Zimdaily**

Zimbabwean Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology Columbus Mavhunga feels the presence of the Internet has made it possible for exiled musicians critical of Mugabe to instantly become journalists, activists and disc jockeys.<sup>175</sup> Cultural and political icon Thomas Mapfumo, undoubtedly Zimbabwe's best known musician who won fame with Chimurenga (war of liberation) songs, denounces the ZANU PF regime with protest songs from his base in the United States. Most of them are banned on ZBC. *The Zimbabwean*, whose editor is one of the severest critics of Mugabe and his regime, has changed the Zimbabwean media landscape since it was officially launched. Unlike Newzimbabwe.com and Zimdaily.com which are targeted in the Diaspora, *The Zimbabwean's* print edition is distributed on the streets of Harare. In 2008, it added a sister publication to its stable, *The Zimbabwean on Sunday*. The editor, Wilf Mbanga, is a veteran journalist, but he has relied chiefly on people with no journalism background for much of the paper's content. In defining citizen journalism, Scot Gant focuses more on the 'democratic participatory' aspects of the citizens.<sup>176</sup> True, trained journalists also contribute to Mbanga's paper, but its editorial position is influenced by the work of citizen journalists. Mbanga explained: "We gather our news from a variety of sources. Zimbabweans love to tell stories. There is no shortage of well informed, thinking people to offer opinion pieces and analysis. We have countless contributors—all unpaid".<sup>177</sup>

Mbanga also pays tribute to advanced technologies, which make it possible for his "reporters" to send news quickly to his base in England. Some have questioned the reliability of news packages supplied by people without formal journalism backgrounds or training. However, the extent to which citizen journalism as practiced by Mbanga and his "reporters" have contributed to accountability on the part of government officials

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<sup>175</sup> Columbus Mavhunga, 'The Glass Fortress: Zimbabwe's Cyber-Guerrilla Warfare', [web page] [www.concernedafricascholars.org/docs/acasbulletin80-4.pdf](http://www.concernedafricascholars.org/docs/acasbulletin80-4.pdf), accessed 12 February 2011.

<sup>176</sup> Scott Gant, *We're All Journalists Now: The Transformation of the Press and Reshaping of the Law in the Internet Age*. (New York: Free Press, 2007) p. 23.

<sup>177</sup> Wilf Mbanga, 'Zimbabwe: Telling the Story, Reporting the News', Nieman Reports [web page] (2008) <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100420>, accessed 3 October 2011.

cannot be underrated. Mbanga said, “Modern technology has been a helpful partner in enabling us to publish news about Zimbabwe while being thousands of miles away. (Those of us directing publication of *The Zimbabwean* face the threat of death at the hands of Mugabe’s forces if we return to Zimbabwe.) Digital media allow citizens within Zimbabwe to report news and send the information and photographs to us. *The Zimbabwean* receives more than its fair share of its news in this way; today, reports received from non-journalists in Zimbabwe is perhaps the main source of the information contained in our columns”.<sup>178</sup>

The CIA World Factbook reported that in 2009 alone 1.423 million Zimbabweans (excluding those in the Diaspora) were able to access the Internet in a country with more than 25 Internet service providers.<sup>179</sup> The probability that Zimbabweans in the Diaspora channeled anti-Mugabe material into the country is thus as good as certain. The politically charged Zimdaily.com was a brainchild of Zimbabwean businessmen based in Canada, the US and Britain, according to Mavhunga, the Zimbabwean academic at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Initially launched in 2004, the paper styles itself as “a force that President Robert Mugabe cannot stop”.<sup>180</sup> Zimdaily is best known for Fair Deal, an online project started in April 2007 to flush out children (and spouses) of ZANU PF officials and get them deported from Western countries. After all, ZANU PF “hates the West” and castigates those who leave land redistribution and go West. The project has been a huge success.<sup>181</sup>

Zimdaily has not hidden its dislike of Mugabe. In fact, nothing published on the site seems to represent a view likely to depict the person of Mugabe or his party in a positive light. On the contrary, it has attracted staunchly vocal critics of Mugabe. Their loathing of Mugabe is seen through the way they cover stories, their selection of news, comments as well as contributors to the debate. Similarly, the site’s forums and chatrooms are awash with anti-Mugabe undertones. Of all the three news sites, Zimdaily stands alone in

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<sup>178</sup> Wilf Mbanga, ‘Zimbabwe: Telling the Story, Reporting the News’, Nieman Reports [web page] (2008) <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100420>, accessed 1 February 2011.

<sup>179</sup> ‘CIA World Factbook’, [web page] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html>, accessed 5 February 2011.

<sup>180</sup> Columbus Mavhunga, ‘The Glass Fortress: Zimbabwe’s Cyber-Guerrilla Warfare’, [web page] [www.concernedafricascholars.org/docs/acasbulletin80-4.pdf](http://www.concernedafricascholars.org/docs/acasbulletin80-4.pdf), accessed 12 February 2011.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid

its robust use of pictures to portray – normally with a rancorous twist – the sorry state of ZANU PF, its supporters, its leaders, allies and sponsors. On the other side, it portrays the MDC as a party of hope, one that is set to play an instrumental role in ending Mugabe’s rule. The MDC is rarely criticised on Zimdaily. The MDC’s own problems have either been forgiven or ignored by Zimdaily. It has barely mentioned the factional battles and the invitation by Welshman Ncube to Professor Aurther Mutambara to lead a breakaway group. Zimdaily, it can be concluded, is to the MDC what *The Herald* is to ZANU PF.

Retaining an overtly and blatantly critical stance towards the Zimbabwean ruler since its commencement, *The Zimbabwean*, like Zimdaily, has also been unambiguous in its animosity to Mugabe and his cohorts. ZANU PF voices are given no space in the paper and its fondness for the MDC is decidedly open. The majority of its contributors have longstanding ties to the MDC. Stories and comments that ridicule Mugabe and his party members are given prominence. Any reader of *The Zimbabwean* will be familiar with the publication’s attempt to dwell largely on issues that present ZANU PF negatively, including alleged human rights abuses, journalists’ arrests, corruption by party officials, scandals within the party, rumours about Mugabe’s poor health, EU sanctions and much more. The Letter to the Editor section also shows an incontestable slant towards the MDC and its leadership.

### **3.3.2 Zimbabweguardian.com: Mugabe fights back**

Not every Zimbabwean in the Diaspora is opposed to Mugabe. Faced with a cyber guerilla war in which government policies were under constant attack, London-based businessmen with ties to ZANU PF unveiled their own pro-Mugabe weapon, Zimbabweangurdian.com. As the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis raged on, Zimbabwean lawyer Itayi Garande launched his site to provide readers with the “other side”. It quickly got the attention of former Zimbabwean Deputy Minister for Information Bright Matonga, thanks to its devoted defence of Mugabe’s policies. Matonga, who had studied in the UK before taking a working stint with BBC, was recalled to Zimbabwe by Moyo, who put him in charge at ZBC. Garande went on to launch a fierce crusade against Zimbabwean websites, which he accused of supporting the West’s regime-change

agenda in Zimbabwe. Garande has since resigned from his post and the website now operates as talkzimbabwe.com. In its present form the website's reports are still tilted towards ZANU PF, though not as defiantly as they were under Garande's reign.

Zimbabwean activists based in the UK tried to get Garande deported for his loyalty towards ZANU PF. Garande rejected accusations he was a Mugabe apologist, asking a talk radio host: "Do I fit the criteria of someone who supports Mugabe?"<sup>182</sup> Despite these denials Garande's publication focussed on news promoting Mugabe and his loyalists, often echoing coverage or stories in *The Herald*. For example, ZANU PF's exposure of Mugabe critic and former Archbishop of Bulawayo Pius Ncube, which coincidentally gained prominence around election time in March 2008, was widely covered by Garande.

This chapter has provided a detailed description and analysis of the Zimbabwe geo-political and media scenes. It has explored the historical injustices associated with the British involvement in Zimbabwe. The chapter also presented views from two different political sides (the Zimbabwean and British) schools of thought as to what has gone wrong in the country. The colonial assessment was relevant to this research since the majority of present-day media laws, as I have shown here, originate from the days of the British colonial rule. The chapter has also profiled dissident news websites run by Zimbabwean journalists, going so far as reviewing the messages they disseminate as well as their ownership and editorial policies

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<sup>182</sup> 'Itayi Garande defends himself on Reporters' forum', Zimdiaspora (28 December 2008).

## 4 PROPPING UP PROPAGANDA

Parts of this chapter are based on:

Mutsvairo Bruce, (2012). Propping up propaganda? Exploring the Role of The Herald in Strengthening ZANU-PF's political position." *Journalism and Mass Communication* Vol. 2 No.12 p. 939-950.

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines *The Herald* newspaper's role in safeguarding the seemingly unparalleled longevity of Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party. Using a sample of stories from both the paper's print and online editions, the study traces the origins of the broadsheet's ostensibly unfaltering pro-ZANU PF editorial positions, turning to direct observation and article analysis to critically probe not only the motive but also the impact of the newspaper's assumed open allegiance to the revolutionary party. In a nation believed battered by perceived state brutality and widening political differences, *The Herald* has been accused of dictating the pace of dictatorship while guardedly manipulating information to prop up President Robert Mugabe's regime. So important has the paper become over the years that its often uncompromising, one-sided style of reporting has earned it praise among militant ZANU PF hardliners while attracting bitter widespread criticism from detractors of the long-serving party.

Discussing Zimbabwean politics would be insignificant without a comprehensive analysis of *The Herald's* relationship with the country's political fabric. The paper has historically enjoyed a monopoly, to the extent that it claimed, "If you hear it, you get it from *the Herald*." This chapter examines *The Herald's* role in contributing to the political endurance of President Mugabe's ZANU-PF party. Using a structural analysis from a sample of stories from the paper's print and online editions, I trace the origins of the broadsheet's pro-ZANU PF editorial positions, analysing content and critically probing not only the motive but also the impact of the newspaper's allegiance to the revolutionary party.

Propaganda is commonly associated with Hitler in the Second World War even though it should be traced back to 500 years B.C., to Alexander the Great in the Ancient World

according to Jowett, G.S. & O'Donnell.<sup>183</sup> As long as mankind has lived in the aftermath of the 19<sup>th</sup> C Industrial Revolution, there has always been propaganda, according to Pratkanis & Aronson, who link propaganda with the invention of human civilizations.<sup>184</sup> Robert Jackall opines that propaganda's origins can effectively be found in religion arguing between 1621-23 a propaganda office was set up by Pope Gregory XV.<sup>185</sup> Stanley Ngoa estimates that there is a connection between advertising and propaganda suggesting that with the coming of the Industrial Revolution lifestyles changed automatically creating the need to "guide" the consumer.<sup>186</sup>

One of the key scholars in the field of propaganda Harold Laswell defines it as "the control of opinion by significant symbols, or to speak more accurately by stories, rumours, reports, pictures and other forms of social communication."<sup>187</sup> Contemporary scholars Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell have opted to define propaganda "as the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."<sup>188</sup> Manipulation is thus very central in both definitions. Persuasion is central in Ross' definition, which concludes propaganda aims to "persuade a socially significant group of people on behalf of a political institution, organization or cause."<sup>189</sup> Another influential scholar in the field Edward Bernays wrote in 1928 "Modern propaganda is a consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group."<sup>190</sup> Even though he is one scholar who believes despite its negative connotations, propaganda does not necessarily have to be bad, it should be pointed out that the propagandist's intentions are always to convince he is right even if it means that he has to deceive. Thus Propaganda does not necessarily have to be

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<sup>183</sup> Jowett, Garth and O'Donnell, Victoria, *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion New and Classic Essay* (London: Sage Publications, 2006) pp.51.

<sup>184</sup> Anthony Pratkanis, and Elliot Aronson,, *The Age of Propaganda: Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion*, (W. H. Freeman & Co, 1991) pp. 11.

<sup>185</sup> Robert Jackall, *Propaganda: Main Trends of the Modern World*. (New York: University Press, 1995) pp. 9

<sup>186</sup> Stanley Ngoa *Agenda-Setting: The Neglected Role of some Agents of Power ...An Unpublished Ph.D Thesis*. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, RSA, 2006.

<sup>187</sup> Harold D . Lasswell, The theory of political propaganda. *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 21 No. (3), (1927), pp. 627-631.

<sup>188</sup> Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Sage Publications, Inc; 4th edition (December 8, 2005) pp. 7

<sup>189</sup> Sheryl T. Ross Understanding propaganda: The epistemic model and its application to art. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 36 No. (1), pp.16-30.

<sup>190</sup> Edward Bernays *Propaganda* (New York: Ig Publishing, 2005, original publication 1928) pp 25.

outright lies. There has to be an element of truth in everything that is reported. However, not everything has to be accurate.

One of the most commonly accepted norms to the success of democracy is the system's inseparable relationship to a free press. The media provides citizens with information essential to the decisions they make, especially when choosing the country's political leaders.<sup>191</sup> The media is a source of power that influences, controls, and promotes new standards in society or reinforces existing ones.<sup>192</sup> During his decades-long rule, Mugabe, deliberately or not, has had a dependable mouthpiece for disbursing information. At the same time, critics especially his opponents in the MDC party have dismissed it as a cheap propaganda platform. The availability of several weekly newspapers, including those fiercely critical of President Mugabe, has failed to hold back *The Herald's* market dominance. With the exception of the short-lived *Daily News*, which doubled its circulation from an initial 60,000 to 120,000 within a few months of its 1999 launch, *The Herald*, with 90,000 readers, has been the overwhelming force on the Zimbabwean media scene, argues Dumisani Moyo.<sup>193</sup> Nor did the arrival of several other post-independence political parties, including the MDC, destabilize the newspaper's support for ZANU PF and market dominance.

#### **4.2 Problem Identification: Research Questions**

In the first of the four separate empirical studies, I endeavoured to first identify the problems associated with *The Herald* newspaper's role in Zimbabwean society. The first problem was the institution itself. Its ability, role and responsibility among the citizens as a provider of reliable news content have all been severely questioned by its critics from the opposition parties at home and abroad because of its openly-pro-state stance. The second problem, which is related to the first, has to do with the openly biased political stances in the stories it covers hence a structural analysis of its content is necessary, with

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<sup>191</sup> Agner Fog 'The supposed and the real role of media in a modern democracy', working paper (2004) pp. 1-49.

<sup>192</sup> Lal Ratan Mani, Sharma, Sushil K., Ahmed, Nazim, 'Inherent barriers for mass media impact on Indian society', Vol 7, No. 6 (2007) pp. 47-63.

<sup>193</sup> Dumisani Moyo, 'The "independent press" and the fight for democracy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the banned Daily News', Westminster Paper in Communication and Culture Special Issue (2005) 109-128.



a view to investigating allegations of bias against the opposition parties. I therefore decided to formulate one central research questions as follows:

Why is *The Herald* prepared to use propagandistic tendencies to support ZANU PF

Data collection was based on a random selection of newspaper articles from *The Herald* newspaper between 1990 to 2012. While the use of random sampling has been criticised by scholars such as Riffe, Aust and Lacy,<sup>194</sup> one has to acknowledge its notable usefulness. Random sampling can leave every item selected for research included in the examination. For instance, the articles chosen for analysis were representative of *The Herald's* editorial output because they were taken covering a period through with the paper has had more than seven different editors in charge

#### **4.3 *The Herald's* role in Zimbabwean politics**

Propaganda, for the right or wrong reasons, is often associated with negative connotations. It is often perceived that propaganda techniques can only be employed by autocratic and despotic regimes. However, it has been argued that practically all governments, including the so-called democratic ones, use some form of propaganda to bolster their support from other nations and citizenry.<sup>195</sup> In its quest to discredit and disqualify President Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe, the British government has also used propaganda techniques, one may argue. Repeatedly labelling President Mugabe a dictator who has a disregard for his human rights is an established propaganda associated with glittering generalities. There is no agreed definition of "dictator" even though it's quite clear that the term carries negative connotations, which the British government used to help convince its allies in the European Union, Australia, Canada, the U.S., and New Zealand to impose sanctions against the Zimbabwean leader and his closest associates in 2002. That Mugabe had rigged elections as was suggested at that time as the justification for launching a sanctions regime, is debatable because the Southern African Development Community (SADC) concluded in its assessment that the elections had been "free and fair."

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<sup>194</sup> 16. Riffe D, Aust C F, Lacy S R. The effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis. *Journalism Quarterly* 1993. 70133–139.139.

<sup>195</sup> Anthony Pratkanis & Elliot Aronson, 'The Age of propaganda: Everyday use and abuse of persuasion', W. H. Freeman & Co (1991) 4-19.

While *The Herald* does not hide its allegiance to ZANU-PF, it offers an alternative to the coverage of Zimbabwean politics, which since the launch of the land reform programme in 2000 has largely been biased against the government of Zimbabwe. While the foreign and independent media has sought to delegitimise Mugabe's rule because of perceived land reform injustices and allegations of election rigging, *The Herald* has robustly maintained its nationalistic pro-Mugabe stance. It has steadfastly echoed the government in blaming Zimbabwe's woes on a coalition of local and international foes including White farmers, the British government and the opposition MDC party.

A newspaper must be judged for its credibility and reputation as an honest provider of reliable news. Yet without the media, people in societies would be isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but from governments, lawmakers, and neighbouring towns and cities. *The Herald's* arguably one-sided approach to reporting, I believe, has damaged its position as a harbinger of impartial, coverage of news and events. Indeed, the newspaper often fails to provide an accurate picture of Zimbabwean news. However, as Fog would argue, how different is it from other media, which adopt an editorial line aligned with their advertisers or sponsors?<sup>196</sup> If *The Herald* has failed to provide a fair and balanced coverage of developments in Zimbabwe, has anybody been able to achieve that goal elsewhere?

Media is a business. The owners of a media outlet normally have a say in the content produced by that particular organization. To understand how *The Herald* works, one has to understand who is behind it. A closer look at the newspaper's ownership helps explain the paper's bias towards ZANU PF. The newspaper is majority-owned by Zimbabwe Newspapers Group, Zimpapers, which holds 51.09 percent of the shares. The remaining shares are owned by the nation's leading financial firm, Old Mutual, and several other government-connected private companies.<sup>197</sup> It is not surprising, then, if *The Herald* takes orders from its masters. Yet it is the newspaper's failure to give a platform to a variety of voices and its deliberate labeling of critics as traitors that may potentially help undermine its authority. By choosing to abandon impartial and objective reporting, instead

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<sup>196</sup> Agner Fog 'The supposed and the real role of media in a modern democracy', working paper (2004) 1-49.

<sup>197</sup> Open Society Institute, Media Programme Publication, Public Broadcasting in Africa Series (2009).

maintaining an unswerving nationalistic pro-ZANU PF agenda, the newspaper has ignored a fundamental ethic of modern journalism. Whether objectivity exists is another question open for discussion. Zimbabweans who have left the country because of the economic crisis are considered traitors and allies of the West in a strongly generalized perspective, which normally ignores the fact that pro-Mugabe supporters may have also left the country. One could argue that the ubiquitous barrage of criticism leveled against the MDC for supporting the Europe Union's "targeted" sanctions ignores ZANU PF's actions that prompted the sanctions, including allegations of gross human rights violations brought by supposedly independent players such as the United Nations.<sup>198</sup> ZANU PF politicians – even those born after independence – are addressed as "Comrade" to reflect their imaginary credentials as veteran bush war fighters. MDC officials, by contrast, are referred to as "Mr.", including those who fought in the 1970s guerrilla wars. *The Herald* thus measures patriotism by party allegiance.

*The Herald's* relationship with the government is symbiotic. While faithfully disseminating the ruling party's political, social and economic agenda, it has been guaranteed exclusivity to news, ensuring that it 'scoops' independent journalists and maintains its journalistic edge against competitors. President Mugabe historically travels with a reporter from *The Herald* on most of his foreign trips. This favour is not extended to journalists from the private media, and accordingly the newspaper gets unchallenged access to the President. Thus, while its reports may be dismissed as manipulative propaganda, they actually may be informative, despite the fact that the objective, like most forms of propaganda, is to create a favourable public response. Though its content is one-sided, the paper has long been a vital and usually credible source of Zimbabwean news. For instance, while various foreign media incorrectly reported that President Mugabe had left the country in the aftermath of his first-round 2008 defeat to Tsvangirai, *The Herald* had it right: the president had not left the country. In 2012, Western media outlets including The Sydney Morning Herald incorrectly speculated that Mugabe may

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<sup>198</sup> UN-commissioned report was critical of Operation Murambatsvina or Drive out trash, a drive of mass evictions. The author read the BBC website report 'Zimbabwe slum demolitions continue' on the BBC website <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4715635.stm>, accessed on 9 September 2009.

have died during a trip to Singapore.<sup>199</sup> As it turned out, *The Herald*, which had a reporter travelling with Mugabe rebuffed these reports, suggesting as what later turned out to be the case that Mugabe was alive.

#### 4.3.1 Historical Overview

Among several challenges faced by any new nation, Eric Hobsbawm introduces the question of loyalty to, and identification with, the state and ruling system.<sup>200</sup> A carefully crafted ZANU PF art of dominance has seen the nationalist party controlling Zimbabwe's political landscape uninterrupted over the past three decades. *The Herald's* pro-state stance can be traced back to the heyday of its predecessor, *The Rhodesian Herald*, which was then a powerful propaganda platform for the Rhodesian Front in 1963, according to Elaine Windrich.<sup>201</sup> The flagrant control of the press is an entrenched characteristic of the legacy of colonialism in post-colonial Africa.<sup>202</sup> Determined to discontinue foreign ownership of the press, President Mugabe's government created the state-controlled Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), a watchdog that eventually took overall ownership of *The Herald* and its sister papers, Nyahunzvi argues.<sup>203</sup>

The Trust was established amid assurances of a free media, with the then Information Minister Nathan Shamuyarira commenting: "Government remains committed to the freedom of press as stated in the Election manifesto. We will neither publish nor edit any of the newspapers."<sup>204</sup> Those pledges would become history a few years later, prompted by what appears to be the government's determination to keep a grip on power. Nyahunzvi concedes that the formation of ZMMT in 1981, just a year after gaining independence from Britain, kick-started a string of problems for the ambitious young

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<sup>199</sup> Megan Levy 'Mugabe Close To Death' Sydney Morning Herald, 10 April 2012 <http://www.smh.com.au/world/mugabe-close-to-death-reports-20120410-1wls5.html> Accessed 12 April 2012

<sup>200</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth and reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 23-45.

<sup>201</sup> Elaine Windrich 'The Mass Media in the Struggle for Zimbabwe: Censorship and Propaganda under Rhodesian Front Rule', *Mambo Occasional Papers, Socio-Economic Series 15* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1981).

<sup>202</sup> Stanford Mukasa, *Press and Politics in Zimbabwe* in M'Bayo, R. T., et al., (eds.) *Press and Politics in Africa* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 2000).

<sup>203</sup> Tim Nyahunzvi 'The Zimbabwean Mass Media Trust: An Experiment that Failed', *Media Development*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 2 (2001), pp 31-36.

<sup>204</sup> Tim M. Nyahunzvi 'The Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust: An experiment that failed', *Promoting Communication for Social Change* [web page] <http://www.waccglobal.org/en/20012-media-scenarios-in-southern-africa/742-The-Zimbabwe-Mass-Media-Trust-An-experiment-that-failed.html>, access on 5 March 2010.

media houses. Among them, he notes, were fears from ordinary citizens about the potential use of newspapers for state propaganda.

There is a wealth of evidence to show *The Herald* has been fronting ZANU PF's political ideologies since its inception in 1981. Political rivalry pitting Mugabe's ZANU and old foe Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union spilled into the state media newsrooms. Nkomo claimed editors either ignored or twisted his speeches following a government decree restricting his speeches to parliament. Furthermore, Willie Musarurwa, who in 1981 became the first Black editor of *The Herald*'s sister paper *The Sunday Mail*, was fired for his connections with Nkomo's ZAPU, although some scholars have argued that his independent editorial line cost him his job.<sup>205</sup> Even though several editors may have graced the nation's oldest newspaper, nothing seems to bring them together more than their unbending support for government policies. Those who refused to toe the ZANU PF line have paid a heavy price.

Both Nyahunzvi and Chikuhwa point to Henry Muradzikwa, the paper's former editor, who was removed from his job over a story that claimed that 60 Zimbabwean students had been deported from Cuba for unspecified "health reasons". The story implied that the students had AIDS, which was seen as potentially damaging to Zimbabwe's relations with the communist island. With its monopoly during the first years of independence, *The Herald* undoubtedly had to deal with a variety of challenges that included serving a racially and ethnically divided nation fresh from the horrors of war. Satisfying the believers of press freedom could not have been tougher. However, it appears the lack of independent media players at independence proved detrimental to the overall government media policy over the years. Continuing the policies of Rhodesian Herald, which according to Gale expressly sought to advance mining and agricultural interests of the white community and the colonial government, *The Herald* sought to serve the interests of the chosen few.

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<sup>205</sup> Jacob Chikuhwa "A Crisis of Governance: Zimbabwe" New York: Algora Publishing, (2004) p.6-21

While Mukasa argues that ZANU PF's media control was tested in the 1990s with the rise of weekly newspapers such as the Zimbabwe Independent, *The Standard* and the *Daily News*, it goes without saying that *The Herald's* political and social influence has remained steadfast. The *Daily News*, which claims to be the first independent Zimbabwean daily newspaper, did not last long, falling victim to a catalogue of new media laws introduced by the government under Moyo's five-year reign as information minister. Moyo's ministerial reign witnessed one of the most unalleviated propaganda campaigns in postcolonial Africa.<sup>206</sup> The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) as noted in Chapter 1, introduced a rigorous licensing system for media outlets, restricting foreign ownership of the media and prolonging *The Herald's* monopoly since the other privately run newspapers were weeklies. Despite their influence, they could not challenge *The Herald's* circulation figures. Intimidation against journalists regardless of their political affiliation has been commonplace in Zimbabwe, but working for the independent press has been even more daunting. Examples of state-sanctioned repression and intimidation of the private media can be seen in the 2007 incident involving veteran journalist Bill Saidi. A soldier, unhappy with an article published in Saidi's *Standard* newspaper, left an envelope with a bullet and a handwritten note reading, "What is this? Watch your step."<sup>207</sup>

Despite its fierce support for ZANU PF, there have been several occasions when the newspaper attacked the government. *The Herald*, Chikuhwa reckons, bitterly criticised the government in the aftermath of the December 1997 national protest and the food riots a year later. Also, according to Mukasa, police brutality, which rarely gets attention in *The Herald*, hogged limelight after teargas hit the newspaper's headquarters during the 1998 disturbances, prompting editor Tommy Sithole to make a rare public attack on the police. This extraordinary criticism should not be taken as a sign of balanced journalism. The newspaper has always supported ZANU PF. In the unlikely event of the party being exiled as the opposition, there is no evidence to suggest the paper would be prepared to

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<sup>206</sup> Ezra Chitando "In the beginning was the land': the appropriation of religious themes in political discourses in Zimbabwe" *Africa* 75 (2) (2005) pp. 220-239.

<sup>207</sup> "Charamba's comments on Saidi rile journalists," 13 February 2007  
[http://www.zimbabwejournalists.com/print.php?art\\_id=1749](http://www.zimbabwejournalists.com/print.php?art_id=1749) Accessed on 14 September 2010

drop its loyalty. Its roots are deeply enmeshed in the revolution against colonialism, and that identity is likely to remain its characteristic feature. President Mugabe's credibility as a freedom fighter, *The Herald* is keen to remind its readers, is there for everyone to see. At a World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002, Mugabe was treated to elated applause for his "braveness" in telling Tony Blair to keep his Britain while he kept "his little Zimbabwe".<sup>208</sup> Mugabe's popularity, readers are told, is based on his desire to see colonial injustices corrected. This is without a doubt a non-negotiable stance shared by Mugabe, *The Herald* and their supporters.

### 4.3.2 Conceptual Framework

In his article on "patriotic journalism", Terence Ranger argues that hate journalism has flourished in controlled media for many years.<sup>209</sup> Die-hards in President Mugabe's government view the state monopoly of media as an effective tool to sell ZANU PF's viewpoint while enforcing its patriotic agenda. After nearly 90 years of colonial and settler rule, it is understandable that nationalism and patriotism were paramount topics at independence in 1980. However, the two concepts remain on today's agenda thanks largely to *The Herald*, which is keen to promote values endorsed by ZANU PF. In a weekly column that appears each Saturday in *The Herald*, a government official writes using the pseudo-byline "Nathaniel Manheru lashes out at President Mugabe's critics". The column, introduced by Moyo, and fairly popular among the political elite, rarely has kind words for anyone who disagrees with the government. Its approach is a deliberate division of the world into two racial pillars, namely "Black" and "White". Anyone who disagrees with the Zimbabwean government is seen as siding with the White colonialists. Others are treated as patriots or nationalists.

Despite Western sanctions, Manheru portrays a picture of hope, arguing Zimbabwe does not need to make friends outside the developing world. His column leaves little room for any intermediate position other than "for us or against us". Here is what he had to say on Kofi Annan's departure from the UN's top office in 2006:

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<sup>208</sup> Keep your England, President tells Blair, *The Herald*, 3 September 2002, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200209030047.html> accessed 14 July 2010

<sup>209</sup> Terence Ranger, 'The rise of patriotic journalism in Zimbabwe and its possible implications', Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture, Conference paper (University of Westminster, London, 2005), pp. 6-17.

In Shona, Annan means "who is he with"? One last word for the United Nations. Kofi Annan is an African, and may the good African Lord be with him in his last days in office. Zimbabwe's land question started in 2000, a good six years before the end of his term. He had lots of time to come, and indeed he came to the region countable times between then and now. Kofi Annan is an African who knows the West only too well. After all, the West is in his home, so to speak.<sup>210</sup>

According to Marxist media theory, the media is a "means of production" that is used by the ruling class to deny or defuse alternative ideas. *The Herald's* mission is evident on many of its pages. *The Herald* does not only 'tell the truth' but also ensures that alternative versions are discredited. The story headlined "Tsvangirai Begs for VP Post", does not only not tell the truth, it also denies other options being suggested by the rumor mill.<sup>211</sup> The message is clear: Zimbabwe may be facing plenty of economic, political and social challenges, but in Mugabe, it has the only tried and tested leader to deliver.<sup>212</sup>

In Gramsci's hegemony theory (1971), the intellectual community plays an important role in the success of hegemonic domination. Exerting government control over the people is impossible without intellectuals. In the case of Zimbabwe, academics regularly contribute to *The Herald* trumpeting nationalist positions. Among them are professors Tafataona Mahoso, known to his opponents as "the Media Hangman", and Vimbai Chivaura, both educated in the US where they received doctorates. The majority of Mugabe's cabinet ministers and close associates hold degrees from Western universities, where they also send their children. Yet, their articles or comments in *The Herald* are decidedly anti-Western. The paper was scathing in response to Australia's decision to deport the children of ZANU PF officials under the sanctions, denouncing it as a racist state.<sup>213</sup> Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his predecessor Tony Blair are portrayed as main culprits responsible for Zimbabwe's isolation. *The Herald*, which

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<sup>210</sup> Nathaniel Manheru No God from a Machine, *The Herald* 20 May 2006  
<http://www.zwnews.com/issuefull.cfm?ArticleID=14451> Accessed 16 July 2010

<sup>211</sup> 'Tsvangirai Begs for VP Post', *The Herald*, 8 April 2008.

<sup>212</sup> 'Zimbabwe: Zim not for Sale', *The Herald*, 19 April 2008.

<sup>213</sup> 'Tsvangirai thanks paymasters for sanctions', *The Herald*, 28 October 2007.



makes no apologies for its support of ZANU PF, has always maintained this view, arguing in its September 22, 2007 issue:

Communicating with fellow Europeans through the British press (Brown) clearly indicated British diplomacy had come unstuck. Clearly British diplomacy has foundered in its backyard, with Brown adopting for the rest of Europe Blair's odious megaphone diplomacy against Zimbabwe.

As noted by Frankfurt school stalwarts Adorno and Horkheimer, the media has the ability to transform enlightenment into barbarism.<sup>214</sup> True to their view that economic prosperity breeds mass deception, *The Herald* has used Zimbabwe's once affluent economy to foster a formidable relationship with the country's ruling elite. As the only daily available in the country, it certainly is a widely read paper, powerfully delivering Mugabe's message of hope, political independence and economic prosperity. When annual inflation was topping over 231 million percent,<sup>215</sup> *The Herald* still chose to defend the country's economic policies, dedicating pages of praise to central bank governor Gideon Gono, the man critics accuse of bringing down the country's economy. The newspaper also ran articles in which Zimbabwe was allegedly commended by its southern African neighbours for pioneering "innovative economic policies".<sup>216</sup>

Perhaps indicative of the anger *The Herald* aroused among its critics, the paper's online version was brought down in May 2008 by an unknown hacker.<sup>217</sup> That happened after the vicious election campaign in which dozens of opposition supporters were beaten or killed, in a well-documented campaign of violence.<sup>218</sup> Victims included Harare deputy mayor Emmanuel Chiroto, whose wife Abigail was reportedly kidnapped and killed by suspected ruling-party militias.<sup>219</sup> *The Herald* stood its ground, reporting pro-ZANU PF stories while taking its usual line of attacking the opposition as a Western puppet, diverting attention from coverage over alleged killings.

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<sup>214</sup> Brian Neve, 'Theoretical Approaches to Mass Media', [web page] <http://people.bath.ac.uk/hssbnp/theories%20of%20media.htm>, accessed 7 December 2010.

<sup>215</sup> 'Zimbabwe inflation hit 231 percent', Associated Press, 9 October 2008.

<sup>216</sup> 'Zimbabwe hailed over economic policies', *The Herald* 14 October 2008.

<sup>217</sup> 'Zimbabwe official newspaper hacked', Reuters, 12 May 2008.

<sup>218</sup> 'Zimbabwe elections: Four activists found dead, says opposition', *The Guardian*, 19 June 2008.

<sup>219</sup> 'Harare mayor in hiding after Mugabe thugs kill wife', *The Independent*, 19 June 2008.

#### 4.3.3 Discussion of Results: Representation and coverage

Endless repetition is a key technique of propaganda. *The Herald* hopes that maintaining its sympathetic stance insofar as the government's land reform exercise is concerned helps convince the audiences on the need to a land reform. Chief among its editorial lines is the continued endorsement of the land reforms. While critics argue that it is unjustified to hand over seized farms to Black 'war veterans' based on their war credentials and not their agricultural expertise, *The Herald* sees no problem with that. It views the reform as enhancing economic expansion. Analysis of the reform exercise is always pro-Mugabe. It ignores the plight of White farmers losing the land or allegations from opposition parties that only those with close connections to ZANU PF benefited from the land reform. While being repetitive is considered important in this case, consistency is also essential. These articles for example show the newspaper's unshaken and continuous loyalty and support for the land reform. "Zimbabwe: War Against Land Reform Unwinnable,"<sup>220</sup> "Zimbabwe: Land Reform a Success – Survey"<sup>221</sup> Zimbabwe: Farmer Reaps Fruits of Land Reform.<sup>222</sup>

The University of Leeds' Institute of Communication through the World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia identifies three ways through which propaganda works: (1) It calls for an action or opinion that it makes seem wise and reasonable. (2) It suggests that the action or opinion is moral and right. (3) It provides a pleasant feeling, such as a sense of importance or of belonging.<sup>223</sup> Stories in the newspaper normally reminds readers of historical imbalances committed by Western imperialists. This is a chorus position echoed by the newspaper editorially taking a position that Mugabe is a liberator and in fact a victim of neo-colonialism. This argument appears convincing due to its ability to give Zimbabweans a sense of shared belonging. Name-calling the West as imperialists puts Zimbabweans in a victims pot. Thus the assumption could then be that they all have one enemy.

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<sup>220</sup> Reason Wafawarowa Zimbabwe: War Against Land Reform Unwinnable *The Herald*, 17, April 2009 <http://allafrica.com/stories/200904170469.html> accessed 17 July 2010

<sup>221</sup> Tinashe Farawo Zimbabwe: Land Reform a Success – Survey *The Herald*, 5 February 2011 <http://allafrica.com/stories/201102140147.html> accessed 17 July 2010

<sup>222</sup> Isdore Guvamombe Zimbabwe: Farmer Reaps Fruits of Land Reform, *The Herald* 15 September 2009 <http://www.politicsforum.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=33&t=110293> accessed 17 July 2010

<sup>223</sup> "Propaganda" <http://ics-www.leeds.ac.uk/papers/pmt/exhibits/727/propaganda.pdf> accessed 16 July 2010

The basis for *The Herald's* strong pro-Mugabe stance is largely historical. The newspaper carries radical opinions from Mugabe's party. It is easier to judge what Mugabe's mood is towards an issue by reading what *The Herald* says since it remains one of the most accurate sources disseminating the thoughts and views of Mugabe and his cadres. *The Herald* twists facts to suit its own pro-Mugabe agenda while its coverage targets a certain audience with characteristically corresponding interests. Race plays a major role in the newspaper's coverage of news. President Mugabe has on a few occasions openly declared his dislike of White people.<sup>224</sup> *The Herald* has followed his cue. That antipathy, however, is not extended to the country's White Olympic gold winner, Kristy Coventry. Mugabe has declared: "What we hate is not the color of their skins but the evil that emanates from them."<sup>225</sup> And the newspaper referred to Coventry as a "golden girl", to whom Mugabe gave a diplomatic passport. Coventry's sporting heroics offers *The Herald* a chance to portray the Zimbabwean government's "liberal" policy towards a multiracial society.<sup>226</sup> In contrast, another White sportsman, Andy Flower was lacerated for teaming up with a Black teammate in openly denouncing President Mugabe during a cricket match in Harare February 2003.<sup>227</sup> Equally interesting is the way White ZANU PF financial supporters John Bredenkamp and Billy Rautenbach appear in the paper. The two businessmen are subject to unfriendly scrutiny and sometimes to scornful attacks in the Western press. But *The Herald* represents them as legitimate Zimbabwean businessmen with the country's interests at heart. Using these few examples of White Zimbabweans sympathetic to the regime, *The Herald* seeks to discount allegations of anti-White antagonism by the government, a position that makes its opinion seems wise.

*The Herald* sees itself as the perfect answer to Africa's often negative and contrived image in the Western and independent media. It accuses Western media outlets with

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<sup>224</sup> "Robert Mugabe: White Farmers Must Vacate Their Land" Associated Press, 28 February, 2009 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/28/robert-mugabe-white-farmers\\_n\\_170752.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/02/28/robert-mugabe-white-farmers_n_170752.html) Accessed 5 June 2010

<sup>225</sup> Robert Mugabe Speech in Harlem, New York (September 2000), In Michael Radu, "State of Disaster", National Review, 27 May 2002

<sup>226</sup> In *The Herald* edition of 30 August 2008, Coventry, a white Zimbabwean, is referred to as the "Daughter of Zimbabwe"

<sup>227</sup> In *The Herald* edition of 23 February 2003, an opinion writer attacked Andy Flower and Henry Olonga as the two were warned by cricket authorities in the country they risk sacking if they wore their "death of democracy" armbands.

correspondents based in the region and local independent newspapers of distorting and misrepresenting facts about Zimbabwe. Bashing the MDC for its alleged connections to the independent media, *The Herald* asks on its opinion page: “The question is, are the media in reality mouthpieces of political powers and governments for which they express sympathy?”<sup>228</sup> While *The Herald* claims bias by other newspapers against ZANU PF, it does not address charges that its own reporting is slanted towards meeting coverage expectations of the party. But can that be quantified? A sample of 25 political stories in February 2008 prior to national elections showed that ZANU PF received overwhelmingly favourable coverage, with 17 stories profiling, reporting or openly professing a slanted opinion towards ZANU PF candidates. There was minimal coverage of campaign rallies for the opposition parties during this period.

A close look at headlines in *The Herald* also discloses an ideological bent towards ZANU PF. “Annan forced to abort visit” is the headline for a story suggesting that the former UN Secretary-General would not visit Zimbabwe for a first-hand examination on the country’s clean-up exercise. Annan, who had been accused by several pro-government commentators of siding with the US and Britain on the issue, possibly handed the party some victory by calling off the trip, which Mugabe had previously called “politicized”.<sup>229</sup> Another headline, “Guarantee Safety of Scribes, MDC Leadership Told”, appears to put blame on the opposition party after two journalists covering a rally were allegedly threatened.<sup>230</sup> A headline of this nature, intended for the ZANU PF leadership would not find space in *The Herald*, as it not only betrays the interests of the party also potentially exposes it to readership scrutiny.

#### 4.3.4 Conclusion

This study has shown the mechanism employed by *The Herald* in summarily showing its siding with the government. It finds itself supporting the ZANU PF in almost every scenario perpetuated by the fact that the revolutionary party owns the establishment and has always made sure pro-party editors are employed in order to guarantee positive coverage. The articles reveal how *The Herald* uses propaganda and bias as the main news

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<sup>228</sup> The Herald, 14 December 2009,

<sup>229</sup> The Herald, 26 September 2005.

<sup>230</sup> The Herald, 22 November 2007.

components to further extend its traditional relationship with Mugabe's party. Hence, the paper's ownership structure is pivotal in its quest to maintain the positive coverage. Understandably, the stories that are run by the newspaper tend to be openly biased towards its cadres. Without its political steadfastness, it could be argued that Mugabe would not have managed to stay in power for over 30 years. Politically, *The Herald* has always been unapologetic for its pro-Mugabe stance. Faced with new Western-sponsored hostility, Mugabe has turned to the paper for the much-needed support. The MDC has accused *The Herald* of refusing the MDC's campaign materials, for example during the 2005 elections. However, as long as Zimbabwe remains a country dominated by Mugabe's Marxist-centered party, *The Herald's* disappearance from the Zimbabwean political arena cannot be foretold.

In the eyes of *The Herald*, Mugabe has become a cult-like figure, incapable of error but someone who it sees as being victimised by a Western distortion of history. Blame is put on the West in *The Herald* while Mugabe's cadres are always presented as victims, regardless of the issue. Most importantly, Mugabe has redefined democracy thanks to *The Herald*. The newspaper convincingly applauds Zimbabwe's democratic credentials. These are questioned in the West, thereby creating confusion as to what is the agreed definition and key characteristics of democracy are. More importantly, despite its evidently pro-Mugabe reporting, *The Herald* cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. It is used to sell the ZANU PF brand. It is a weapon in the party's tactics to preserve power among all sectors of society, by reinforcing, for example, the party's relationship with war veterans and the educated elite. As the newspaper's majority shareholder, ZANU PF may seek to justify its control of the newspaper merely on the grounds of its overpowering investments in the company, which gives it absolute decision-making powers. *The Herald* therefore occupies a very important seat in Zimbabwean politics, one that should never be underestimated.

## 5 PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATORY JOURNALISM IN ZIMBABWE

Parts of this chapter are based on:

Mutsvairo, Bruce. (2013) Everyone is a reporter: Perspectives on participatory Journalism in Zimbabwe. *Global Media Journal, Canadian Edition*. Under Review.

### 5.1 Introduction

While it has generally been accepted that non-professional media actors empowered by novel, digitally networked technologies are changing the media landscape in the West, this is less obvious in the case of sub-Saharan Africa. Recent years, however, have seen the emergence of a diverse range of citizen media in Africa, empowered by digital technologies such as mobile phones, blogs, microblogs, video-sharing platforms, and mapping. Through observational research and extensive interviews with selected experts and citizen-journalism practitioners, as well as a review of the existing body of research, this chapter aims to critically analyse existing and emerging patterns and trends in African citizen journalism, specifically exploring the Zimbabwean case, where citizen journalism appears uniquely non-integrated with traditional reporting, as journalists continue to question the ethical basis for commercially engaging, ‘unverified’ journalism. While others like the South Africa-based *Mail* and *Guardian*’s ‘Thought Leader’ continue to coerce citizen participation, evidence on the ground show that conventional media in Zimbabwe is still skeptical about the prospects of embedding the works of citizen journalists into their mainstream packages. Operating on their own, others like kubatana.net have thrived, however, further underscoring the perceived democratic value of citizen journalism. The research endeavors to studiously examine the success and overall potential of Zimbabwe's blogosphere and hopefully establish the notion that digital technology-enabled citizen journalism, though still restricted to a subset of African countries, provides a powerful counter-narrative to professional media that are often constrained, or even controlled, by national governments. Views of Zimbabwean journalists were sought in this research through face-to-face interviews.

Non-professional media actors, empowered by digitally networked technologies, are changing the media landscape in the West. In contrast, this is less obvious in the case of sub-Saharan Africa. Recent years, however, have seen the emergence of a diverse range of citizen media in Africa, employing mobile phones, blogs, micro blogs, video-sharing platforms, and mapping. Through observational research and extensive interviews with selected experts and citizen journalists, as well as a review of the existing research, this study aims to critically analyze current and emerging patterns and trends in African citizen journalism. Specifically, it will explore the Zimbabwean case where citizen journalism appears uniquely non-integrated with traditional reporting, as journalists continue to question the ethical basis for commercially engaging in ‘unverified’ journalism.

The pervasive availability of digital technologies has given non-professional audiences unmatched access to the tools of media production and dissemination.<sup>231</sup> Africa has not been spared the rapid emergence and seamless exposition of new media technologies, which have served as springboards for social and democratic change.<sup>232</sup> This chapter seeks to explain the extent to which Zimbabweans are actively engaged in participatory journalism, elaborating on their purposes and methods of participation before evaluating the overall impact of their involvement. Two key methodologies were employed in this research, which not only sought to deconstruct the Western notions of news, but also provide an assessment of different forms of contesting participation-based journalism initiatives and narratives in an African setting. Using observational research conducted in remote Zimbabwean villages and extensive interviews with media practitioners and bloggers living in the capital Harare, I argue that the concept of participatory journalism is not new to Zimbabwe. I also categorise the participation into two camps, namely the traditional African and the Western-sponsored form of participatory journalism. Observational research was carried in March 2008 during a one-month field trip to Murewa, a farming district located roughly 78km north of the capital Harare. A follow-up visit was also made in July 2011. Interviews with professional and non-professional

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<sup>231</sup> Brian Loader, ‘The Citizens’ Voice in a Wired World: Experiments in e-democracy,’ paper presented at the ANA Hotel, Tokyo, 14 November 2001.

<sup>232</sup> S. Craig Watkins, ‘The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future’, (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2009) 18.

journalism actors were conducted during the second trip. The two-way methodology directly allowed me to elect a comparative study of behaviours and attitudes in participatory journalism from both a Western and traditional African context.

## 5.2 Review of existing body of research

Often referred to as “citizen journalism”, “open source journalism”,<sup>233</sup> or “user generated content”,<sup>234</sup> participatory journalism embodies mass media-related content produced, published and distributed by non-professional journalists mostly for free consumption. Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis have been credited with coining the term “participatory journalism”.<sup>235</sup> While examining its relationship with social movements, John Downing called it “alternative media”.<sup>236</sup> In his attempt to define participatory journalism, Joseph Daniel Lasica argued that “when small independent online publications and collaborative news sites with an amateur staff perform original reporting on community affairs, few would contest that they're engaged in journalism.”<sup>237</sup> An element of dynamic commitment is central to understanding participatory journalism with Alfred Hermida declaring “the underlying assumption behind the notion of participatory journalism is a shift from passive consumption to active engagement.”<sup>238</sup> Bowman and Willis define participatory journalism as an “act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information.”<sup>239</sup> But others like Hayley Watson believe “there is little consensus over what constitutes citizen journalism.”<sup>240</sup>

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233 Clyde H Bentley, C.H., et al., ‘The Citizen Journalist Movement: MyMissourian as a case study’, paper presented to the Communication Technology and Policy Division AEJMC Annual Convention (San Antonio, Texas: 10-13 August 2005).

234 Wolfgang Schweiger, and Oliver Quiring, ‘User-generated content on mass media web sites - just a kind of interactivity or something completely different?’ Paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference (New York, 2006).

235 Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, *We media: How audiences are shaping the future of news and information*, The Media Center at the American Press Institute (Reston, Virginia: Media Center, 2003) 7.

236 John Downing, *Radical media: The political experience of alternative communication* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1984).

237 Joseph Daniel Lasica, ‘What is participatory journalism?’ *Online Journalism Review* [web page] (2007) <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/workplace/1060217106.php>, accessed 1 October 2011.

238 Alfred Hermida, ‘The Active Recipient: Participatory Journalism Through the Lens of the Dewey-Lippmann Debate’, paper presented at the International Symposium on Online Journalism 2011 (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Austin, 2011).

239 Shayne Bowman and Chris Willis, *We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information*, The Media Center at the American Press Institute (Reston, Virginia: Media Center, 2003) 9.

240 Hayley Watson, ‘Preconditions for Citizen Journalism: A Sociological Assessment’, *Sociological Research Online* Vol. 16, No. 3 [web page] <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/16/3/6.html>, accessed 18 October 2011.



Joyce Nip sees a difference between citizen and participatory journalism, asserting that under participatory journalism, non-professionals engage trained journalists to produce content, while citizen journalism is the work of untrained professionals working independently.<sup>241</sup> Nico Carpentier points to a need to make a clear distinction between participation ‘in’ the media and ‘through’ the media.<sup>242</sup> But similarities can be drawn between content from traditional outlets and that from citizen journalism, as was shown by Wilson Lowrey and Jenn Burleson Mackay’s study of blogs, which concluded that “topics and information in news-oriented blogs are similar to those in traditional news content, at times uncomfortably similar.”<sup>243</sup> Tom Johnson furthers the argument by claiming blogs rely “heavily on traditional media for information gathering.”<sup>244</sup> Nevertheless, citizen journalism is redefining the whole essence of journalism, as the “wisdom of the crowds” has been shown to be more empowering than that of experts such as reporters and editors in terms of making good decisions and finding solutions to societal problems, posits James Surowiecki.<sup>245</sup>

Furthermore, the concept of citizen journalism is “literally as old as a rock” argues Clyde H. Bentley, who traces its origins to Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, whose 85 essays were published in 1787.<sup>246</sup> While Bentley’s argument traces the traditional foundations of citizen journalism in the American context, my research sought to solidify and justify the viewpoint that participatory journalism was already in existence in Zimbabwe long before the arrival of the British colonialists in the 1880s. Regrettably, the news or journalism practiced in pre-colonial Africa, and particularly Zimbabwe, has not received any notice, which stems from the fact that no one has portrayed the traditional one-to-one or one-to-many exchange of information among Africans as

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<sup>241</sup> Joyce Nip, ‘Exploring the second phase of public journalism’, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2006) 212-236.

<sup>242</sup> Nico Carpentier, (eds.), *Media technologies and democracy in an enlarged Europe, the intellectual work of the 2007 European media and communication doctoral summer school* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2007).

<sup>243</sup> Wilson Lowrey and Jenn Burleson Mackay, ‘Journalism and Blogging: A test of a model of occupational competition’, *Journalism Practice* Vol. 2, No.1 (2008) 64-81.

<sup>244</sup> Tom Johnson, ‘Agenda Setting in the Internet Age’[web page] (2009) <http://mediaconvergence.org/blog/?p=163> , accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>245</sup> James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations* (New York: Anchor Books, 2004) 5.

<sup>246</sup> Clyde H Bentley, ‘Citizen Journalism: Back to the future?’ discussion paper prepared for the Carnegie Knight Conference on the Future of Journalism (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 20-21 June 2008).

“news”, since such a conclusion may not be in line with the Western conceptualisation of news.

Technically reinforcing Bentley’s argument is the view that if the University of Missouri opened its doors to the world’s first journalism school in 1908, it then means that anyone engaged in professional journalism work before that period could be considered a “citizen journalist” on the grounds that they did not receive any formal professional training. Kirsten Johnson and Susan Weidenbeck propose that lack of professional training is the central characteristic of citizen journalism.<sup>247</sup> The Internet has arguably been the key precipitating factor in the development of participatory journalism; “online journalist” is presently an acceptable professional term in journalism practice.<sup>248</sup> Hence, technological innovation has enhanced the work of citizen journalists, even though the concept is not entirely new. While scholars such as Frankson Banda consider the ICT revolution as a stepping-stone to improving democratic and developmental institutions on the continent,<sup>249</sup> others like Eli N. Noam are less optimistic. Whilst acknowledging the Internet’s mediating role in facilitating direct access to public officials, Noam is keen to remind us that “only a few messages will get through.”<sup>250</sup> For Noam, the Internet disconnects as much as it connects. In Africa, others argue that the historically negative depiction of the continent in the traditional Western press is the main driving force behind the surging need for alternative sources of media.<sup>251</sup> In its present form, the concept of participatory journalism is rather more appealing to those citizens opposed to the institutionalised coverage of African issues in Western press because it offers an enabling platform for participants to air and share likeminded views and opinions.

Participatory journalism is pioneering new ways of content development and content sharing, as suggested by Dan Gillmor. He says, “For the first time in history, at least in

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<sup>247</sup> Kirsten Johnson, & Susan Weidenbeck, ‘Enhancing perceived credibility of Citizen Journalism Websites’, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (2009) pp. 332-348.

<sup>248</sup> Robert Hernandez, ‘Online Journalism or Journalism Online. There is a difference’, *Online Journalism Review* [web page] (2010) <http://www.ojr.org/ojr/people/webjournalist/201009/1885/>, accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>249</sup> Frankson Banda, *Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa*, (Grahamstown, South Africa: Highway Africa, 2006).

<sup>250</sup> Eli H Noam, ‘Why the Internet is bad for Democracy’, *Communications of AMC*, Vol 48, No. 10 (2002) pp. 57-58.

<sup>251</sup> Bruce Mutsvairo & Lisa Kleeven, ‘Seeking self-determinism through social media: A critical analysis of representation issues for Zimbabwean youths’, paper presented at the International Conference on Youth and Media (London, England: University of Westminster, 12-13 March 2011).

the developed world, anyone with a computer and Internet connection could own a press. Just about anyone could make the news.”<sup>252</sup> Gillmor’s assessment, which is based on the Western conceptualisation of the news discourse, leaves several questions unanswered. What is news? Who determines what news is? Should news only be technologically deterministic as proposed by Marshall McLuhan? Can news still be conveyed or disseminated through any other formats outside the dominant means of print, broadcasting and new media attributes such as the Internet and mobile telephony? Geographic location does not hinder the production of news, with Randy Reddick and Elliot King suggesting the Internet allows journalists to “do their jobs better no matter where they are physically located.”<sup>253</sup> Yet several factors have led to the indispensable spread of participatory journalism. Ben Scott argues that for the commercial press, the need to make profits has eclipsed journalism’s traditional roles in healthy democracies, concluding, “it has become increasingly clear that the public service mission of democratic journalism has been abandoned by the commercial press in favour of expanding profit margins.”<sup>254</sup> For Stuart Allan, “the spontaneous actions of ordinary citizens compelled to adopt the role of a journalist in order to participate in the making of online news”, is central to the rise of the concept of citizen journalism.<sup>255</sup>

### 5.3 Conceptual and theoretical discourses

Defining what constitutes “news” can be highly subjective. James Glen Stovall defines news as “information that journalists believe is important or interesting for their audiences.”<sup>256</sup> Admitting that it is a difficult concept to define, Pamela Shoemaker simply says news is “what comes in the newspaper everyday.”<sup>257</sup> Taking a cue from Harold Evans’ definition suggesting, “news is people. It’s people talking and doing”,<sup>258</sup> I have defined news as the conveyance of previously unknown information to individuals and

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<sup>252</sup> Dan Gillmor, *We The Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, (California: O’Reilly Media, Inc., 2004) p. 24.

<sup>253</sup> Randy Reddick & Elliot King, *The Online Journalist* (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1997) pp. 4.

<sup>254</sup> Ben Scott, ‘A contemporary history of digital journalism’, *Television & New Media*, Vol. 6, No. 1(2005) pp. 89-126.

<sup>255</sup> Stuart Allan, *Online News: Journalism and the Internet*. (Maidenhead and New York: Open University Press) p. 10.

<sup>256</sup> James Glen Stovall, *Journalism: Who, what, when, where, why and how* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Publishers, 2005).

<sup>257</sup> Pamela Shoemaker, *News and newsworthiness: A commentary*, *Communications*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2006) pp. 105-111.

<sup>258</sup> Beth Whittaker, ‘Shout it out’, *Viva Communications* (2010) p. 8.

masses. This also means that gossip, or a professor introducing a new concept to students, could also be seen as providing news. The universally accepted characteristics of news include the fact that it needs to be relevant to a large number of people while being timely and sometimes unusual. In line with Shoemaker's argument, the providers of news, including television, radio and newspaper outlets take an intermediary role of seeking, editing and publishing news for the readers. Apart from having an audience following, they are also widely considered knowledge providers, argues Inge Brinkman.<sup>259</sup> Most of these agents seek to make profit for their services and are also guided by a set of ethics. Similarly, in the traditional African setting, newsagents, as was the case in the Murewa villages, are either paid or unpaid servants who convey news to the villagers on behalf of the headman, for instance. They deliver news through word of mouth, a less popular medium in the technologically-rich West. After news has been delivered in one homestead, the family members take on the role of informing others within their community about the new development. This way, word spreads speedily. Inaccuracies are widespread, as also frequently occurs in the technologically-enabled news on TV, print or digital mediums.

Exploring the historical origins of news, contemporary media scholar Melissa Wall recognises the assumption that "news itself can be said to have existed since people needed to exchange information between villages or tribes".<sup>260</sup> Des Wilson, making a case for traditional forms of communication, argues that customary African communication methods are mostly considered antagonistic and inferior to modern ones developed in the West.<sup>261</sup> That assumption is not always accurate. When a funeral occurred, one village headman told me, it would not be broadcast on TV or published in a newspaper, yet mourners would gather literally within hours of the initial announcement. While his subjects would deliver the news to selected groups of villagers and the word would spread from there, the use of membranophonic drums and aerophones was a more

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<sup>259</sup> Inge Brinkman, 'What is News?' Guest lecture (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University College, 3 October 2011).

<sup>260</sup> Melissa Wall, 'Blogs as black market journalism: A new paradigm for news', *Journal of Education, Community and Values*, Vol. 11, No.10.

<sup>261</sup> Des Wilson, 'Traditional Systems of Communication in Modern African development: An Analytical Viewpoint', *Africa Media Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1987) 87-104.

effective way of grabbing the villagers' attention. Villagers are traditionally familiar with a range of sounds and their meanings and hence will be aware of an upcoming funeral.

No million-dollar technology is used here, yet news is meticulously delivered. Also, the practice of seeking medical or psychological treatment from witch doctors is common in several African cultures. It could also be argued traditional healers "break the news" about their clients' source of misfortune, for instance, in the same way a weather presenter would warn viewers about an impending typhoon on TV. The only difference is that in the Western context, seeking medical assistance would not be classified as "news". Nor do witch doctors consider themselves newsmen as such, even though they unknowingly deliver important news just like a commercial TV channel. The only problem with calling this "citizen journalism" might be the fact that the notion of "citizenship" could be applicable to every profession, including "citizen professor" or "citizen lawyer". I consider citizen journalism an informal version of the profession, and there can be no better place to find unofficial versions of professions than in Zimbabwe. Moreover, to understand citizen journalism in the African traditional context, one needs to accept the perception that it is not a profession but rather a practice, which has and will always be available for everyone to pursue. It is indeed like politics, which is open for anyone who dares to join.

In the West, news and advertising depend heavily on each other. In traditional African communication, advertising is present in many different forms. In Murewa, villagers use tree stumps and mountain paintings to showcase their products. Vendors selling products also perform door-to-door advertising. Most of these vendors also convey news. Singing and drumming, as was the case with Inge Brinkman's findings in remote southern Angolan villages, also play a crucial role in disseminating news or advertising events. In Murewa, I have attended several ancestor-appeasing services known in local language as *bira*. Nobody is allowed to sleep on this day and villagers sing and dance in honour of the deceased. They also listen to the music of *mbira* or the thump piano, as well as the rattling sounds of *hosho*, a round-shaped gourd filled with kernels.

According to A. J. Liebling, “the function of the press is to inform, but its role is to make money.”<sup>262</sup> This assertion also explains the reason behind the near-collapse of journalism we are witnessing. Journalism is in crisis, hence the confusion as to what exactly constitutes news. This is the case not just in Zimbabwe but everywhere throughout the world. The Jason Blair affair at *The New York Times* is a perfect example. A young and thriving journalist made a name for himself by fabricating stories based on interviews that never happened. Readers must question: What exactly is news? Who determines the news, and how trustworthy is the news we get? It is for that reason that citizen journalism has gained momentum, with others seeing it as a good alternative to traditional journalism. Whereas in the old days “good journalism” was about reporting important issues such as people dying in wars or starving to death due to hunger, many of the stories that sell these days are about celebrities like Lady Gaga, David Beckham or Charlie Sheen. Developments such as these have indirectly popularised participatory journalism, with participants deciding what should be on the news agenda rather than being spoon-fed by mass media. Therefore, instead of mass media deciding what is important for them, citizens have embarked on a mission to self-decide. The business focus of journalism is right at the centre of these changing dimensions. For instance, a story about African immigrants sinking in a boat off the coast from Morocco in their attempt to reach Europe is considered less appealing to readers than Jennifer Aniston going on holiday in the Bahamas. Business-minded editors will argue that they try to report what readers want.

Technological determinism is defined by Bruce Bimber as “what is really a variety of distinct views about the relationship of technological enterprise to other aspects of human activity.”<sup>263</sup> The theory has been attributed to Karl Marx, Bimber says. However, others like Roderick Munday have linked the theory to Marshall McLuhan’s “the medium is the message” dictum.<sup>264</sup> Is technology the force shaping society in Zimbabwe? Do the rural folk need technology to speed up the way they communicate? Do they understand

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<sup>262</sup> William S Solomon, *The Newspaper Business*, (Eds) In Alan Wells, Ernest A. Hakanen, *Mass Media and Society* (Greenwich, CT: Albex Publishing Corporation), 1997, p. 71

<sup>263</sup> Bruce Bimber “Karl Marx and the three faces of Technological Determinism” *Social Studies of Science Working Paper* 11 pp. 1-22

<sup>264</sup> Roderick Munday “Marshall McLuhan declared that “the medium is the message.” What did he mean and does this notion have any value?” 20003 <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/ram0202.html> Accessed 6 October 2011.

technology and does it positively change their lives? It is indeed being celebrated as a potential catalyst for democratic change, but there is little evidence to support this school of thought. Technology is overrated. It is dangerous to conclude that technology is good for the rural dwellers in Murewa, because some of them have never encountered mobile phones; if they were offered laptops, they would not know how to use them, and might not even be willing to learn. The determination of the people can effect democratic changes in Zimbabwe. Technology may have little to do with it. There are societies where technology has been credited with spearheading democratic changes. Zimbabwe is a different case. For instance, state security agents have in the past confiscated solar-powered radio transmitters said to be broadcasting anti-Mugabe propaganda. NGOs were behind this campaign. Eventually, when all enabling technology was impounded, the people still had to start afresh.

The agenda-setting theory is based on the assumption that mass media retains plenty of power, influence and authority on audiences, in terms of what stories they should regard as more important than the others and how much prominence they should give to these stories.<sup>265</sup> Introduced in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, the theory followed the authors' examination of the 1968 US presidential campaign in North Carolina.<sup>266</sup> It is believed that under the agenda-setting model, if audiences follow the media, the things they will consider important will likely be the same. McCombs and Shaw concluded that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the campaign. The results of the study indicated an almost perfect correlation between the media and public agendas, inferring an extremely strong connection between what the media provides the public and the public's perception of important issues. Although prior, similar surveys had been conducted to link public and media agendas, Shaw and McCombs were the first to suggest the agenda-setting theory. The mass ability to participate in online activities in Zimbabwe has instituted a paradigm shift from media-agenda setting to content-agenda setting. But this

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<sup>265</sup> Brian Brooks, George Kennedy, Daryl R. Moen & Don Ranly, "News Reporting and Writing," Seventh Edition. (Bedford: Missouri Group) 2007, p. 27

<sup>266</sup> Maxwell McCombs & Donald Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 36, No. 2, 1972, pp. 176-187.

trend is more noticeable in the more affluent city cultures than in villages, where subsistence methods of communication are still in place.

Government documents show that currently there are four separate pieces of legislation governing regulatory powers over the ICT industry in Zimbabwe. These are the Postal and Telecommunications Act of 2000, which gives the government full powers to monitor email usage; the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001; the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act of 2002; and the Interception of Communications Act of 2007, which gives the government legal authority to intercept mobile and email communication.<sup>267</sup> In June 2009, the new coalition government proposed the Information Communication and Technology Bill, which is set to replace the Broadcasting Services Act and the Postal and Telecommunications Act, setting up a single authority to regulate the ICT sector. Presently, regulation of the ICT sector is shared among the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ), POTRAZ, and the Media and Information Commission (MIC), which are all accountable to the Minister of Transport and Communications as well as the Minister of Media, Information, and Publicity. Both are controlled by the ZANU PF party. The future of these entities, particularly POTRAZ, may be hanging in balance should the new bill, proposed by Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC party, become law. The bill is currently awaiting Cabinet approval before heading to the Parliament for debate. It is likely to face hurdles from President Mugabe's ZANU PF party, which may be unwilling to lose its long-time control over regulating the broadcasting services. To date, the pro-state Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) is the only outlet allowed to broadcast on national airwaves. The new bill could bring the ZBC's broadcasting monopoly to an end.

Blogs, argue Stephen Quinn and Stephen Lambie, have played a leading role in the increasing recognition of citizen journalism. They define a blog as "a type of Web site where entries are written, or posted, the same way you would update a journal or diary."<sup>268</sup> Blog reports have much to do with the writer's "personality, passion and point

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<sup>267</sup> "Strategic Plan 2010-2014" Ministry of Information Communication Technology (MICT) (Harare: 2010) pp. 1-54.

<sup>268</sup> Stephen Quinn & Stephen Lambie. *Online Newsgathering: Research and Reporting for Journalism*. Amsterdam: Focal Press, 2008. p. 31.



of view” says Bornie H Nardi et al.<sup>269</sup> While American Jorn Barger is credited for starting the world’s first blog in 1997,<sup>270</sup> blogs failed to garner momentum in Zimbabwe until the height of the country’s political crisis in the 2000s. Zimbabwean blogs are epicentres of political activism. These include Sokwanele.com, or enough is enough in local vernacular. Quinn and Lamble recall Salam Pax, a blog run by Baghdad resident Salam al-Janbabi, which gained global recognition in 2003. Zimbabwe’s most recognised online advocacy platform Kubatana.net was established in 2001, but only launched its first blog five years later. “The repressive environment over the last 8 years made Kubatana develop online activism to regularly encourage Zimbabweans to use the information communication technologies (ICTs) that they have access to and advocate, mobilize and lobby”,<sup>271</sup> commented one of the platform’s co-founders, Bev Clarke.

Breaking away from the old characteristic of mass communication, which denotes a complex relationship between media outlets and the audience in terms of disseminating feedback messages, traditional news outlets such as the pro-state *Herald* newspaper now accept web-based comments and in some cases even news stories from readers. “Internet has brought us more closer to reality. Everyone can reach us from everywhere”, commented a *Herald* reporter.<sup>272</sup> Correspondingly, non-professional interview respondents also said they only had become regular visitors to *The Herald*’s online page upon realizing it was possible for them to comment on the newspaper’s stories, underscoring that active participation increases public trust for a certain publication. *The Herald* is not alone in allowing citizens to comment on its web-based stories. Other newspapers including *Newsday*, *The Standard* and *The Independent* offer the same service to readers as well. Facebook links are also available for citizens to comment on and otherwise react to stories. *The Sunday Mail* also offers blogging opportunities for readers. This seemingly unprecedented development reduces the previously noticeable gap between readers and journalists. However, it must be noted that the “Letters to the Editor” section already existed in these newspapers long before they went online, another

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<sup>269</sup> Bonnie H. Nardie, Diane J Schiano, Michelle Gumbrecht, Luke Swartz, “Why we Blog” Communications of ACM, Vol. 47, No. 12, pp. 41-46, 2004.

<sup>270</sup> Rebecca Blood, “How blogging software reshapes the online community,” Communications of ACM Vol. 47, No. 12, pp. 53-55, 2004.

<sup>271</sup> Technology for Transparency Network <http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/project/kubatananet> Accessed on 30 September 2011

<sup>272</sup> Interview with a Herald Reporter conducted 17 July 2011.

reason to believe participatory journalism is not a new concept. However, while Zimbabwean citizen journalists in Harare were equally convinced that they had embraced “journalism” through their active online participation, their counterparts in Murewa, despite abstaining from calling themselves “journalists”, could also be considered citizen journalists because they do not need a trained journalist from Harare or anywhere else to tell them what is news. They determine what is news on their own and literally deliver and systematically share news among each other in their communities on a daily basis. Hence the notion that “everyone is a reporter”.

According to Last Moyo, Zimbabweans are no longer “helplessly bombarded with messages by mass media: they are actively producing news and initiating news flows among themselves.”<sup>273</sup> Stand-alone sites dedicated to unedited blogging are another form of participatory journalism, as suggested by Steve Outing.<sup>274</sup> LivinginZimbabwe.com is one such site. It says it is “open to content submissions on anything to do with Zimbabwe.”<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, 3Gmedia, a Diaspora-based company that publishes seven online newspapers dedicated to Zimbabwean news including Zimdaily.com, unveiled its citizen journalism programme in July 2009, claiming it would offer “accurate, unfiltered news”.<sup>276</sup> Using what it calls “e-activism”, Kubatana.net has made use of Western funding to provide a platform where Zimbabweans are encouraged to lobby and mobilise (mostly politically engaged) initiatives through the use the information communication technologies (ICTs). The majority of people in the rural areas have not heard about it. In the three Murewa villages sampled for this research, several people owned pre-paid mobile phones, which they called “receivers”, meaning they mostly waited for someone to call them. It is generally expensive for them to top-up credit available at \$1 each. They have other priorities such as buying basic food for their families. Their financial predicaments meant SW Radio Africa’s free SMS campaigns were more appealing. Villagers acknowledged benefiting from the campaign launched in December 2006 by

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<sup>273</sup> Last Moyo, “Blogging down a dictatorship: Human rights, citizen journalist and the right to communicate in Zimbabwe” *Journalism* Vol. 12 No. 6, 2011, pp. 745-760.

<sup>274</sup> Steve Outing “Eleven layers of citizen journalism” <http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/69328/the-11-layers-of-citizen-journalism> Accessed 7 October 2011

<sup>275</sup> Living in Zimbabwe, ‘About’ [web page] <http://www.livingzimbabwe.com/about>, accessed 7 October 2011.

<sup>276</sup> 3MG launches Citizenship Journalism Programme’, [web page] (22 July 2009) [http://gmricapital.com/index2.php?option=com\\_content&do\\_pdf=1&id=103](http://gmricapital.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=103), accessed 6 October 2011.

the London-based radio station, which sent headlines of its largely anti-Mugabe news packages to subscribed telephone numbers in Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans in the Diaspora would send an email to the newspaper containing the phone numbers of relatives and friends whom they wished to receive the news.

#### **5.4 Citizen Journalism: Roles and Criticism**

Journalism's fundamental role in a society, according to Randy Reddick and Elliot King, is to act as public watchdog, seeking truth, operating independently and transparently, disseminating the message to the audiences and readers.<sup>277</sup> However, the Internet can facilitate the redundancy of professional journalists, as claimed by Jo Bardoel and Mark Deuze.<sup>278</sup> It has also, however, facilitated affordable communication on "a one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many basis", acknowledges Jamie Cowling.<sup>279</sup> Still, citizen journalism has had its own share of criticism. While proponents of citizen journalism, including Mark Glasser, believe that citizens potentially contribute important information that otherwise gets ignored by traditional media,<sup>280</sup> citizen journalists lack transparency, especially by choosing to remain anonymous when they publish or broadcast their work. Kirsten A. Johnson and Susan Weidenbeck believe that unless they carry by-lined stories, stories by citizen journalists will lack credibility.<sup>281</sup> It must, however, be noted that the non-use of by-lines is also prevalent in professional journalism. Many papers carry stories by "staff writer" or "own correspondent". Others, such as Leonard Pitts Jr., reject the importance of citizen journalism because it fails to honor ethics and standards of the profession: "Journalism – like any profession worthy of the name – has standards and

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<sup>277</sup>Randy Reddick & Elliot King, *The online Journalist* (Dallas, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1994).

<sup>278</sup> Jo Bardoel & Mark Deuze, *Network Journalism: Converging Competences of Media Professionals and Professionalism*. *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol. 23 No. 2 (2001) 91-103.

<sup>279</sup> Jamie Cowling, 'Digital News: Genie's Lamp or Pandora's Box? Digital Manifesto Project', [web page](2005) [http://www.ippr.org/uploadedFiles/research/projects/Digital\\_Society/news\\_and\\_info\\_jcowling.pdf](http://www.ippr.org/uploadedFiles/research/projects/Digital_Society/news_and_info_jcowling.pdf), accessed 6 October 2011.

<sup>280</sup> Mark Glaser, 'Your Guide to Citizen Journalism', Public Broadcasting Service [web page] (2006) <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2006/09/your-guide-to-citizen-journalism270.html>, accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>281</sup> Kirsten Johnson, & Susan Weidenbeck, 'Enhancing perceived credibility of Citizen Journalism Websites', *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 2 (2009) 332-348.

ethics, and if you don't sign on to those, I can no more trust you than I can a doctor who refused the Hippocratic oath or a lawyer who failed the bar exam.”<sup>282</sup>

Stephen Reese et al. have shown through content analysis that work produced by citizen journalists lacks originality.<sup>283</sup> Identifying a gradual decline in the quality of traditional journalism, Axel Bruns credits citizen journalists for displaying “persistence and determination both in uncovering political and other scandals and in highlighting the shortcomings of professional journalism”.<sup>284</sup> As noted, the ethical standards and overall credibility of citizen journalism has been the main point of discussion among journalists and academics alike. This is despite the fact that in a global trend, traditional media organisations have also launched citizen journalism initiatives.<sup>285</sup> Wilson Lowrey, for instance, concluded that most of the content on blogs run by professionals is commentary on news stories.<sup>286</sup> Scholars such as Melissa Wall have argued that content produced by citizen journalists can be considered ‘news,’ since others within their ranks have equally adopted universal norms recognised by professionals.<sup>287</sup> This view is not shared by Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, who are convinced that online activists use new media voices such as blogs to promote their own agendas and interests, a view that strongly contradicts the demand for ‘balanced and fair’ coverage embedded in traditional ethics of journalism.<sup>288</sup> Discussions on whether citizen journalists should be accountable to journalistic integrity will always attract attention and debate and predictably, there will be no consensus on this topic.

Traditional journalism, which supposedly values standards and ethics, has nevertheless attracted criticism over the last two decades. Notorious instances of plagiarism and of fabricating stories have stained the reputations of some of the most respected of

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<sup>282</sup> Leonard Pitts Jr., ‘Citizen journalists? Spreading like a cold’, Miami Herald, [web page] (10 June 2010) <http://www.miamiherald.com/2010/10/06/1859362/citizen-journalists-spreading.html>, accessed 1 October 2011.

<sup>283</sup> Stephen Reese, Lou Rutigliano, Kideuk Hyun, Jaekwan. Jeong, ‘Mapping the blogosphere: Professional and citizen-based media in the global news arena’, *Journalism*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2007) 235-261.

<sup>284</sup> Axel Bruns, ‘New Blogs and Citizen Journalism: New directions for e-Journalism’, in Prasad, Kiran (ed.), *e-Journalism: New Media and News Media* (BR Publishing, Delhi, India) pp. 101-126.

<sup>285</sup> Jonathan Weber, ‘Citizen Journalism and the challenge to credibility’, *The Times of London*, 6 October 2008.

<sup>286</sup> Wilson Lowrey, ‘Mapping the journalism-blogging relationship’, *Journalism*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (2006) 477-500.

<sup>287</sup> Melissa Wall, ‘Blogs of war: Weblogs as news’, *Journalism*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2005) pp. 153-172.

<sup>288</sup> Richard Kahn, & Douglas Kellner, ‘New Media and Internet Activism’, *New Media & Society*, Vol. 6, No.1 (2004) pp. 87-95.

publications, including the cases of the *New York Times*' Jayson Blair and *USA Today*'s Jack Kelley. Supporters of participatory journalism will most likely argue that it is better to have no ethics than to cheat on those we have. Also, if professional journalists solicit money from readers to enable them to cover an event, how objective and balanced can their information be? For instance, freelance science journalist David Appell, according to Glenn Harlan Reynolds, "asked his readers to finance an article on the World Health Organisation's relations with the sugar industry; readers contributed more than he had requested within a few days."<sup>289</sup> Despite its shortcomings, the Internet remains curiously more appealing because it offers a different and unmatched set of dynamics, argues Robert W. McChesney, who is adamant there is no evidence that the Internet will be subject to "corporate control as have broadcasting and traditional media".<sup>290</sup>

Yet, all 12 Zimbabwean journalists interviewed for this research agreed that activities oriented to online participation do not constitute journalism. While citizen journalism offers a unique platform where nonprofessionals are free to share their opinions, journalism was bigger than this, they said. Their unanimous view was that journalism goes beyond sharing opinions. They suggested that by granting access to everyone to air their views, citizen journalism ideally presents a more personalised form of reporting. But that contradicts the central call for a balanced and objective approach, itself a non-negotiable principle of traditional Western-based journalism, known to the Zimbabwean journalists interviewed in this research who all graduated from colonial tertiary institutions that supported this model.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In the common understanding that new media has revolutionised the process of producing and sharing content, unsubstantiated claims have emerged that attribute increased democratic participation to citizen journalism. This chapter has argued that while the potential of citizen journalism to democratise the political space cannot be

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<sup>289</sup> Glenn Harlan Reynolds, 'Weblogs and Journalism: Back to the future' Nieman Reports <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/101063/Weblogs-and-Journalism-Back-to-the-Future.aspx> Accessed 5 October 2011

<sup>290</sup> Robert W. McChesney, 'The Internet and US Communication Policy-Making in Historical and Critical Perspective,' *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* Vol. 1 No. 4 (1996) pp 98-124.

underestimated, participatory journalism is a misunderstood concept. New technologies have indeed helped activists build up their case against tyranny. However, technology only plays an enabling role. While the technological use of social media can relatively be considered a new concept, there certainly is nothing new about citizen participation. Citizens will always participate in issues that affect their communities and even though they may find citizen journalism an interesting platform, they may as well do without it.

## 6 AFRICAN CITIZEN JOURNALISTS' ETHICS AND THE EMERGING NETWORKED PUBLIC SPHERE

Parts of this chapter are based on:

**Mutsvairo Bruce, Columbus Simon, & Leijendekker Iris** “Converging ethics in African online journalism and the emerging networked public sphere,” 13<sup>th</sup> *International Symposium on Online Journalism* (University of Texas, Austin, US, 20-21 April, 2012).

### 6.1 Introduction

Citizen journalism is emerging as a powerful phenomenon across Africa. The rise of digitally-networked technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones is reshaping reporting across the continent. This change is technological – with social media platforms enabling new forms of publishing, receiving, and discussing stories – as well as cultural, with idiosyncratic conventions emerging on these platforms. This study surveys the ethical beliefs of citizen journalists in several sub-Saharan African countries. We find that they are driven by a sense of social responsibility and a wish to inform their readers and the general public. Citizen journalists show a clear anti-authoritarian strain and an antipathy towards government regulation, yet most see themselves as subject to the same ethics that guide traditional journalism. We then investigate the implications of these ethics for the emerging networked public sphere. The emergence of a digitally-networked public sphere has been hailed as a revival of bottom-up democracy in the West, but its consequences for African countries are rather ambiguous. We therefore set out to disentangle the possible relationship between citizen journalism and the emerging networked public sphere.

Internet access is scarcer in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else in the world: African Internet users account for barely more than 5 percent of the world's online population, and in many countries the Internet penetration rate still lies below 5 percent. However, the picture is changing rapidly as more and more people gain access. Mobile phone adoption has exploded all over the continent, so much so that today most Africans have access to a mobile device. In a number of countries, the introduction of 3G networks has also revolutionised the way by which many people access the Internet - while for most of

the previous decade cybercafés prevailed, more and more people now access the Internet via their mobile phones. In these countries – Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, among others – a significant share of the population is now online.<sup>291</sup>

The rise of the Internet across Africa, just as anywhere else in the world, has not left journalism untouched. Newspapers and broadcasters across the country have started to publish content online. In many cases, however, African online journalism is merely repurposing content produced for the publishers' primary publications.<sup>292</sup> Nevertheless, practices pioneered by alternative media actors – such as the use of multimedia and increasingly immediate reporting – are adopted by mainstream journalists, so that there is a trend towards "networked-convergent journalism".<sup>293</sup>

The spread of Internet and mobile telephony has also led to the emergence of a new form of citizen journalism in many sub-Saharan African countries. While this movement and its impact is less obvious in Africa than in Europe and the US, vibrant online communities exist in many countries, and citizen journalists are increasingly using digital technologies such as blogs, SMS, social networks, microblogs, video-sharing platforms, and mapping to report and comment on a wide range of topics.<sup>294</sup> The role of citizen journalists has particularly been highlighted in times of crisis: in Kenya, during the violent election aftermath 2007, while social media were also used to incite riots, bloggers documented human rights abuses and created Ushahidi, a crisis mapping software.<sup>295</sup> In such situations, when reports from conventional media are absent, citizen journalists are not merely relaying critical information – blogs, microblogs and fora also serve as means to express emotions and as spaces for discussion.<sup>296</sup>

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291 Simon Columbus & Rebekah Heacock, *Internet Access in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, forthcoming.

292 Tanja Bosch, 'Digital journalism an online public spheres in South Africa', *Communicatio*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2010, pp. 265-275; and Okoth Fred Mudhai, 'Immediacy and openness in digital Africa: Networked-convergent journalisms in Kenya', *Journalism*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2011, pp. 674-691.

293 Fred Mudhai; and Fackson Banda, *Citizen Journalism & Democracy in Africa*, Highway Africa, Grahamstown, South Africa, 2010.

294 Bruce Mutsvairo & Simon Columbus, 'Emerging patterns and trends in citizen journalism in Africa: A case of Zimbabwe', *Central European Journal of Communication*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2012.

295 Joshua Goldstein & Juliana Rotich, *Digitally-networked technology in Kenya's 2007-2008 post-election crisis*, Berkman Center for Internet and Society. 2008, <[http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Goldstein&Rotich\\_Digitally\\_Networked\\_Technology\\_Kenyas\\_Crisis.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Goldstein&Rotich_Digitally_Networked_Technology_Kenyas_Crisis.pdf)>

296 Ethan Zuckerman, 'Citizen media and the Kenyan electoral crisis', in S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, Peter Lang, New York, NY, 2009, pp. 187-196.



The rise of the Internet, and in particular of citizen journalism, has been hailed as the emergence of a “networked public sphere”.<sup>297</sup> Digitally networked technologies enable ordinary citizens, the idea goes, to become their “own broadcasters and reach large numbers of people in unprecedented ways at trivial cost”.<sup>298</sup> However, the application of this theory in the African context has been controversial. While Goldstein and Rotich argue that the fast adoption of mobile phones in Kenya has led to the emergence of a networked public sphere, this has been challenged by Marion Walton, who points out that many are still without access to communication technologies.<sup>299</sup> Goldstein and Rotich, however, also note that the emergence of a networked public sphere in Africa is, unlike in Western democracies, not necessarily linked to civic impulses; rather, digitally networked technologies can be utilised for such divergent purposes as to promote violence, to provide counter-narratives to the stories of oft-censored conventional media, and to more easily collect reports from witnesses of human rights violations.<sup>300</sup> Bosch, who entertains the notion of multiple public spheres in different online communities, in a similar vein points out that online discussions often fall short of the reasoned debate required for the formation of a public sphere, more resembling a “barroom brawl”.<sup>301</sup>

## 6.2 Citizen Journalism in Africa

The term 'citizen journalism' has risen to broad attention since the mid-2000's,<sup>302</sup> albeit mostly in Western countries. In Africa, it is even more of a novel phenomenon. Along with its novelty comes an abundance of definitions, such that the boundaries of citizen journalism are hardly drawn yet. Often, the term is used to denote non-professional, amateur news publication;<sup>303</sup> the reporters are "incidental journalists" who happen to witness and capture, then publicise events.<sup>304</sup> Allan therefore argues that citizen

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297 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2006.

298 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich “Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya’s 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis.” The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 11 May 2012

299 Marion Walton, 'Mobilizing African publics', *Information Technologies & International Development*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2011, pp. 47-50.

300 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich “Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya’s 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis.” The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 11 May 2012 .

301 Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa. *Communicatio*, Vol. 36 No. 2, 2010 265-275.

302 Stuart Allan, 'Histories of Citizen Journalism', in S. Allan & E. Thorsen, *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, Peter Lang, New York, NY, 2009, p. 18.

303 *ibid.*

304 *ibid.*, pp. 21.

journalism plays a particularly salient role in crisis reporting.<sup>305</sup> Indeed, much of the research on African citizen journalism consists of case studies on political crises.<sup>306</sup> The total body of research remains small, although useful Africa-specific normative frameworks for the analysis of citizen journalism are supplied by Goldstein, Rotich, and Banda. A comprehensive literature review is provided by Mutsvairo and Columbus.<sup>307</sup>

In Africa more than elsewhere, participation in citizen journalism hinges on scarce access to information and communications technologies (ICTs);<sup>308</sup> consequently, citizen journalists can be expected to be mostly better-off, more highly educated, and living in urban areas.<sup>309</sup> Over the last decade, the growing adoption of mobile phones has vastly increased access to ICTs for many Africans, and they have been noted as a key technology for citizen journalists in Africa;<sup>310</sup> most recently, Internet-enabled mobile phones are also enable increasing access to the latter medium. Despite these advances, citizen journalists in Africa today are often experienced ICT users with extensive experience in using social media.<sup>311</sup> Blogs and Twitter are commonly used outlets for citizen journalists, as well as the social network Facebook; but uses of mass SMS and emails for citizen journalism have also been reported.<sup>312</sup>

Reporting news is quite naturally a major part of citizen journalism. Especially in the crisis situations predominantly studied, which come with an absence of reports from traditional media sources, citizen journalists take a role in relaying critical information.<sup>313</sup> In some cases, this involves dedicated research on issues that are ignored or suppressed

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305      *ibid.*

306      In Kenya: Maarit Mäkinen & Mary Wangu Kuira, 'Social media and postelection crisis in Kenya', *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 13, no. 3, 328-335; Goldstein & Rotich; and Zuckerman; in Zimbabwe: Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567.

<sup>307</sup> Bruce Mutsvairo, Simon Columbus Simon. "Emerging patterns and trends in Citizen Journalism in Africa: A case of Zimbabwe." *Central European Journal of Communication* Vol. 5, No. 1 (8), 2012, pp. 23-37.

308 Marion Walton Mobilizing African Publics.

*Information Technologies & International Development* Vol. 7 No. 2, 2011, pp. 47-50

309 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 11 May 2012

310      *Ibid*

311      *Ibid*

312      Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies* Vol. 10 No. 4 pp. 2009, 551-567.

313      *Ibid*

by mainstream media,<sup>314</sup> but Moyo has also pointed out that this "parallel market of information" can be fraught with falsehoods and uncertainty. However, citizen journalists do not only report news, but also comment on it. Punditry has been noted as a common feature on citizen media outlets,<sup>315</sup> as has the expression of emotions, for example by means of political jokes.<sup>316</sup> Social media, in particular blogs and fora, also have a strong discursive component and have been turned into "spaces for discussion",<sup>317</sup> which in crisis situations serve to connect those in the country with the Diaspora.<sup>318</sup>

Mutsvairo and Columbus have argued that in Africa, citizen journalism takes place counter, parallel to, and interlinked with mainstream journalism, noting a growing convergence between conventional and citizen journalism. Bloggers and microbloggers take up and link to stories published in the online editions of newspapers,<sup>319</sup> but in return traditional media also take leads from citizens, going as far as reprinting blog articles without permission.<sup>320</sup> Tools and practices pioneered by citizen journalists have also found their way into the portfolios of some media publishers, as when journalists write blogs in an explicitly less formal tone, or when online editions of newspapers provide platforms for readers to report stories – what Banda calls "institutional citizen journalism".

There is also a much debated relationship between citizen journalism and democratization and empowerment.<sup>321</sup> Goldstein and Rotich, in particular, have proven wary of technological determinism. They employ a terminology of "civic" and "predatory" impulses (borrowed from Diamond) which are amplified by digitally

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314 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 11 May 2012

315 *ibid.*; Ethan Zuckerman, E. (2009). Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis. In S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang.

316 Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies Vol. 10* No. 4 pp. 2009, 551-567.; Oteku, V., de Bastion, G., Schütz, R., & Bierhals, G. (2010). From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View. Working paper, *newthinking communications*

317 Ethan Zuckerman, Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis. In S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187–196.

318 Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies Vol. 10* No. 4, 2009, pp.551-567.;

319 Oteku, V., de Bastion, G., Schütz, R., & Bierhals, G. (2010). From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View. Working paper, *newthinking*

320 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008.

321 Frankson Banda, F. (2010). *Citizen Journalism & Democracy in Africa* Grahamstown, South Africa: Highway Africa.

networked technologies. Indeed, during the aftermath of Kenya's 2007 election, the tools and practices of citizen journalists were utilised both to incite violence and to document it. Similarly, Moyo warns that citizen journalism, while at times providing critical information, by spreading untruths may be fueling "panic and disorder".<sup>322</sup>

Thanks to its global ubiquity, social media engagement has become a critically important strategy for political candidates the world over. For some, social media deserves some credit for offering a helping hand in the deconstruction of authoritarian regimes, thereby presenting opportunities for democratisation (Gaier and Smith, 2011). Others are quite adamant that social networking sites are dictating the online outlook of today (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). Given the new digital messaging landscape, it would appear as if new media tools have become contemporary society's equivalent of samizdat, the underground network which was used by Soviet-era activists to disseminate anti-government materials.

Indeed, the increased use of social media and blogs by pro-democracy activists in Zimbabwe and in the Diaspora has forced some to suggest that online activists are using sites such as Facebook to voice their discontent with the government.<sup>323</sup> However, the significance of this active participation has been largely ignored by scientific researchers. Empirical work is therefore lacking here. While social media sites have been credited with determining the political discourse in some parts of the world, including the Middle East, we conclude based on this research they have largely been used for non-political campaigns in Zimbabwe. While accepting social media's role as an alternative space for political engagement, we argue that the use of Facebook among Zimbabwean youth is more of a lifestyle than a form of political activism. These conclusions are based on an ethnographical study of 20 Facebook pages belonging to or run by social and political activists in Zimbabwe and abroad. We observe that online political activity, which has largely been sponsored by pro-democracy activists living abroad, has not translated into offline action on the ground. While members of civil society in Zimbabwe has embraced

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322 Dumisani Moyo Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election. *Journalism Studies* Vol. 10 No. 4 pp. 2009, 551-567.;pp. 562.

323 Bruce Mutsvairo & Lisa Kleeven "Seeking self-determinism through social media: A critical analysis of representation issues for Zimbabwean youths," *International conference on youth and media* (University of Westminster, London, England, March 12-13, 2011)

the social media to reach, organise and mobilise their supporters, they have notably struggled to attract meaningful political reforms – though it is too early to completely dismiss their endeavors as a failure. It seems like as long as Mugabe is in power or should he be replaced by a more traditionally-oriented leader like he is, it is going to be difficult to realise the full potential of social media. Indeed people will be allowed to voice their concerns online, but we should not forget that it all comes down to concrete action: online-based activism should be translated into real-time, face-to-face action in Zimbabwe. Our observation is given the past unsuccessful attempts to topple the government through “people power”, it still is too early to suggest Mugabe will be removed from power through Facebook-enabled mass protests against his regime.

Social media is unique in that it allows users to create and search for content and information without logging in to any specific portal site. Kaplan and Haenlein believe social media is “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.”<sup>324</sup> Other scholars prefer to place emphasis on the social network sites’ ability to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.<sup>325</sup>

To understand the emergent digital forces, we need to first accept the notion that globalisation has played an important role in forcing individuals out of traditional bases of social solidarity including parties, churches, and other mass organisations.<sup>326</sup> Ghannam pinpoints that social networks play an active information-providing role for activists and citizens. Furthermore he claims they “mobilize, entertain, create communities, increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable.”<sup>327</sup>

Among several reasons Boyd considers to be behind citizens’ motivation for participation in public life are identity development, status negotiation, community maintenance, and,

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<sup>324</sup> Andreas M.Kaplan, Michael Haenlein, "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media", *Business horizons*, Vol. 53 No. 1 2010, pp.59-68

<sup>325</sup> Danah boyd and Nicole Ellison. "Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication Vol. No. 13 No. 1 2007*

<sup>326</sup> Lance Bennett W, Alexandra Segerberg, Digital media and the personalization of collective action. *Information, Communication, & Society* 14: 2011, pp. 770-799.

<sup>327</sup> Jeffrey Ghannam, *Social Media in the Arab World: Leading Up to the Uprisings of 2011. A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance*, February 3, 2011. Washington, D.C pp. 4

yes, civic engagement.”<sup>328</sup> Boyd further argues that most online activists are no longer accustomed to using chat rooms or bulletin boards for interacting with strangers. Instead they choose to hang out online with people they already know. In the case of Zimbabwe and Africa in general, mobile phone usage has been expanding rapidly, transforming not just the economies of scale but also the way people interact socially.<sup>329</sup> A new study confirms rising rates of Internet penetration in Africa, singling out Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. These developments have had a significant impact in spearheading online social activism continentally. Yet there is nothing new about the use of technologies to sustain activism. Shirky argues that Martin Luther “adopted the newly practical printing press to protest against the Catholic Church, and the American revolutionaries synchronized their beliefs using the postal service that Benjamin Franklin had designed”<sup>330</sup>

### 6.3 The digitally networked public sphere

With the emergence of digitally networked information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet and the mobile phone, has come “the rhetoric of the technological sublime”, or, in other words, a Utopian belief in their democratising potential.<sup>331</sup> Associated with a reshaping of the public sphere, ICTs are hailed as a revival of bottom-up, participatory democracy in the West. However, their consequences for African countries are less clear. This section therefore considers conceptualisations of the digital or “networked public sphere”<sup>332</sup> and the necessary preconditions for it to function well, while particularly focussing on what this implies for African countries.

Originally conceptualised by Habermas, the public sphere is a discursive arena where private people come together as a public to freely discuss matters of mutual

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<sup>328</sup> Danah Boyd "Can Social Network Sites Enable Political Action?" In Allison Fine, Micah Sifry, Andrew Rasiej and Josh Levy (Eds.) *Rebooting America*. Creative Commons. 2008, 112-116

<sup>329</sup> Mirjam de Bruijn & Inge Brinkman “Communicating Africa” *Researching Mobile Kin Communities, Communication Technologies, and Social Transformation in Angola and Cameroon* *Autrepart* (57/58) 2011

<sup>330</sup> Clay Shirky *The Political Power of Social Media, Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change* *Council on Foreign Relations, Inc* <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media> Accessed 17 June 2012

<sup>331</sup> Carey cited in Nathaniel Poor, 'Mechanisms of an online sphere: The website Slashdot', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2006.

<sup>332</sup> Yochai Benkler *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* New Haven, 2006 Conn.: Yale University Press.

interest.<sup>333</sup> Presumably led by the strength of the argument, the rational-critical debate ideally results in consensus or public opinion, which then serves as a mediator between private citizens and the state, and constitutes democratic control of state activity.<sup>334</sup>

Although widely recognised as an indispensable resource, this conceptualisation of the public sphere has been criticised as it does not seem to fully take into account how systems of exclusion may be embodied in a public sphere.<sup>335</sup> As Fraser points out, what should and what should not be regarded as a matter of public interest does not naturally or logically follow from the subject itself, but rather becomes a common concern through the process of debate.<sup>336</sup> However, to participate in the debate marginalised groups “must assume the discourse of the dominant group (...) and this may include disregarding what to them are crucial issues”.<sup>337</sup> In this manner, the public sphere may leave concerns of the subordinate classes unaddressed, and thereby perpetuate existing systems of domination. A related yet distinct strand of criticism questions the possibility of a common interest for all citizens. They posit that like-minded individuals will organise themselves in separate public spheres, which all vie for the attention of the political arena. Poor comes to the same conclusion on more practical grounds. He simply questions a singular public sphere’s ability to function on the basis of deliberation, given the size of population.

Regardless of whether there is one overarching public sphere or separate distinct ones, in practice, the nature of a public sphere is highly dependent on information and communication tools. After a period of a weak public sphere during the era of the traditional mass media, the emergence of new ICTs, such as the mobile phone and the Internet, has supposedly reshaped and strengthened the public sphere, aptly termed the “networked public sphere” by Benkler. These technologies have made possible “multidirectional connections among all nodes in the networked information

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333 Jürgen Habermas, 'Political communication in media society', *Communication Theory*, Vol. 16, 2006, pp. 411-426.

334 *ibid.*

335 Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the public sphere: a contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy', *Social Text*, vol. 25/26, 1990, pp. 56-80.

336 *ibid.*

337 Alinta L. Thornton, 'Does the Internet create democracy?', *Exquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2001, pp. 126-147.

environment” at trivial costs.<sup>338</sup> As a result, more information and voices are able to reach a larger audience, and like-minded individuals are better able to organise. Or, in Benkler’s words, ICTs have drastically improved the generative and reactive capacities of individuals, thereby enabling them to “be active participants in the public sphere as opposed to its passive readers, listeners, or viewers”.<sup>339</sup> Particularly the Internet, with its anarchic nature, feedback loops, and comment sections,<sup>340</sup> has been associated with the potential for a more varied and inclusive public discourse, more transparency, and the capacity of cooperative actions, such as civic journalism and civil society campaigns.<sup>341</sup>

However, in order for a public sphere to function properly it must satisfy several conditions, which include environmental factors as well as behavioural norms. Although there is interdependency between the various factors, they will be discussed separately for the purpose of clarity. With respect to the environmental factors, two seem particularly relevant for our current purposes. First of all, individuals must be able to speak freely about any topic. This implies that the public sphere must be autonomous from state and economic power,<sup>342</sup> and that individuals’ rights to free speech must be protected.<sup>343</sup> In the African context this is not something that can be taken for granted, as for example, in the case of Zimbabwe, where the government has attempted to restrict basic political and civil rights, particularly in online spaces, since the dawn of the millennium.<sup>344</sup> The second environmental condition concerns equal access to the public sphere among different members of society. To have access to the networked public sphere naturally calls for the need to have access to digitally networked technologies. This is not only dependent on penetration rates, but also on the availability of leisure time, literacy, and – with respect to the Internet – often also on English language

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338 Yochai Benkler *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* New Haven, 2006 Conn.: Yale University Press. pp. 211.

339 *ibid.*, p. 212.

340 Alinta Thornton, 'Does the Internet create Democracy?', *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 2, 2001 pp.126-147. p. 139.

341 Yochai Benkler *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* New Haven, 2006 Conn.: Yale University Press..

342 Nathaniel Poor, 'Mechanisms of an Online Public Sphere: The Website Slashdot', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Vol. 10 No. 2, 2006, article 4.

343 Jürgen Habermas, 'Political communication in media society', *Communication Theory*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2006, pp. 411-426.

344 Last Moyo, 'Repression, propaganda, and digital resistance', in F. Banda, O. F. Mudhai, & W. J. Tetey (eds.), *African Media and the Digital Public Sphere*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY, 2011, pp. 125-142.



speaking skills.<sup>345</sup> Despite the rapidly growing usage of ICTs, access is still skewed towards males and urban residents in Africa.<sup>346</sup>

The required behavioural norms include those linked to the promotion of a rational-critical debate, the inclusiveness of the public sphere, and the minimization of harm in a politically sensitive context. In line with Habermas, one of the most important characteristics for a strong public sphere is that it should foster rational-critical debate that leads to a common judgment and action.<sup>347</sup> First, this implies (inter)activity on behalf of the participants of the public sphere. Thornton particularly warns for the possibility that the Internet may become dominated by advertisements and public relations interests, where politicians are “sold as commodities, citizens are viewed as consumers, and issues are decided with staged events and quotes pre-worded by publicity specialists”.<sup>348</sup> Rather, a strong public sphere should consist of active participants that continuously react to one another. Second, the discussion should be led by the strength of the argument, which implies that the quality of the argument should be checked and the status of the speaker should be disregarded. Third, this discussion should lead to some sort of consensus. However, although this seems theoretically admirable, Bosch notes that in practice one must find a balance between “informal kinds of consensus” and deliberation free of status.<sup>349</sup> In her case-studies she found that participants were more likely to reach consensus if the website or blog owner posited him- or herself as a discussion leader. Similarly, where deliberation was left to run its natural course, no consensus seemed to be reached.<sup>350</sup> Finally, the consensus that is presumably arrived on from the rational-critical-debate represents public opinion, and should lead to action.

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345 Alinta Thornton, Does the Internet create Democracy? *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, Vol. 22 No. 2, 2001 pp.126-147., p. 133.

346 Martin Hilbert, 'Digital gender divide or technologically empowered women in developing countries? A typical case of lies, damned lies, and statistics', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 34, no. 6, 2011, 479-489.

347 Matthew D. Barton, 'The future of rational-critical debate in online public spheres,' *Computers and Composition*, vol. 22, 2005, pp. 177-190.

348 Martin Hilbert, Digital gender divide or technologically empowered women in developing countries? A typical case of lies, damned lies, and statistics. *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 34 No. 6, 2001 pp. 479-489

349 Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa. *Communicatio*, Vol. 36 No. 2, 2010, pp 265-275. pp. 273.

350 *ibid.*

Moreover, in light of the previously mentioned criticism that public spheres may embody systems of exclusions, participants should be able to introduce topics that were previously unquestioned.<sup>351</sup> However, Bosch notes that in Africa citizen journalism and online journalism are often “dependent on traditional outlets for content delivery”.<sup>352</sup> In this sense, they tend to be reactionary, and have to enter the discourse of the dominant powers.<sup>353</sup>

Lastly, although not originally included in previously discussed conceptualisations of the public sphere, in the African context of ethnic conflicts, it may be particularly important to be wary of sensitive or harmful content. As the Kenyan post-election crisis of 2007/2008 illustrates, ICTs can be used both to promote civil rights campaigns as well as to incite violence, and Goldstein and Rotich have posited that the digitally networked public sphere may serve civic and predatory impulses, thus not necessarily aligning with democratic values.

#### 6.4 Traditional theories of press

The authoritarian doctrine is a normative theory of press originally conceived by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm.<sup>354</sup> Under this theory, press is tightly controlled by the government and operates to encourage solidarity and union in the nation. Interference through challenging, questioning or criticising the workings of the government is not permissible. The press’s role, instead, is to strength the power and authority of the head of state or government. It is a theory under which “the press as an institution is controlled in its functions and operations by organised society through another institution, government.”<sup>355</sup> Baran and Davis define it simply as a “normative theory advocating the

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351 Matthew DBarton, The future of rational-critical debate in online public spheres. *Computers and Composition*, 22, 2005 pp. 177-190. p. 185.

352 Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa. *Communicatio*, Vol. 36 No. 2, 2010, 265-275. p. 270.

353 *ibid.*

354 Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, & Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet Communist concepts of what the press should be and do*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL, 1963.

355 *ibid.*, p. 10.

complete domination of media by a government for the purpose of forcing those media to serve the government.”<sup>356</sup>

The authoritarian theory of press is best understood in a comparative analysis with other theories, which as suggested by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm are the libertarian theory, the social responsibility theory and Soviet Communist concept. Severin and Tankard say the libertarian theory of the press holds that the press is fundamentally there to inform the public and protect their rights and liberties.<sup>357</sup> A clear distinction between the authoritative and libertarian concepts is offered by John Stuart Mill, who asserts that for the latter, which has also been called the “free press theory”, to function well, there needs to be no authoritative state intervention.<sup>358</sup> Unlike the authoritarian concept, this theory thus clearly does not allow for government ownership of the press. Associated with several Western democracies, it unequivocally states that the right to publish is a right that is essential for the success of any democracy. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm conclude the theory took a “philosophical view that man is rational and able to discern between truth and falsehood and, therefore, can choose between a better and worse alternative”. Again, unlike the authoritarian doctrine, ownership under the libertarian theory of press exclusively private.

The social responsibility theory is considered an offshoot of the libertarian concept, sharing plenty of similarities; nevertheless, one clear distinction is that it places moral and ethical restrictions on the press. While the former guns for absolute freedom, the latter believes in freedom with responsibility. Considering under this theory that journalists are accountable to the public and government, state intervention – just as is the case with the authoritarian doctrine – can thus be necessary and justified. Siebert, Peterson and Schramm also note that “freedom of expression under the social responsibility theory is not an absolute right, as under pure libertarian theory....One's right to free expression must be balanced against the private rights of others and against

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356 Stanley J. Baran & Dennis K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment and Future* (3rd ed.), Wadsworth, Belmont, 2009, p. 118.

357 Werner J. Severin & James W. Tankard, *Communication Theories: origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*, Pearson, New York, NY et al., 2010.

358 John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (ed. J. M. Robson), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, CA, 1963, pp. 44-45.

vital social interests.” As noted by the Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947, the press has an important role to play in the development and stability of modern society and, as such, it is imperative that a commitment of social responsibility be imposed on mass media. Hence Jennifer Ostini and Anthony Fung’s analysis that social responsibility model is based on “the idea that media have a moral obligation to society to provide adequate information for citizens to make informed decisions”.<sup>359</sup>

The Soviet Communist theory of press, which was developed during the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, shares plenty of similarities with the authoritarian press theory. Oyedele argues that the theory “which evolved from Marxist – Leninist – Stalinist thought, with mixture of Hegel and 19th Century Russian thinking, the chief purpose of the press is to contribute to the success and continuance of the socialist system, and especially to the dictatorship of the party”.<sup>360</sup> Journalists are thus there to transmit government policy and not to aid in searching for the truth. The Soviet Communist model is seen as an extreme application of authoritarian ideas—in that media are “totally subordinated to the interests and functions of the state”.<sup>361</sup> In assessing the relationship between the authoritarian model with other theories, it is relevant to take note of Siebert et al.’s view that “in fact practically all Western Europe... utilized the basic principles of authoritarianism as the theoretical foundation for their systems of press control”.<sup>362</sup>

While Siebert et al.’s largely normative four theories of press paradigm have remained the dominant source for the scientific study of the press worldwide, the advent of the Internet and new technologies make it equally timely to disentangle its original hypothesis. Its framework is considered “obsolete and inapplicable for contemporary analysis”, argue Ostini and Fung.<sup>363</sup> Conceptualizing the work by Siebert et al., Benson dichotomises their work with the endorsement of ethnocentrism, thereby justifying the

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359 Jennifer Ostini & Anthony Fung, 'Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A new model of national media', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, pp. 41-56.

360 I. Bayo Oyedele, 'Press Freedom: A conceptual analysis', *Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2005, pp. 101-109.

361 Jennifer Ostini & Anthony Fung, 'Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A new model of national media', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, pp. 41-56.p. 42.

362 Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, & Wilbur Schramm, *Four Theories of the Press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet Communist concepts of what the press should be and do*, University of Illinois Press, Champaign, IL, 1963., p. 9.

363 Jennifer Ostini & Anthony Fung, 'Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A new model of national media', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2002, pp. 41-56.p. 42.

central need for objectivity in news. This inherent need for objectivity is one area considered outdated and incomprehensible by the disciples of the web. For others, objectivity is indeed slowly becoming a thing of the past largely due to the rise of online journalism.<sup>364</sup> Few will be opposed to the idealistic need for objectivity be it for professional or citizen journalists. But others have chosen to focus on the overall ethical dilemmas posed by online-based journalism.<sup>365</sup> Among several issues raised by these scholars are the commercial-based pressures caused by the immediacy factor, issues surrounding accuracy and authenticity of news.

Accuracy and impartiality are universally accepted as standard norms for any practicing journalist.<sup>366</sup> Journalism ethics is defined as a species of applied ethics that examines what journalists and news organisations should do, given their responsible role in any given society.<sup>367</sup> Kaplan contends that good journalism involves the abolishment and potential influence of own ideas and values when researching and publishing a story.<sup>368</sup> Furthermore, objectivity boosts reliability.<sup>369</sup> It is also Ward's conviction that truth and objectivity are the main pillars of good journalism since the need to present two sides of the story remains apparently universal.<sup>370</sup> Objective reporting involves presentation of provable news free of personal evaluation or assumptions.<sup>371</sup> In the traditional sense, these definitions would mostly work. However, it is almost impossible to maintain this assumption especially when one looks at the presentation of African news online. Web-based journalism is a fast-paced environment, which means journalists are constantly

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364 Richard F. Taflinger, *The Myth of Objectivity in Journalism: A commentary*, Washington State University, 1996, < <http://www.wsu.edu/~taflinger/mythobj.html>>. Accessed 17 May 2012

365 Cecilia Friend & Jane B. Singer, *Online Journalism Ethics: Traditions and transitions*, ME Sharpe, New York, NY, 2007; and

Mark Deuze & Daphna Yeshua, 'Online journalists face new ethical dilemmas: Report from the Netherlands', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2001, pp. 273-292.

366 Faridah Ibrahim, 'Press freedom and ethics with accountability: Premises and constraints', presented at the International Conference on Free and Responsible Journalism, Port Dickson, 27-31 January, 2010, <<http://www.ssig.gov.my/ssig/kcent/material/1-PRESS%20FREEDOM%20%20SSIG-%20dr%20faridah%5B1%5D.pdf>> accessed 16 May 2012

367 Stephen J. A. Ward, *The invention of journalism ethics: The path to objectivity and beyond*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, CA, 2005.

368 Richard L. Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2002.

369 Paul E. Fischer & Robert E. Verrecchia, 'Reporting bias', *The Accounting Review*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2000, pp. 229-245.

370 Ward, S.J.A. *The invention of journalism ethics: The path to objectivity and beyond*. Montreal, 2005 Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

371 Werner J. Severin & James W. Tankard, *Communication Theories: origins, methods, and uses in the mass media*, Pearson, New York, NY et al., 2010.

under pressure to complete their new stories in order to remain competitive. The quest for objectivity is the main loser of this development.

Ethical guidelines are the capstone for most media associations and groups of journalists, as they have adopted these guidelines and attempt to achieve them in practice (Cline, 2009). Several journalistic organisations have adopted codes of conduct, which ensure that their professional conduct remains intact.<sup>372</sup> Ghana was one of the premier African countries to establish a code of ethics, with the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) introducing a colonial era one in 1949. The codes are developed and approved by media organisations as evidence for self-regulation, thereby accepting the calls for autonomy.<sup>373</sup> “Ethics substantially defines the duties of an individual towards his own self and towards other people and is a personal responsibility”, argues Demir.<sup>374</sup> In the African context, the audiences are perceived to be largely poor, illiterate, uneducated, of diverse language and cultural background and difficult to reach.<sup>375</sup> Faced with dilemma of working without proper and permanent gatekeepers, African journalists often compromise the important journalistic requirement of responsibility. It is acceptable common practice to acknowledge the source of a borrowed news article. Findings of a study conducted in Nigeria concluded that the advent of the Internet was making it possible for journalists to freely cull and publish articles from other the website without paying any royalties or acknowledging the source of the article.<sup>376</sup>

Traditional ethics of journalism include a commitment to truthfulness, accuracy, wisdom, courage, justice, temperance, objectivity, impartiality and public accountability.<sup>377</sup> A peaceful vote in Kenya was followed by a demoralising political, economic, and humanitarian crisis ignited by President Mwai Kibaki’s declaration that he had won the

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372 David Pritchard & Madelyn Peroni Morgan, 'Impact of Ethics Codes on Judgements by Journalists: A natural experiment', *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 4, pp. 934-941; and

Alexander Pleijter & Annemarie Frye, *Journalistieke gedragscode: leiband of leidraad?* [Journalistic code of ethics: leading-string or guideline?], Radboud University Nijmegen, 2007.

373 Yehiel Limor & Itai Himelboim, 'Journalism and moonlighting: An international comparison of 242 codes of ethics', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2006, pp. 265-285.

374 Muge Demir, 'Importance of Ethic, Credibility and Reliability in Online Journalism', *European Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2011, pp. 537-545.

375 Hildah Mupfurutsa, 'Ethical and professional issues in African journalism', <[http://www.ephrem.org/dehai\\_archive/2005/sept-oct05/0424.html](http://www.ephrem.org/dehai_archive/2005/sept-oct05/0424.html)>.

376 Uche Nworah, 'How the Internet is affecting the practice of journalism in Nigeria', *Nigeria Village Square*, <Retrieved from <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/uche-nworah/how-the-internet-is-affecting-the-practice-of-journalism-in-nigeria.html>>.

377 M. Zahidul Haque, 'Ethics of journalism', *Eye on Ethics*, <<http://www.eyeonethics.org/2008/02/26/ethics-of-journalism/>>

presidential election held on December 2007. More than 1000 people were allegedly murdered during the ethnic clashes, further presenting media analysts with another chance to examine the role of journalism ethics in the wake of the digital revolution. Notably, the Kenyan government's move to inexplicably delay announcing the election winner evoked tensions across the country even though it was its decision to impose a ban on live broadcasts that left many perplexed. While some foreign media continued to broadcast live, local media did not dare to resist the ban.<sup>378</sup> The ban presented bloggers with an opportunity to flex their muscles as the political crisis intensified. Zuckerman credits the growing middle-class population for the rising number of digital activists in the country. The Ushahidi crisis-mapping project gathered momentum as several people, including Kenyans abroad, flocked to its site hoping to get first-hand reports on the crisis. The reports generated by the blog were passed on to journalists and aid organisations to enable them get the correct picture of the crisis.<sup>379</sup> If Macharia's claims are to be believed then there is a bigger chance journalists working for the foreign media may also have been tempted to use information from this "trusted" source. Whether facts were verified is another matter, potentially bringing ethical and credible journalism into disrepute as a blog was used as a primary source for such a crucial news item.

Limitation of harm, which largely involves the preservation of certain details from reports with the aim of avoiding harm to someone or an organisation's reputation, is one principle often highlighted as a journalism norm. The otherwise popular newzimbabwe.com news site's editorial independence and responsibility came under heavy scrutiny after November 2010 when it published an AIDS victim's death certificate on its website without the permission of his family. The document supplied to the website's editor by the Zimbabwean government was meant to offset rumors that the country's dreaded spy agency was behind the victim's death. It can be argued that the website acted irresponsibly by publishing the death certificate as this may have caused

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378 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008. .

379 Anthony Kariuki Macharia, 'At a crossroad: Kenyan blogger comes to the rescue', Inwent, <<http://www.inwent-iiij-lab.org/projects/2010/wordpress/2010/at-a-crossroads-kenyan-blogger-comes-to-the-rescue/>>.

pain and grief to the victim's family, something that the online newspaper could have easily avoided to remain within the tenets of good journalism.

## 6.5 Citizen Journalism ethics

Whereas journalism ethics have a long tradition and are manifested in the codes of unions, agencies and publishers, the ethical foundations of citizen journalism have been much less explored. Perlmutter and Schoen found that even among top-ranked American political blogs, some of which are professional outlets, few have formal or informal codes of ethics.<sup>380</sup> In the United States, there have been two notable early attempts at creating a "bloggers' code of ethics". Blood focuses on journalistic bloggers and attempts to provide guidelines to raise their credibility.<sup>381</sup> Dube similarly sees bloggers as comparable to journalists and provides a code of ethics that is adapted from the guidelines of the Society of Professional Journalists, listing advice for honesty and fairness, minimizing harm, and accountability.<sup>382</sup> However, these two early formulations depart little from traditional journalism ethics and are only within limits specific to the medium.

A more audacious attempt was formulated by Kuhn, who set out to "identify through a dialogic process those values held most deeply by those who chose to blog regardless of the specific functions they perform as bloggers and build a normative code accordingly".<sup>383</sup> He particularly stresses the use of blogs for many-to-many communication, as opposed to the one-to-many communicative fashion of journalistic bloggers in Blood and Dube's conception. Consequently, Kuhn used a dedicated blog to elicit responses from readers; however, his sample size is unfortunately rather small. Kuhn finds that in his sample, bloggers identified themselves and their readers, rather than society at large, as 'stakeholders' in their blogs; while at the same time they considered blogs as "vehicles for social change, a challenge to our mainstream media, and tools that can be leveraged for political and social gain".

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380 David D. Perlmutter & Mary Schoen, "If I Break a Rule, What Do I Do, Fire Myself?" Ethics codes of independent blogs', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2007, pp. 37-48.

381 Rebecca Blood, *The Weblog Handbook: Practical advice on creating and maintaining your blog*, Basic Books, New York, NY, 2002.

382 Jonathan Dube, *A bloggers' code of ethics*, 2003, <<http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000215.php> Accessed 17 May 2012>.

383 Martin Kuhn, 'Interactivity and prioritizing the human: A code of blogging ethics', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2007, pp. 18-36.



In Kuhn's study, bloggers named 'free expression' as the value most important to them with regard to blogging, followed by 'factual truth', followed by transparency, accountability, and minimising harm to others. Etiquette was mentioned regularly, but ranked as rather unimportant. When asked for imperative "dos", they named providing credits or links to other blogs, being honest and grounding opinion in fact, and disclosing biases as most important for bloggers, whereas knowingly spreading misinformation, posting information unsupported by facts, and violating copyright laws were highlighted as "don'ts".<sup>384</sup> Kuhn particularly notes that the dos and don'ts also include prescriptions to "sustain the discourse on blogs" and "avoid actions that might discourage participation in blog discourse", consistent with his emphasis on dialogue and many-to-many communication.<sup>385</sup>

Kuhn's findings tie in with a larger study by Cenite et al., which asked personal and non-personal bloggers about their ethical beliefs and corresponding practices.<sup>386</sup> They found that personal bloggers valued attribution most, followed by minimising harm, truth-telling, and accountability. Non-personal bloggers valued attribution and truth-telling highest, followed by minimising harm, and accountability.<sup>387</sup> Differences between groups were significant for truth-telling, valued more highly by non-personal bloggers, and minimising harm, valued more highly by personal bloggers.<sup>388</sup> Cenite et al. also found that non-personal bloggers practice ethical practices related to truth-telling, accountability, and attribution more than personal bloggers.<sup>389</sup> However, the findings of this study are limited by the fact that answers were restricted to these four categories, excluding the interactive factor Kuhn has emphasised.

There has been no research specifically on the attitudes and ethical practices of African citizen journalists so far. If mentioned in the literature on ethics at all, citizen journalists

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384      ibid., p. 31.

385      ibid., pp. 31-32.

386      Mark Cenite, Benjamin H. Detenber, Andy W. K. Koh, Alvin L. H. Lim, & Ng Ee Soon, 'Doing the right thing online: A survey of bloggers' ethical beliefs and practices', *New Media & Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2009, pp. 575-597.

387      ibid., p. 586.

388      ibid., p. 587.

389      ibid., p. 588.

are portrayed as negative examples of unethical behaviour. As Kasoma writes, “if untrained citizens become journalists, they are oblivious about principles of ethics. This [...] puts the entire media institution at risk with governments”.<sup>390</sup> Some authors have noted practices in which citizen journalists differ markedly from professional codes of ethics. For example, Moyo, writing about Zimbabwe, notes that “when the bloggers refer to ‘the news in now’ or ‘unconfirmed reports’, they are not necessarily trying to convince the reader that they have done some investigation in the manner professional journalists verify facts, but merely to indicate that the information has been derived from the grapevine and hence suggest that the readers should do their own cross-checking and verification of stories published.” Concluding from this observation, Moyo warns that in the absence of any particular ethics, citizen journalists could, by spreading untruths, lead to “panic and disorder”.

## 6.6 Methods

To study the set of ethics citizen journalists in Africa subscribe to, we used an online survey. Citizen journalists were found through the alternative news platform Global Voices, which summarises the discourse in non-Western blogospheres, and contacted through mail addresses on their respective blogs. We explicitly excluded non-African expatriates and the African Diaspora from this study. Despite the fact that the targeted number of respondents was originally 80, the survey was filled in by 20 participants, of whom all but three self-identified as citizen journalists. The response rate can be attributed to the willingness of citizen journalists to share their views with strangers digitally. As shown below, the number of participants was quite representative considering the fact that we were targeting three English-speaking countries with a history of political dictatorships: Zimbabwe, Kenya and Uganda. Only one participant explicitly denied this. However, half of the participants also identified as journalists in the more general sense, and eight claimed to work as media professionals. All but one of the participants claimed to have both a blog and a Twitter account.

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390 Keyan G. Tomaselli, '(Afri)ethics, communitarianism and libertarianism', *International Communication Gazette*, vol. 71, no. 5, 2009, pp. 577-594.

Due to the small number of active citizen journalists in most African countries, we decided to include all of sub-Saharan Africa in this study, acknowledging the complications that come with generalizing across the continent. Since the survey was conducted in English, responses were focussed on English-speaking countries. Most responses came from Kenya (5), Uganda and Zimbabwe (4 each); further responses came from six different countries, all in Africa.

In the first part of our survey, we assessed attitudes towards several ethical questions. In total, this part consisted of 19 prompts with Likert scales. The questions encompassed three major themes: traditional theories of press, journalism ethics, and press freedom. First, we asked who journalists and citizen journalists should serve, testing public, communitarian, and authoritarian perspectives. Second, we investigated the issues of attribution and objectivity. Third, we asked about Internet regulation and press freedom. The second part of the survey consisted of three prompts for qualitative statements, asking about citizen journalists' motivation, values of objectivity, and differences and traditional and citizen journalists' ethics.

## **6.7 Results**

### *Respondents' roles as media actors*

The survey was filled in by 20 participants, of whom all but three self-identified as citizen journalists. Only one participant explicitly denied this. However, half of the participants also identified as journalists in the more general sense, and eight claimed to work as media professionals. All but one of the participants claimed to have both a blog and/or a Twitter account (Table 6.1).

The responses show that traditional and citizen journalism co-occur. A sizable number of prominent citizen journalists, those who engage in political discourse, also worked professionally with the media; most of these in online journalism. There is, however, a notable distinction between journalism and citizen journalism. While many self-described citizen journalists, including some who do not work professionally in the media sectors, also self-identified as journalists, other did not. This shows that 'citizen journalist' is a distinct category, with likely specific norms and values.

**Table 6.1: Respondents’ self-described roles as media actors**

Question	Yes	No
I self-identify as a journalist.	10	9
I think of myself as a citizen journalist.	17	1
I currently make a living working for the media.	8	11
I primarily work for online media.	8	11
Do you have a blog, or write for a group blog?	17	2
Do you have a Twitter account?	16	3

*Theories of the Press*

We tested three clusters of two to three items on values identified in the literature as making up the distinctive core of three theories of the press. These three theories are the social responsibility, communitarian, and authoritarian theories of the press. Two of the clusters were found internally consistent (Social Responsibility and Authoritarian, Cronbach’s alpha > .7); however, the Communitarian cluster scored below the threshold for reliability (Table 6.2). The analysis of the clusters reveals a tendency in favour of socially responsible journalism (combined mean = 2.39), and a strong antipathy against authoritarian claims (mean = 4.29). For each construct, a further item-by-item analysis was conducted.

**Table 6.2: Theories of the Press (reliable constructs are marked \*)<sup>391</sup>**

Construct	Reliability	Mean	SD	Test Statistic	Significance
	Cronbach's Alpha			t	p
Social Responsibility	.775*	2.39	.95	-2.814	.011
Communitarian	.555			2	
Authoritarian	.722*	4.29	.81	6.984	.000

For tables 6.2-6.7, statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

The first cluster of three items (Cronbach's alpha = .775; combined mean = 2.39; standard deviation = .95; significant difference from 3 (one-sample t-test) at p = .011) tested the attitude towards socially responsible journalism, in which the "media have a moral obligation to society to provide adequate information for citizens to make informed decisions" according to Ostini and Fung. (Table 6.3). The results indicate a clear

<sup>391</sup> Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

preference for socially responsible journalism in the service of the public among citizen journalists.

**Table 6.3: Social Responsibility**<sup>392</sup>

Question	M	SD	t	p
As a journalist, your first duty is to serve the public.	2.20	.95	-3.760	.001
Whether a story is true is more important than who it serves.	2.50	1.28	-1.751	.096
As a blogger, your articles should first and foremost inform the audience.	2.37	1.17	-2.364	.030

The second cluster of three items ( $\alpha = .555$ ; mean = 3.41; SD = .78;  $p = .041$ ) asked about the need for self-censorship in case that national security is threatened (Table 6.4). This set of questions relates to communitarian ethics, which as Tomaselli argues constrain freedom of the press to accord to the values of a community. Given the low Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ , individual t-tests were run for each question in this cluster. These yielded a highly significant finding for one question (“A journalist should not report a story that could endanger national security, even if it is true”, mean = 3.90;  $s = .72$ ;  $p < .001$ ); but insignificant findings for both other questions. The significant item indicates that explicit self-censorship is refused by citizen journalists; however, the insignificant findings on the other questions raise the question what these actors perceive as self-censorship, and also how citizen journalists stand towards the ethic of minimisation of harm, which was not addressed in this study. Nevertheless, the data support a tentative rejection of communitarian ethics among citizen journalists. It was clearly significant for these journalists to be social responsible for the audience that they serve but a notable challenge was dealing with a dictatorship and working in a suppressive media environment. While for instance, they were interested in adding bylines to the stories they wrote as this would add transparency to their stories, they were equally reluctant to do so because they feared being victimised should they publish stories deemed anti-government.

<sup>392</sup> Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

**Table 6.4: Communitarian Ethics**<sup>393</sup>

Question	M	SD	t	p
A journalist should not report a story that could endanger national security, even if it is true.	3.90	.72	5.604	.000
Bloggers should be careful in what they publish, so as to not endanger national security.	3.22	1.11	.846	.409
Some self-censorship from journalists is necessary to preserve national security.	3.10	1.25	.357	.725

The third cluster of two items ( $\alpha = .722$ ; mean = 4.29;  $s = .81$ ;  $p < .001$ ) concerned the authoritarian theory of the press, which, as argued by Siebert et. al, stipulates that the press should be controlled by the government. The result shows a clear rejection of authoritarianism. Citizen journalists, it is indicated, see the government as a valid recipient of criticism.

**Table 6.5: Authoritarian Theory of the Press**<sup>394</sup>

Question	M	SD	t	p
The government should not be scrutinized by the media.	4.25	.91	6.140	.000
Criticizing the authorities is not permissible.	4.32	.89	6.479	.000

In conclusion, in the first part of our questionnaire we find that citizen journalists have a tendency towards public journalism. Journalism is seen as service to the public rather than to the authorities, and self-censorship is tendentially opposed even if it is in the name of national security.

*Ethical Values*

The second part of the questionnaire includes two clusters of three items on attribution ( $\alpha = .383$ ) and two items on objectivity ( $\alpha = .592$ ). Due to the low Cronbach's alpha in both clusters, individual t-tests were run for each individual question in both clusters, which yielded no significant results.

In each cluster, two questions respectively asked for journalists' and bloggers' need to abide to the given ethical construct. To further examine the differences between these items, a paired-sample t-test was run. For two items in the “attribution” cluster, on

<sup>393</sup> Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

<sup>394</sup> Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3

bloggers’ and journalists’ need to disclose sources, respectively, no significant difference was identified. A paired-sample t-test for both items in the “objectivity” cluster, asking for bloggers’ and journalists’ need to cover multiple perspectives on an issue, respectively, yielded no significant result either. Hence, the data do not allow a conclusion on citizen journalists’ ethics of attribution and objectivity; however, the large standard deviations indicate that individuals might hold a wide range of perspectives on these issues.

**Table 6.6: Ethics of Attribution (1-3) and Objectivity (4-5)**<sup>395</sup>

Question	M	SD	t	p
A journalist must always name his sources.	3.35	.99	1.584	.130
For a blogger, it is permissible not to disclose the source of his information.	2.53	1.26	-1.634	.120
Online media should always provide links to their sources.	2.80	1.11	-.809	.428
An article in a newspaper may cover only one point of view.	2.90	1.21	-.370	.716
As a blogger, it is important to always present multiple perspectives.	2.63	1.26	-1.278	.217

*Government Control and Press Freedom*

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of two clusters of three items on government control of online media (alpha = .524) and two items on press freedom (alpha = .348). Given the low Cronbach’s alpha, individual t-tests were run for each item in both constructs (Table 6.7). For government control, all tests yielded significant values (p < .05 and < .001 for two of the questions). This shows a clear opposition towards government control and censorship of online and in particular social media.

<sup>395</sup> Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.

**Table 6.7: Attitudes towards Government Control (1-3) and Freedom of the Press (4-5)<sup>396</sup>**

Question	M	SD	t	p
The government should have a tight control over online media.	4.30	.73	7.935	.000
Unconstrained social media endanger public safety.	3.58	1.12	2.251	.037
The government should censor online media if national security is endangered.	3.90	.74	5.288	.000
Press freedom should not be subordinated to any law.	2.95	1.13	-.203	.841
The freedom of the press must be weighed against other concerns, such as security.	3.05	1.19	.188	.853

*Individual Motivation*

The second part of the survey serves to further elaborate on the findings from the questionnaire. The first question asked what motivates citizen journalists to report on a story. By far the most common answer given was to “inform” their audience or the public at large (n = 11); other factors that were named more than once included “truth” (n = 4) and “raising awareness” (n = 3), as well as “justice”, which included holding authorities accountable. These answers serve to affirm that citizen journalists are motivated by social responsibility. At the same time, they perceive their role as limited to reporting a situation, leaving commenting (named once) and taking action to others.

The second question asked whether traditional and citizen journalists ought to be objective in their reporting. The answers can be categorised as either yes (n = 8), no (n = 4), or yes, but while disclosing their opinion (n =4). Several of the responses frame objectivity as a responsibility to the audience. As one citizen journalist remarked about traditional and citizen journalists alike, “the information they share goes to influence the opinion of readers online, therefore there is a duty of care expected from them”. It is also notable that none of the respondents made an explicit distinction between the need for traditional and citizen journalists to be objective, instead, many pointed out that both enjoy “public trust” and should act accordingly.

Differences between traditional and citizen journalists were investigated in the third

<sup>396</sup> Statements were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = very much agree, 5 = very much disagree). Results reported are from one-sample t-tests for difference from the neutral score 3.



question, which asked whether both ought to adhere to the same set of ethics. The vast majority of answer affirmed that there was no difference between them ( $n = 11$ ), whereas some respondents saw some differences ( $n = 3$ ). A few respondents also claimed that ethics either did not exist or were not needed ( $n = 3$ ). As one respondent wrote, there is “no need for ethics on the Internet. It's free”. The majority however contended that citizen journalists ought to work according to the same ethics that count for traditional journalists. Those who differed felt that the ethics for citizen journalists were “undefined” or less strict, leaving more freedom to them. As one respondent phrased it, “ethics of balance and fairness should apply, but in some cases there's no need for that balance and that's what citizen journalism benefits from.”

Apart from the question what ethics journalists ought to live up to, respondents voiced perceptions on actual ethical or unethical behaviour. They report shortcomings on both sides; as one respondent wrote, “citizen journalists do not realize they have that responsibility, because they do not even know it exists. Some journalists are just in a hurry to be published and get paid, worry about ethics is the last thing on their mind.” While it was generally acknowledged that citizen journalists might not be trained in journalistic ethics, traditional journalists were seen as being at least equally at fault; one respondent ever claimed that “traditional journalists, although professional trained, are generally more unethical and biased than bloggers who usually disclose their position up front.”

## **6.8 Discussion**

Participants were convinced as shown on Table 6.1 that they were citizen journalists. Their involvement in citizen journalism largely involved activities working as media players digitally. Interestingly, the majority of them did not consider themselves media players. While some of them openly consider themselves, “journalists” they do not noticeably work as journalists per se, but they supply information to blogs and several other online platforms. The participants admitted to having jobs outside the media landscape. They however shared the sense of responsibility, which is a key reference point here because one of the main criticisms that citizen journalism is facing worldwide

comes from the fact that unlike trained journalism professionals, they do not ethically behave or believe in disseminating information responsibly. It is very important to note that being responsible in an uncontrolled, free-for-all digital world is a difficult undertaking. Even worse, it is not possible to maintain a watchful eye on everything that is disseminated online. However, when citizen journalists openly declare their allegiance to ethics, it is notably important because it shows their clear intentions despite the fact that it may be very difficult to probe the extent to which they act responsibly.

What drives these citizen journalists to act socially responsible? Most of them do not use their real names when they write their stories so what would be their main motivation in ensuring fairness? Culture plays a role in all of this. Being socially responsible is one expectation that these citizens may have in a bid to avoid direct confrontations with officials. In countries where fear is a major issue for professional journalists, citizen journalists may also be concerned that should their identities be known, they may be thrown in jail or face arrests. Draconian media laws force citizen journalists into submission. They know that offending authorities could trigger problems. To do away with possibilities of offending officials, they choose to act responsibly. Lack of enhanced accessibility to the Internet could also come in as a strong factor influencing their eagerness to act responsibly. Most of the citizen journalists access the Internet in cafes, which are expensive. Considering most of them are not paid for their services, it is difficult to expect them to spend longer periods on the Internet. In fact most of them write their stories and then only get access to the Internet for sending or publishing them since Internet costs are so prohibitive.

Analysed through the perspective of the 'four theories of press', it is clear that African citizen journalists align themselves with the ethics of social responsibility. For most of the citizen journalists in our sample, informing their readers and the public is the main motivation for their work. They object to authoritarian tendencies and government regulation of social media. Nevertheless, our findings on practical journalism ethics are less clear. While most respondents claim that citizen journalists ought to be objective in

their reporting and align with traditional journalism ethics, our quantitative findings on questions of attribution and objectivity are less clear.

When interpreted in light of the behavioural requirements for a strong public sphere, it seems that the unwritten ethical codes of conduct of online journalists and bloggers (at least partially) contribute to a stronger public sphere. In the African context, arguably the most important challenge to a public sphere is that of the free press. While infractions against freedom of expression are rampant in many African countries, the Internet has remained mostly free of censorship.<sup>397</sup> Indeed, our data show that African online journalists and bloggers are critical of government regulation and authoritarian tendencies. Moreover, some of our respondents seemed particularly motivated to bring out truth, highlight different perspectives to a story, and bring about justice, which shows they are not afraid to bring up issues outside the boundaries of the dominant discourse. A particular question is whether the ethical norms of citizen journalists align with the values of a rational-critical debate, which is supposed to prevail in a strong public sphere. Bosch has seriously questioned whether online debates live up to this value, comparing them to a “barroom brawl”.<sup>398</sup> Many of our participants responded that citizen journalists, just as traditional ones, ought to be objective in their reporting, although some pointed out that in practice, this value is often not adhered to. Since our quantitative data also does not yield a significant preference for objectivity in reporting, further research will be needed to identify how citizen journalists in Africa conceptualise and value objectivity.

Linked to the rational-critical debate in the networked public sphere is also the notion of many-to-many communication, or interactivity. Kuhn has argued that conceptualisations of citizen journalism ethics along the lines of traditional journalism ethics, which are based on one-to-many publishing, miss an important factor that sets apart digitally networked media. Indeed, citizen journalism outlets are often also used as

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<sup>397</sup> Simon Columbus & Rebekah Heacock, *Internet Access in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, forthcoming.

<sup>398</sup> Tanya Bosch, Digital journalism and online public spheres in South Africa. *Communicatio*, Vol. 36 No.2, 2010 265-275.

“spaces for discussion”.<sup>399</sup> However, most of our respondents emphasise informing citizens as their main goal, whereas engagement and discussion with their readers are hardly mentioned. There was no significant finding on the need to link to other sources, which would contribute to the discourse in social media. Implicit in the aim of informing others is a notion of a passive “reader” rather than a “prosumer”, for whom reading and writing are one process.<sup>400</sup> This passivity is hard to align with the notion of a public sphere that is open to involvement from all.

If anything, the networked public sphere is still emerging in Africa. Although advancements have been made, Internet usage is still low, and citizen journalists are few. We find that those who perceive themselves as citizen journalists are motivated by a sense of social responsibility and the wish to inform others. Despite criticisms, both in the literature and from citizen journalists themselves, most value journalistic ethics. The sense of social responsibility displayed by citizen journalists fosters the emerging networked public sphere, which builds upon rational-critical debate. Although barriers of access remain, the values held by the subjects of this study support such a debate. Further research will have to investigate to what degrees these beliefs translate into ethical practices.

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399 Ethan Zuckerman, *Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis*. In S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187–196.

400 Morgan Currie, *Felix Stalder: free culture vs. Culture flatrates*, Institute for Network Cultures, 2010, <<http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/weblog/2010/11/04/felix-stalder-free-culture-vs-cultural-flatrates/>>. Accessed 17 May 2012

## 7 EMERGING PATTERNS IN CITIZEN JOURNALISM

Parts of this chapter based on

Mutsvairo Bruce, Columbus Simon. (2012). “Emerging patterns and trends in Citizen Journalism in Africa: A case of Zimbabwe.” *Central European Journal of Communication* Vol. 5, No. 1 (8), p. 23-37.

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter tries to explore the current trends in citizen journalism in Africa. A diverse range of citizen media has emerged in sub-Sahara Africa, though it is still less obvious than in the Western media landscape which has been radically altered by digital technologies. This research aims to identify emerging patterns in Africa, especially Zimbabwe, through in-depth and focus-group interviews with selected experts and citizen journalists, as well as through a review of the existing body of research. The research hopes to establish that digital nonprofessionals equipped with new technologies provide a powerful counter-narrative to the state-controlled professional media, even though they are still restricted to a subset of African countries.

Citizen journalism is a relatively new phenomenon even in developed countries, where according to Allan the term has only come into use since the mid-2000s;<sup>401</sup> this is truer still for Africa. The boundaries of citizen journalism are not yet clearly drawn, but the term is frequently used to denote non-professional, amateur publication of news items.<sup>402</sup> Often, the reporters are “incidental journalists” witnessing and capturing exceptional events.<sup>403</sup> As Allan argues, citizen journalism thus plays a particular role in crisis reporting.<sup>404</sup> Benkler argues that citizen journalism is a phenomenon of the emergence of a “networked public sphere” based on digitally networked technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones.<sup>405</sup> In the networked public sphere, “commons-based peer production”, of which citizen journalism is a form, is enabled by two shifts in communication technology, writes Benkler: “The first element is the shift from a hub-

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401 Stuart Allan, ‘Histories of Citizen Journalism’ in S Allan & Einar Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009) pp. 17-31.

402     *ibid.*, p. 18.

403     *ibid.*, p. 21.

404     *ibid.*

405 Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006).

and-spoke architecture with unidirectional links to the end points in the mass media, to distributed architecture with multidirectional connections among all nodes in the networked information environment. The second is the practical elimination of communications costs as a barrier to speaking across associational boundaries.”<sup>406</sup> That is, digitally networked technologies allow people to become their own broadcasters and to reach unprecedented audiences at low costs.

Citizen journalism in Africa has so far attracted the least attention from researchers in comparison to the study of print and broadcasting journalism elsewhere. A growing body of relevant research has emerged over the last three years, however. Most of these are descriptive case studies, which show that a generally accepted theory of citizen journalism has not yet been developed, and even less so for Africa. However, some authors such as Banda,<sup>407</sup> as well as Goldstein and Rotich,<sup>408</sup> provide useful normative frameworks for the analysis of citizen journalism specifically in an African context. Most case studies chronicle single incidents of citizen journalism around exceptional events, such as the 2007-08 post-election crisis in Kenya,<sup>409</sup> whereas there are only few studies concerned with everyday citizen journalism, and no long-term studies. At the current state of research, three emerging foci can be discerned: studies which are concerned with the relationship between citizen journalism and democracy;<sup>410</sup> research into the interaction of conventional and citizen journalism;<sup>411</sup> and studies on the representation of Africa in the global media sphere.<sup>412</sup>

Media regulation and access to ICTs shape the environment for citizen journalism. In Zimbabwe, freedom of expression is highly restricted. Until recently, there were no

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406 Ibid, p. 212.

407 Frankson Banda, *Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa*, Highway Africa, Grahamstown, South Africa, 2010.

408 J Goldstein & J Rotich, 'Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007-08 Post-Election Crisis', working paper, Berkman Center for Internet & Society, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: 2008) [http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Goldstein&Rotich\\_Digitally\\_Networked\\_Technology\\_Kenyas\\_Crisis.pdf](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/Goldstein&Rotich_Digitally_Networked_Technology_Kenyas_Crisis.pdf), accessed 1 July 2011.

409 Maarit Mäkinen & Mary Kuira, 'Social Media and Postelection Crisis in Kenya', *The International Journal*

of Press/Politics, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2008) pp. 328-335; Goldstein & Rotich; E Zuckerman, 'Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis' in S Allan & E Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009) pp. 187-196.

410 Banda; Goldstein & Rotich; Mäkinen & Kuira; Zuckerman; D Moyo, 'Citizen Journalism and the Parallel Market of Information in Zimbabwe's 2008 Election', *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2009) pp. 551-567.

411 V Oteku, G de Bastion, R Schütz & G Bierhals, 'From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View', working paper, New Thinking Communications (Berlin, 2010).

412 Melissa Wall, 'Africa on YouTube: Musicians, Tourists, Missionaries and Aid Workers', *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 71, No. 5 (2009) pp. 393-407.

independent newspapers or broadcasters, and journalists often faced repression. Foreign broadcasts were frequently jammed.<sup>413</sup> However, the telecommunications market has been liberalised, allowing several private ISPs to operate in the country. As a consequence, Zimbabwe has one of the highest Internet penetration rates on the continent, at 11.5 percent of the population.<sup>414</sup> However, in 2009, there were only 100,000 fixed Internet subscriptions, fewer than one per 100 inhabitants.<sup>415</sup> About a quarter of these subscriptions provided broadband access.<sup>416</sup> At 60 percent in 2010, the rate of mobile phone subscriptions is comparable to other countries in the region.<sup>417</sup> All operators now offer mobile broadband, and its use is growing rapidly, according to a 2010 Opera study.<sup>418</sup> Irrespective of the model, Internet connections are still extremely slow, with broadband being capped at 256kbps. While offline media are heavily censored, the OpenNet Initiative has found no evidence of Internet filtering in Zimbabwe.<sup>419</sup>

Citizen journalism often happens when amateur or untrained journalists engage in journalistic practice, a mission that often involves sourcing, interviewing, witnessing, writing and reporting news. The assumption and viewpoint that trained journalists often fail to tell people's real stories certainly has contributed to the rise of participatory journalism, whose presence has also been sustained by the consequent emergence of new media technologies. Citizen journalism, conclude Bowman and Willis, seeks to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information.<sup>420</sup> That's not always the case. Media scholars have questioned the transparency and objectivity of citizen-generated content. In turn, activists argue that mainstream media outlets, which

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413 OpenNet Initiative, 'Zimbabwe', [web page] (2009) <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/zimbabwe>, accessed 30 July 2011.

414 International Telecommunications Union, 'Internet users.', ITU [web document] (2011) <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/InternetUsersPercentage00-10.xls>, accessed 28 July 2011.

415 International Telecommunications Union, 'Fixed Internet subscriptions', ITU [web document] (2011) <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/FixedInternetSubscriptions00-10.xls>, accessed 28 July 2011.

416 International Telecommunications Union, 'Fixed broadband subscriptions', ITU [web document] (2011) <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/FixedBroadbandSubscriptions00-10.xls>, accessed 28 July 2011.

417 International Telecommunications Union, 'Mobile cellular subscriptions', ITU [web document] (2011) <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/MobileCellularSubscriptions00-10.xls>, accessed 28 July 2011.

418 Jon von Tetzchner, 'State of the Mobile Web, December 2010', Opera, [web page] (2010) <http://www.opera.com/smw/2010/12/>, accessed 29 July 2011.

419 OpenNet Initiative, 'Zimbabwe', [web page] (2009) <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/zimbabwe>, accessed 30 July 2011.

420 Shane Bowman & Chris Willis, *We Media: How Audiences are Shaping the Future of News and Information*, The Media Center at the American Press Institute, (Reston, Virginia: Media Center, 2003).

over the years have been stricken by reporting scandals and fraud, have failed to meet that target as well. This only spurs the debate: What exactly is real journalism? When anyone can post 'news,' who should be trusted as the dependable flag-bearer of competent and reliable news? This is a global debate that has not excluded Africa.

This chapter is intended to identify trends and developments in African citizen journalism. A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to incorporate the state of research on citizen journalism in sub-Saharan Africa. From the case studies provided, dominant trends and developments in African citizen journalism are identified. Furthermore, to establish a general understanding of the current state of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe, snapshot in-depth and focus group interviews were conducted with up to 50 Facebook account-holders, bloggers and online activists living in the country. Those interviewed included university students and graduates, university lecturers, vendors, informal traders, bus drivers and politicians.

In a focus group interview, a small number of people sit together to discuss the topic of interest. For the purpose of this research, the group size was deliberately small to avoid any possibilities of participant members feeling intimidated. The idea was to get them to speak and express their opinions freely. Just as with in-depth interviews, the discussion was tape-recorded, then transcribed and analysed. Krueger and Casey say the researcher is supposed to listen not just to the content of focus group discussions, but also for emotions, ironies, contradictions and tensions.<sup>421</sup> Denzin and Lincoln state that focus groups apply to a situation whereby the interviewer asks group participants very specific questions about a topic having already done considerable research about it.<sup>422</sup> In our case, in-depth interviews were the primary source-gathering data before we engaged in focus-group interviews.

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<sup>421</sup> Richard Krueger & Mary Anne Casey, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, (3rd edn; Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000).

<sup>422</sup> Norman Denzin & Yvonna Lincoln. 'Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research', in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1994) 1-17.



Of particular interest to this research are semi-structured interviews, which collect qualitative data by setting up a two-way, communication-based interview with the respondents, giving them enough time and scope to reveal their opinions. According to Christa Wessel, Fredric Weymann and Cord Spreckelsen, semi-structured interviews signify two corresponding aspects: (a) the interviewer is aware of the topics and (b) the interviewee has the opportunity to talk freely on a certain point. The use of semi-structured interviews was preferred largely because of their ability to get the respondent's opinion through the use of open-ended questions.<sup>423</sup> In-depth interviews are used in situations where one is eager to learn about the perspectives of individuals, as opposed to, for example, group norms of a community, for which focus groups are more appropriate.<sup>424</sup> While in both instances a researcher is keen on deeply exploring the respondent's point of view, feelings and perspectives, the two are separated by definition. With in-depth interviews, one person – or sometimes two – will be interviewed at a time, while focus groups look at group dynamics. The type of interview one uses provides another important distinction between the two. Whereas conducting a telephone interview is a possibility for in-depth interviews, it might be a difficult method to apply in focus groups.

In-depth interviews provide an ultimate model for investigating personal, sensitive and confidential information, as stated by Punch.<sup>425</sup> In-depth interviews therefore bring in flexibility that one may not find in focus groups. More time needs to be invested to bring a group of 10 people together than just talking to a single person. Moreover, dealing with a group interview may need a skilled moderator or interviewer as tensions may run high, especially if conflict groups are put together. In-depth interviews are more personalised and therefore perhaps easier to handle for a less experienced researcher, who only has to focus on the person being interviewed. From our experience, there are more commonalities between the two. This may be in their design as well as execution. The role of the researcher is unchanged in both methodologies. The researcher engages with

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<sup>423</sup> Christa. Weßel, Frédéric Weymann, Cord Spreckelsen ., Streamlining Qualitative Research Methods for Medical Informatics - A Methodological Approach in Engelbrecht R, Hasman A (ed.), European Notes in Medical Informatics. Ubiquity: Technologies for Better Health in Aging Societies (2006) pp. 371-376.

<sup>424</sup> Natasha Mack, Cynthia. Woodson, Kathleen MacQueen, Greg Guest, and Emily. Namey, Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide FLI (2005).

<sup>425</sup> Keith Punch, Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2005).

participants, posing questions in a neutral manner and listening attentively to what is being said and possibly asking follow-up questions. The researcher therefore has to acknowledge that his role is that of a moderator while the interviewees are experts.

Finding a sample that exhaustively represents the entire population is a problem found in both in-depth interviews and focus groups. While it is our responsibility to clearly spell out the target groups of people to be interviewed and explain reasons for their inclusion, we always expect observers to question the representativeness of the sampling. For example, how does talking to 50 people represent the views of the entire nation? Thus the problem related to sampling affects both methodologies. Moreover, one has to transcribe all data obtained from the interviews, which is a time-consuming process of transforming the oral speech into written text. Justifying tape-recording and transcribing the data, Bryman argues that qualitative researchers do not just need to focus on what people say but also in the way in which they say it.<sup>426</sup> Verbatim transcription means everything recorded in the transcript is typed up, including coughing or pauses. Transcribing the interview is important as other interviewees may request to see the interview. However, in both instances confidentiality needs to be respected.

## **7.2 Citizen Journalism in sub-Saharan Africa**

Banda's eponymous book on citizen journalism and democracy in Africa provides a first exploration of citizen journalism as a phenomenon that can be found across the continent. The author focuses mostly on institutionalised citizen journalism, i.e. platforms provided by media companies or non-governmental organisations. Drawing on case studies from South Africa, Eastern (Kenya and Uganda) and Western Africa (Nigeria and Ghana), as well as the Maghreb (Algeria), Banda examines five questions related to citizen journalism in Africa: its context, technological basis, uptake by conventional media, financial viability, and democratic value. He places citizen journalism in a context defined by the globalisation of democratization and an increasingly deregulated, over-

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<sup>426</sup> Allan. Bryman, *Interviewing in qualitative research: Social Research Methods*, (2nd edn.; Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 321.

commercialised media landscape, as well as the "rapid emergence and adoption" of novel ICTs.<sup>427</sup>

As Banda writes, "citizen journalism thrives in a context of democratic pluralism", where freedom of expression and access to information are guaranteed; value that can be encoded in both legislative and technological architecture. This contextualisation reflects the author's view that citizen journalism is both shaping and shaped by technology,<sup>428</sup> in that it incorporates social and technological impacts on the emergence of citizen journalism. Nevertheless, he asserts that citizen journalism is a "product" of novel technologies, which have, in part, also shaped its form; for example, social media have facilitated "dialogical communication".<sup>429</sup> Some conventional media have begun to take up such formerly alien practices from citizen journalism, e.g. in the *South African Mail* and *Guardian's* "Thought Leader" blog which is open for citizen contributors. Banda finds that these institutional forms of citizen journalism – where platforms are provided, and sometimes edited, by a commercial media company or non-governmental organisation – are most prevalent in Africa, more so than non-institutional citizen journalism. Although a business model for such platforms is not yet in sight, Banda asserts that some are founded with commercial considerations in mind; others, however, are meant to promote public debate. In the absence of financial viability, Banda argues that their sustainability should be understood in terms of "democratic sustainability": a media supported by the willingness of citizens to take up communicative spaces afforded by ICT. Citizen journalism promotes democratic citizenship through citizen participation in media production and broader public affairs, and it increases media plurality.<sup>430</sup> In this view taken by Banda, citizen journalism and democracy are interrelated and facilitate each other.

Kenya's 2007-08 post-election crisis, which was marked by widespread riots and a media shut-down, has been the subject of several case studies. Banda and Mäkinen and Kuira both provide short, descriptive accounts, as does Zuckerman. A concurring, but

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427 Frankson Banda, *Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa*, Highway Africa, Grahamstown, South Africa, 2010, pp. 7-9.

428 *ibid.*, pp. 35-41.

429 *ibid.*, p. 73.

430 *ibid.*, p. 75.

theoretically more sophisticated case study is provided by Goldstein and Rotich. They draw on the concept of the networked public sphere put forward by Benkler, which describes two shifts in mass communication enabled by digitally networked communication technologies; namely towards many-to-many communication at costs of near zero, or, in the terms of Goldstein and Rotich, the emergence of tools that "allow us to become our own broadcasters and reach large numbers of people in unprecedented ways at trivial cost".<sup>431</sup> It is worth noting that the application of Benkler's theories to the African context has been criticised as being oblivious to the lack of Internet access still prevalent on the continent.<sup>432</sup>

Within this theoretical framework, Goldstein and Rotich analyse a threefold use of digitally networked technologies during the crisis: of SMS to spread violence, of blogs to provide a counter-narrative to conventional media, and of maps to document and draw awareness to human rights violations.<sup>433</sup> In all of these media, however, the authors find tensions between "civic" and "predatory" impulses.<sup>434</sup> SMS calling for ethnic violence were spread after the announcement of election results on January 1, 2008, drawing on the capacities of bulk SMS tools and simple forwarding mechanisms. Goldstein and Rotich find SMS to be "remarkably useful for organizing this type of explicit, systematic, and publicly organized campaign of mob violence".<sup>435</sup> As Zuckerman reports, the Kenyan government reacted by disabling bulk SMS tools and asking mobile network providers to send out messages calling for peaceful behaviour.<sup>436</sup>

Kenyan bloggers covered the election process as citizen journalists, initially without anticipating the subsequent violence.<sup>437</sup> As Goldstein and Rotich point out, the country

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431 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011 , p. 3.

432 Marion. Walton, 'Mobilizing African Publics', Information Technologies & International Development, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2011) pp. 47-50.

433 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011 p. 3.

434 Larry Diamond, 'Civic Communities and Predatory Societies', delivered at Culture Matters: A Forum on Business, Education, and Training Professionals (Washington D.C., 2001)

435 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011 , p. 4.

436 Ethan Zuckerman, Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis. In S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187–196. , pp. 194.

437 *ibid.*, pp. 189-191.

has one of the most active blogospheres in Africa.<sup>438</sup> When the government ordered a ban on live broadcasts, these bloggers intensified their efforts, actively researching incidents of violence. Zuckerman reports that some bloggers published articles written by guest authors, some of whom were entirely new to the medium.<sup>439</sup> Bloggers published information on incidents that were not covered by conventional media, for instance concerning the involvement of foreign troops, thus filling the gap in coverage left by newspapers and radio stations either censored or self-censoring under pressure from the government.<sup>440</sup> During the time of the crisis, web traffic from Kenya vastly increased, and bloggers reached further audiences when radio stations began to relay their articles.<sup>441</sup> Besides their importance as sources of news and commentary, blogs – through their comment sections – also became "spaces for discussion".<sup>442</sup> Among the incidents reported by bloggers were human rights violations and their consequences, such as refugee movements.

During the crisis, Ushahidi was developed as a tool to map such incidents. The software links Google Maps with various means of reporting incidents to be displayed on the map, including via SMS, email, and Twitter. Zuckerman argues that Ushahidi is best understood as "a form of collaborative citizen journalism", in which reports from vastly dispersed and independent witnesses are pulled together on a central platform.<sup>443</sup> Goldstein and Rotich understand the platform in Benkler's terms of "commons-based peer production", allowing a new form of cooperation as it has "significantly lowered the cost of participating in a global civic campaign from anywhere on the planet with only a mobile phone signal".<sup>444</sup> Goldstein and Rotich have concluded that the emergence of a networked public sphere in Africa is, unlike in Western democracies, not necessarily

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438 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011 , p. 8.

439 Ethan Zuckerman, *Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis*. In S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187–196. p. 191.

440 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011 , p. 8.

441 *ibid.*

442 Ethan Zuckerman, *Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis*. In S. Allan & E. Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187–196, p. 195.

443 *ibid.*, p. 192.

444 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011 pp. 6-7.

linked to "civic" impulses; instead, digitally networked technologies are more likely to be utilised to promote violence as well as to provide counter-narratives to the stories of oft-censored conventional media, and to more easily collect reports from witnesses of human rights violations.<sup>445</sup>

Moyo provides an analysis of citizen journalism during another election aftermath, the delayed announcement of election results following Zimbabwe's general elections in 2008. The election had been preceded by "intimidation, torture and violence" from long-term dictator Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF. Moyo posits that as government and electoral commission failed to provide information about the outcomes of the hotly contested election, citizen journalism gave rise to a "parallel market of information".<sup>446</sup> This "information gap provided fertile ground for various alternative forms of communication to take centre stage", feeding on and from "an increasingly hungry rumor mill". As Moyo argues, the parallel market of information "became the dominant source of a mix of information and disinformation". However, while being "often replete with supposition, speculation and fiction",<sup>447</sup> this market nevertheless filled the information gap and enabled citizens to discuss the situation and to "engage in different scenario building and conjecture".<sup>448</sup>

Moyo defines citizen journalism broadly, to include blogs, emails, and SMS, arguing that "these are communications meant for dissemination to many (often unknown) recipients".<sup>449</sup> The inclusion of SMS also reflects the relative prevalence of mobile telephony over Internet usage in Zimbabwe,<sup>450</sup> a factor which is similarly true for all of sub-Saharan Africa. That notwithstanding, Moyo explicitly points out that definitions of citizen journalism grounded in "the idea of equal access to these new technologies of freedom [i.e. digitally networked communications technologies] [...] become[s] particularly problematic in the African context, where diffusion of these technologies has

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445     ibid., p. 9.

446     Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567., p. 552.

447     ibid p. 553.

448     Ibid, pp. 553.

449     ibid., pp. 555.

450     ibid.

been characteristically slow and unequal".<sup>451</sup> However, while noting Zimbabwe's relatively low Internet penetration as an obstacle to blogs gaining relevance, Moyo also points out high growth rates in Internet usage across the African continent.<sup>452</sup>

Mobile phones served to fulfill several information needs during the election aftermath. They enabled people within the country to share information about the situation on the ground with the Diaspora, which in turn relayed news from international media not accessible in Zimbabwe.<sup>453</sup> Mainstream media also utilised SMS and emails to receive information from citizens, in particular in regions inaccessible to journalists for economic or security reasons.<sup>454</sup> However, Moyo asserts that "most of the shared text messages [...] were in the form of jokes", which served as "discreetly packaged news" where outspoken criticism of the government could be dangerous, and provided political commentary.<sup>455</sup> In addition, SMS were used to inform fellow citizens about ongoing events, including vote counts, often in connection with the request to forward the information, according to Moyo "an emerging critical feature of citizen journalism" as it "enables a viral spread of information".<sup>456</sup>

According to Moyo, Zimbabwe's blogosphere has a multifold bridging function. While bloggers on the ground provide eyewitness accounts, those in the Diaspora "both amplify and comment" these reports. In addition, blogs also link traditional and citizen journalists;<sup>457</sup> in many cases, bloggers break stories that go unreported by mainstream media.<sup>458</sup> Moyo makes a distinction between the roles played by personal and institutional blogs during the election aftermath.<sup>459</sup> Personal blogs relayed "personal experiences, opinions and emotions", but their authors also acted as "monitorial citizens".<sup>460</sup> Moyo notes that when relaying information, this was presented as unverified, i.e. in a style

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451     *ibid.*, pp. 554-555.

452     *ibid.*, p. 559.

453     *ibid.*, p. 556.

454     *ibid.*, p. 556-557.

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456     *ibid.*, p. 559.

457     *ibid.*

458     *ibid.*, p. 560.

459     *ibid.*

460     *ibid.*; cf. M. Schudson, *The Good Citizen: a history of American civil life* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1998.)

suggesting "that the readers should do their own cross-checking and verification".<sup>461</sup> In line with this observation, institutional blogs written by professional journalists provided them "with the opportunity to temporarily escape from the institutional formalities and constraints placed by mainstream media and become a citizen journalist".<sup>462</sup> However, Moyo notes that exactly because citizen journalism is not bound to any particular ethics or set of rules, it "could worsen things by spreading untruths and half-truths which could lead to panic and disorder".<sup>463</sup>

A study focussed on the roles taken by conventional and citizen journalism comes from Oteku et al. The authors analysed media reports on Kenya's 2010 constitutional referendum, which in contrast to the 2007 election remained peaceful; the study is thus interesting because it is less prone to hindsight bias as retrospective analyses of incidents of outstanding citizen journalism. Oteku et al. find that in the presence of extensive news coverage from conventional media, citizen journalists played a merely complementary and less prominent role than in 2007-08.<sup>464</sup> Nevertheless, blogs and microblogs were used to report the voting process, e.g. using Twitter hashtags such as Kenya Decides.<sup>465</sup> An Ushahidi-based platform, Ushaguzi, was employed by a civil society organisation to compile and map reports from social media users.<sup>466</sup> The study notes in particular that "mobile services seem to have become an established part of Kenya's new media system".<sup>467</sup> The authors group these uses into three categories, namely personal expression, provision of background information, and aggregation of news published by other media.<sup>468</sup> The latter two uses, in particular, involved "cross-linking to other media",<sup>469</sup> thus supporting the thesis that citizen journalism has become "an integrated part of the media system".<sup>470</sup>

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461 Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567., p. 561.

462 *ibid.*, p. 562.

463 *ibid.*

464 Oteku, V., de Bastion, G., Schütz, R., & Bierhals, G. (2010). From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View. Working paper, *Newthinking communications* p. 11.

465 *ibid.*, p. 9.

466 *ibid.*

467 *ibid.*, p. 11.

468 *ibid.*

469 *ibid.*

470 *ibid.*, p. 8.



Wall has studied the representation of Kenya and Ghana on the video-sharing platform YouTube. Her findings dispute claims of diminished boundaries in the digitally networked public sphere.<sup>471</sup> The study examines videos uploaded on YouTube and tagged as dealing with Kenya or Ghana in 2007 and finds only several hundred such videos;<sup>472</sup> these numbers can be expected to be much higher today. Wall finds that most of the videos were posted by Westerners, and that videos posted by Westerners on average were viewed more often than those posted by people in Africa or by Africans in the Diaspora.<sup>473</sup> Entertainment, in particular music, and tourist experiences were the most common contents, each making up about one-third of the videos; further categories included aid work, religious contents, news, and commercials.<sup>474</sup> With regard to citizen journalism, the news category, which includes videos of generally informational content, is of particular interest. This category constituted a minor share of the videos, 4 percent in Kenya and 10 percent in Ghana.<sup>475</sup> Most of these videos were produced by non-African television channels, only one each was from Kenyan and Ghanaian television, and no videos made by citizen journalists are mentioned.<sup>476</sup>

Wall's analysis builds on post-colonial studies which understand Africa's representation as constructed by Western observers who "employ their gaze to create an Other", which "has enabled them to exercise dominion over Africa for centuries".<sup>477</sup> She notes a discussion on the possible opportunity provided by new media for Africans to create and distribute representations of the continent themselves, although marred by unequal access to information and communications technology.<sup>478</sup> However, Wall concludes that her findings seem "to suggest that these new technologies and new global information channels will continue to support Western dominance", although African news producers might gain access to Western audiences in the future.<sup>479</sup> She writes that "YouTube enables the average westerner in particular to become a chronicler of other peoples in faraway lands just as travelers and missionaries 'discovered' Africa in previous

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471 Melissa Wall, *Africa on YouTube: Musicians, Tourists, Missionaries and Aid Workers*, *International Communication Gazette* 71/9 (2009) 393–407 p. 393.

472 *ibid.*, pp. 395-396.

473 *ibid.*, pp. 398-399.

474 *ibid.*, p. 400.

475 *ibid.*, p. 404.

476 *ibid.*

477 *ibid.*, p. 394.

478 *ibid.*, p. 395.

479 *ibid.*, p. 404.

centuries", thus not disrupting the representation of Africa in the media. Rather, "age-old inequities still exist and still allow westerners to dominate", and YouTube might even allow more of them to do so.<sup>480</sup>

### **7.3 Participatory Journalism in Africa: Issues at stake**

Within any given context, citizen journalism aims to strengthen people's use of home-grown media ideas to increase quality information dissemination capacity using readily available multiple digital platforms. The Internet is not available to every sub-Saharan African. When it is available, it is normally accessed in urban areas, leaving rural residents isolated from active and potential participation. For Clemencia Rodriguez, independent media enable ordinary citizens to become politically empowered.<sup>481</sup> However, activists' ability to use new media technologies to empower citizens through publication, lobbying, networking and knowledge-sharing within their particular constituencies is often impinged by the fact that they either have no Internet access or lack the required skills. Anti-West African regimes, keen to maintain control of the media, are suspicious of the NGOs that normally provide ICT training. They keep a close eye on these activists, further deterring others from participating. Moreover, participants have to work in an environment where there is a lack of equipment, inadequate infrastructure and few resources.

Traditionalists are worried that citizen journalists are not true journalists. Professionalism is central to the success of any media outlet, which is why journalism training, not just in Africa, is encouraged. Citizen journalists normally do not worry about ethics. The problems do not end there. The use of colonial languages also means that vernacular languages are largely ignored. More than 80 percent of South Africans consider English their second language, and their inability to work in their native language curtails their activity. This reality is often ignored by Western groups willing to fund citizen journalism initiatives. Traditional media also have disparaged citizen journalists as lacking objectivity or quality. Despite the criticism, new media players have

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<sup>480</sup>     ibid., p. 405.

<sup>481</sup> Clemencia. Rodríguez, *Civil Society and Citizens Media: Peace Architects for the New Millennium*, In *Redeveloping Communication for Social Change: Theory, Practice, Power* (ed.) Karin Wilkins (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) pp. 147-160.

completely changed the rules of the game. In fact, several traditional media outlets including CNN, BBC and *New York Times* have occasionally used citizen journalists as sources, further underlining their importance.

Although the body of research on citizen journalism remains small, it reveals several trends in both technology use and social practices. Participation in citizen journalism remains dependent on access to information and communications technology, in particular for Africans.<sup>482</sup> Accordingly, citizen journalists can be thought of as being predominantly better-off, more highly educated, and living in urban areas,<sup>483</sup> although there is need for a dedicated demographic study to support this assumption. However, mobile phones have been noted as a key technology for citizen journalists in Africa,<sup>484</sup> and with growing mobile phone adoption, more and more Africans become technologically enabled to become reporters. That notwithstanding, at the moment citizen journalists are often long-term ICT users who have extensive experience with social media.<sup>485</sup>

Citizen media outlets, such as blogs and Twitter, but also mass SMS and emails, have been found to be utilised in multifaceted ways. Citizen journalists are relaying critical information, in particular in the absence of reports from conventional media.<sup>486</sup> This can involve dedicated research to publicise issues ignored or suppressed by mainstream media.<sup>487</sup> However, this "parallel market of information" can be fraught with falsehoods and uncertainty, and verification will often be left to the reader.<sup>488</sup> In line with the perception of citizen journalism as providing a more personal perspective, punditry has been noted as a regular feature of citizen journalism.<sup>489</sup> Several authors have also noted

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482 Marion Walton, 'Mobilizing African Publics', *Information Technologies & International Development*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2011) pp. 47-50..

483 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011

484 ibid

485 ibid

486 ibid

487 ibid

488 Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567.

489 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007–2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011

the expression of emotions as a prevalent use, for instance through political jokes.<sup>490</sup> Blogs and fora, in particular, have also been turned into "spaces for discussion",<sup>491</sup> which can connect those in the country with the Diaspora.<sup>492</sup>

Citizen journalism takes place counter,<sup>493</sup> parallel to,<sup>494</sup> and interlinked with<sup>495</sup> mainstream journalism. Several authors note a growing convergence between conventional and citizen journalism. Bloggers and microbloggers link to and relay news stories published by online editions of newspapers,<sup>496</sup> but conventional media also take up leads from citizens, for example those relayed by SMS.<sup>497</sup> In Kenya, newspapers have even occasionally been found to have reprinted blog articles without permission.<sup>498</sup> Some media publishers have integrated tools and practices from citizen journalism into their portfolios, such as having journalists write blogs in a less formal tone, or providing platforms for non-journalists to report stories.<sup>499</sup> However, these forms of institutional citizen journalism<sup>500</sup> remain exceptions.

Although citizen journalism is linked to democratization and empowerment,<sup>501</sup> research has shied away from technological determinism, rather pointing out different utilizations of the underlying technologies. Goldstein and Rotich's terminology (borrowed from Diamond) of "civic" and "predatory" impulses that are amplified by digitally networked technologies is particularly helpful to understand this issue. As they show, the tools and practices of citizen journalists have been used both to incite violence and to document it.

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490 Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No.. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567..

491 Ethan Zuckerman, 'Citizen Media and the Kenyan Electoral Crisis. In S. Allan & E.Thorsen (eds.), *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009 pp 187-196

492 Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No.. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567.

493 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007-2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011

494 Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No.. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567.

495 Oteku, V., de Bastion, G., Schütz, R., & Bierhals, G. (2010). From the Birds Eye to the Grassroots View. Working paper, *Newthinking communications*

496 ibid

497 Dumisani Moyo, 'Citizen journalism and the parallel market of information in Zimbabwe's 2008 election, *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 10 No.. 4, 2009, pp. 551-567

498 Joshua Goldstein and Juliana Rotich "Digitally Networked Technology in Kenya's 2007-2008 Post-Election Crisis." The Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. September 2008 <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files> Accessed 10 May 2011

499 Frankson Banda *Citizen Journalism and Democracy in Africa* (Grahamstown, South Africa: Highway Africa, 2006).

500 ibid.

501 ibid.

Similarly, Moyo warns in the absence of any particular ethics, citizen journalism could have adverse effects as it might contribute to the dissemination of untruths fuelling "panic and disorder".

**7.4 Current state of affairs: Zimbabwe**

Facebook pages belonging to the following individuals were studied in April 2011 with the aim of identifying the kind of messages they post and the reactions they get. These individuals were and are still either my “friends” on the social network site or they just did not restrict access to their pages. Evidence from this study showed that religion and sport, especially football, seemed to receive more attention than politics. For example on 18 April, which is the Zimbabwean national independence, you would have expected politically-linked messages to dominate the cyberspace. Instead, 19 posts on this day alone contained the word “God” or were simply direct quotations from the Bible. Participants, including politicians, post religiously-influenced messages, which is not surprising considering Zimbabwe is a deeply conservative Christian nation. Messages posted by journalists such as Chofamba Sithole are almost always politically based. Academics, mostly Alex Magaisa, whose messages almost attract reaction every time he posts, also write politically-charged messages. There is also room for humor though. Jokes targeting and apparently belittling ZANU PF members or Mugabe specifically were also very common. I looked at pages owned by these prominent Zimbabweans. It should be noted that I did not verify whether, for example, a page claiming to be Tsvangirai’s, was indeed his.

**Table 7.1:Facebook posts in the following categories in April 2011**

Politics	Religion	Sport
88	112	95

**Figure 7.1 Prominent Zimbabweans on Facebook**

Morgan Tsvangirai	Leader of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)
Tendai Biti	Minister of Finance
Obert Gutu	Deputy Minister of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs
Walter Mzembi	Minister of Tourism
Welshman Ncebe	Leader of the splinter MDC party
Job Sikhala	Leader of another splinter MDC party
Nelson Chamisa	Minster of ICT technologies
Promise Mkwanzazi	Youth leader of the main MDC party
Abednico Bhebhe	Senior Politician for the main MDC party
Charles Ray	United States Ambassador to Zimbabwe

Chofamba Sithole	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Chris Gande	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Constantine Chimakure	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Barnabas Thondhlana	Prominent Zimbabwean Journalist
Beloved Chiweshe	Civil Society and former student activist
Blessing Zulu	Leading Zimbabwean journalist
Den Moyo	MDC politician and activist
Dorcas Chibanda	Zimbabwean journalist
Douglas Mwonzora	Member of Parliament for the main MDC party
Innocent Gonese	Member of Parliament for the main MDC party
Farai Mungazi	Zimbabwean journalist
Fungai Kanyuchi	Zimbabwean journalist
Gabriel Shumba	Human Rights activist
Alex Magaisa	Zimbabwean academic
Grace Kwinje	Leading MDC politician and activist
Heal Zimbabwe Trust	Human rights activist
Edward Chindori-Chininga	ZANU PF Member of Parliament
Hugo Knoppert	Human rights activist
Innocent Gonese	Member of Parliament for the main MDC party
Isdore Guvamombe	Journalist at <i>The Herald</i>
Kucaca Phulu	Human rights lawyer
Kumbirai Mafunda	Zimbabwean journalist
Mechanic Manyeruke	Prominent gospel singer
Madock Chivasa	Human rights activist
Usain Sibanda	Reverend
Robson Sharuko	Zimbabwean journalist
Mcdonald Lewanika	Human rights activist
MDC Mbare	Constituency Facebook page for Mbare
Mdudusi Mathuthu	Zimbabwean journalist
Miles Tendi	Zimbabwean academic
Moses Mudzwiti	Zimbabwean journalist
Munyaradzi Makoni	Zimbabwean journalist
Obrien Rwafa	Zimbabwean journalist
Okay Machisa	Human rights activist

Zimbabweans buoyed by the easy availability of mobile phones have revolutionised and pioneered a new concept of citizen-led news-gathering and content-sharing responsiveness. Twitter, popular across the globe, has yet to find its ground in Zimbabwe. Facebook, on the other hand, has become increasingly popular. Based on the findings and assessment, it will likely continue to dominate other social network platforms in terms of recognition. With accounts already opened by virtually all sectors of society from vendors to leading politicians, including the president and prime minister, it is safe to conclude that Facebook will continue to increase its popularity among citizens. The key question is: why are people on Facebook and what do they use it for? Interestingly, the majority of these participants (from the interviews) said they used Facebook as a way of knowledge improvement rather than for social purposes. Students said they used Facebook to get updates on course assignments or to ask friends on questions related to their courses while vendors said they used Facebook to stay in touch with relatives and friends abroad. The interviews did not suggest any evidence of political participation

even though this could be because Zimbabwean in general tend not to discuss their political preferences with strangers. While Zimbabwe's repressiveness of free speech is internationally well documented, citizens said they felt more free to share content and openly criticise the status quo digitally than any other way. As noted, an array of politicians has also embraced the social network platform. While I could not independently verify whether a registered account for the president and prime minister were indeed maintained by these political leaders, I confirmed that ministers including David Coltart and Walter Mzembe were active users of Facebook.

Technology has always evaded the poorer and less educated people. Zimbabwe, which has sub-Saharan Africa's highest literacy rate, has made inroads thanks largely to the availability of mobile phone-based Internet. All 50 respondents from the interviews said they used their mobile phones as a way to access to the Internet, with only seven of them using personal laptops as the second option.

Citizen journalists have cashed in on these technological developments. Recent citizen-led accomplishments can be traced to *The Zimbabwean*, a newspaper published in Britain by exiled Zimbabwean editors. The paper's editor, as noted, says most of its content is provided by citizen journalists. As expected, most are not trained as media professionals. The bulk of other online newspapers, independently run by Zimbabwean journalists abroad, use citizens as their main source of news-gathering. The platform offers Zimbabweans a unique opportunity to interact and participate in events that shape their daily lives, thanks largely to new media technologies. To date, there have only been two known arrests made in connection with comments made on Facebook. An arrest warrant was issued against an opposition figure after he commented on his Facebook wall that President Mugabe had died in Singapore where he had allegedly gone for treatment. Another activist was charged with "subverting a constitutional government" after posting a message on Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's Facebook account that "what happened in Egypt is sending shockwaves to dictators around the world." Apart from these two isolated incidents, and based on my participant observation in politically-charged Facebook-based debates for five months, it looks like citizens are at least for

now free to openly express their political and social misgivings online. Activists and general citizens share stories critical of Mugabe and his party on Facebook. These are then followed by comments that denounce political repression. While some participants live abroad, I was able to talk to citizens who claimed they shared their views without any concerns. They used their real names, even though the majority of them said they would not broadcast the same views on TV or Radio. This shows that the adoption of ICTs in Zimbabwe, and potentially in Africa, is giving rise to an emerging reform-based alternative media that encourage, articulate and stimulate public participation.

Given the plethora of rigorous media laws that dominate the print and broadcasting sectors, the blogosphere cannot be ignored as a powerful facet contributing to critical social development and political reports. Civil society-funded and student-driven content of daily, weekly and monthly electronic periodicals, providing comment and debate on issues affecting the country, have been gathering momentum since 2000 at the beginning of the country's political and economic crisis. Since then, activists have put their knowledge of web 2.0 tools to good use on Zimbabwe-centred blogs and weblogs. They are widely shared on social networks with locals as well as millions of Zimbabweans living abroad. In the absence of private newspapers, my interviews with urban and rural dwellers show that blogs are providing an alternative voice. Seeking to fight off what it branded as imperialism, the government enacted harsh media laws in 2002. It expelled foreign reporters who refused to register with the state, and banned private newspapers perceived to be critical of its policies. This only encouraged the growth of the blogosphere. Popular blogs include Kubatana blogs, which largely provides commentary on politics and life in Zimbabwe. Content is drawn from its online community providing a large electronic archive of documents on Zimbabwean issues. It also covers Pambazuka News, which is a Kenya-based multilingual Africa-centred initiative of activists using citizen-generated content to create awareness on citizen rights and freedom.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has identified trends in citizen journalism in sub-Saharan Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular. Participation in citizen journalism remains dependent on access



to information and communications technology, in particular for Africans; but the increasing adoption of mobile phones and, in recent years, mobile Internet services, is lowering this technological barrier. Nevertheless, issues of (media) literacy and economic privilege continue to play a role, which is mirrored in the demographics of citizen journalists, who are mostly middle class, well educated, and living in urban centres. In particular in times of crisis, when reports from conventional media are absent, citizen journalists are relaying critical information; but blogs and microblogs are not merely news platforms, but also means to express emotions and spaces for discussion. Citizen journalism takes place counter, parallel to, and interlinked with conventional journalism. Depending on the situation it can contradict, replace, or amplify mass media narratives. While citizen journalism is often discussed in a context of democratisation and empowerment, the African reality is more complex. The neutral tools of citizen journalism can be used to increase participation in peaceful or in violent action. Several questions remain open at this stage of research. Citizen journalism has for the most part been studied in exceptional instances, when the use of social media in crisis situations rose to the fore. To understand the phenomenon more comprehensively, there is a need for studies on day-to-day citizen journalism in Africa. Furthermore, at the moment, there is no dedicated study on the demographics of citizen journalism in Africa, an issue that calls for quantitative as well as in-depth ethnographic studies. In general, the current body of research covers only a few countries in which citizen journalism seems particularly salient. Studies on other African countries, and indeed non-user studies, will be necessary to complement the picture.

What was important from this study was to show the diverse purposes for which citizens used Facebook. Zimbabweans in the Diaspora tend to post most of the politically-charged messages, confirming a conclusion that I make in chapter 8 that fear is still very much a stumbling block for those wishing to embrace the web for political reasons. Still, it would be wrong to suggest that Zimbabweans in the country are not actively participating politically. The majority of those doing it seem to have an activist background, however. You need to have the laymen on the street also posting political messages on Facebook to be fully convinced that “everyone” is participating. Traditionally-minded people, as

suggested by the number of ZANU PF aligned politicians, still do not think that Facebook is an ideal basis for political engagement. I share this view. You still want to talk to the grandmas in the rural areas who have never heard of Facebook, because in most cases these are the kind of people that vote. The youth – especially those opposed to Mugabe – tend to criticise his leadership but then do not vote because they are “convinced” elections are rigged long before the election day.

## 8 DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

### 8.1 Results overview

This chapter presents an overview as well as reflections and implications of the research's findings. An analysis of these results, which are found in the Appendix, is also given. This chapter looks at the specifics from the content analysis as well, exploring the methodology as well as findings from this part of the research.

### 8.2 Reflections and Implications

Herman Wasserman is keen to remind us of the contested nature of the debate over the efficacy of new media technologies in bringing about social change.<sup>502</sup> When I started conducting my research I was quite convinced that the Zimbabwean Diaspora movement was playing a prominent role in advancing democracy at home. The research results were fairly mixed, however. As a member of this disenchanted Zimbabwean Diaspora, I observed that websites run by Zimbabwean exiles were indeed helping foster political participation. To their credit, these websites are enabling Zimbabwe expatriates to engage in political and social activism. These websites are at the forefront of introducing a completely different and unprecedented information-gathering and information-sharing spectrum. But are they helping boost the number of citizens participating in the country's political processes? Not entirely, according to the findings of my research. You cannot fault the websites or the brains behind them for failing to do their work. There are several reasons why they fall short of achieving their goals, if encouraging the masses to participate in political engagement is one of their aims. Zimbabwe has a unique political context, one that is often misread by people, especially and perhaps mostly, by those who think they have the solutions.

There was a great deal of renewed hope among Mugabe's opponents that the Internet could be a tool to remove him from power and usher in a new era of democracy. For some, the Arab Spring could have been a point of departure to unseat the long-entrenched

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<sup>502</sup> Herman Wasserman Mobile Phones, Popular Media, and Everyday African Democracy: Transmissions and Transgressions, Popular Communication, Vol. 9 No. 2011 pp. 146-158

president. But Mugabe's image in the West in recent years has been one-dimensional, lacking nuance or historical context. Despite his noticeable mistakes, is he the evil caricature often portrayed in the Western media? Possibly not. Does Zimbabwe need democratic changes? Maybe. But then again, what exactly is democracy? As this study has shown, democracy is a contested subject – theoretically discussable, but practically difficult to implement.

From the findings from the interviews, it became clear that Zimbabweans were actively involved in the political process back home. All 50 respondents, for example, acknowledged transmitting and to some extent sharing news with friends and relatives at home. However, not all of them said they had distributed anti-Mugabe views. Two students, who both admitted to having relatives within Mugabe's party for example, said they saw it as useless to relay anti-Mugabe news back home because it would have little impact, since most of their relatives were Mugabe supporters and would vote for him in any case. In Zimbabwe, some respondents admitted being influenced in their voting choices by relatives from abroad, but still chose to vote for a candidate of their own choice. This, therefore, leads us to question whether Mugabe was entirely disadvantaged by the views from the Diaspora. As has already been shown in this study, Mugabe himself has a large following among the Diaspora, contrary to the popular belief that Zimbabweans living abroad exclusively approve of Tsvangirai's policies.

Clearly, new media technologies played a crucial role in selling the image of the opposition party. Some pro-Tsvangirai respondents admitted telling their parents they would stop sending money home if they voted for Mugabe. They said they were convinced Zimbabwe's economy would improve if Tsvangirai took over the leadership, thanks to Western aid that his government presumably would receive. Notably however, six of the 20 respondents interviewed in Zimbabwe said they had planned to vote for Tsvangirai whether they had been advised by relatives and friends abroad or not. This confirms that relaying information to relatives abroad in some cases had a minimal effect on the voting patterns. Still, the Internet offered Tsvangirai an unmatched platform for

political campaigning, considering the state media gave minimal coverage of his political campaign compared to that of Mugabe.

The involvement of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora in the country's political affairs was always going to be there. After all, Zimbabwe is not the only country that has citizens abroad. The need to improve the political situation at home was one of the main answers I got when I asked respondents why they were particularly using new media vices as a way of communicating with those at home. While some were bluntly clear that they were eager to effect regime change, the majority of them said they were not concerned who was the political leader in Harare as long as their families and friends could afford the basics. The regime change agenda purportedly instigated by Western powers has been one of the major bones of contention between President Mugabe and his erstwhile allies in the West. Interestingly, only three respondents suggested that they were seeking regime change in Zimbabwe at all costs, including the possibility of a Western-backed military action. For the rest, a "free and fair" democratic election was the only way to solve the problem even though they expressed reservations that the possibility was slim given the history of violence-led voting in Zimbabwe.

What made my involvement in this research more interesting, I believe, is the fact that I consider myself an active participant in Diaspora's efforts to find political solutions at home. Far from just accepting unsubstantiated claims that the Internet was contributing to political participation in Zimbabwe, I saw my involvement as a member of the Zimbabwean Diaspora community as an opportunity to further examine these optimistic claims connecting new media technologies to increased political participation. When I started conducting my research, I was very optimistic that the Internet was at the centre of furthering democratic participation in Africa. I read several articles that supported this hypothesis and I talked to people especially in the NGO communities, who understandably also backed these claims since most of them were being funded by Western governments to advance this cause.

Two years into my research, I started analysing my data and I for the first time started questioning some of these claims with the help of my data. The Internet, it seemed, offered plenty of opportunities in terms of mobilizing, informing and disseminating information to the citizens. Whether it increased political participation remains an area of debate, offering opportunities for further research. There is no doubt that to some extent, it did change the dynamics of participation. However, unlike in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, Zimbabwe is a completely different case. In general, even though they had information about what was going on around them, the majority of Zimbabweans were afraid to even participate in a peaceful demonstration.

As an active member of the Zimbabwean Diaspora, how did I ensure that I was not biased in the first place? First of all, I wanted to make sure that President Mugabe's voice was represented in this research. I had read plenty of books, news articles etc, in which the bias against Mugabe was quite clear. Mugabe was demonised and rarely got an international platform to share his views. In this dissertation, Mugabe and those who share his views were given adequate space to share their own views through a critical analysis of news articles and interviews. While developing questions for my interviewees, I made sure not to frame them with a political slant. What I wanted was to get not only a true, but also a broader, picture on the influence of technology in Zimbabwean politics. Then when I selected the interviewees I also picked potential Mugabe supporters just like I selected those sharing a political ideology with Tsvangirai. I also selected students, who had benefited from Mugabe-sponsored scholarships and professionals, whose views had in the past been supportive of Mugabe. Also when I selected websites for content analysis, I was careful not to choose content that was brusquely pro-Tsvangirai. The aim of the content analysis was to investigate the way these news sites covered the Zimbabwean story, with the hope that any Zimbabwean who frequented these sites would read and then transfer their "knowledge" to relatives and friends back home. Content relating to the Zimbabwean Guardian, for example, was not directly offered to profile it and represent it as a sternly anti-Tsvangirai online news site.

The social desirability of this research is one element that needs to be explored.

Considering the fact that I was using structured interviews for the better part of the research, I already anticipated to get responses that I believed would be accurate since all respondents responded to a similar set of questions. While as a researcher you can almost never tell if someone is telling you the truth or not, my assumption was that all the respondents more or less gave accurate answers to my questions. This is because obviously I had gained their trust. They knew that I was not a spy for the Zimbabwean government. The topic is also very emotive, such that while fear is one element that remains a major stumbling block to progress, those who are fearless consider sharing their views with the outside world as a way of showing how desperate they are. These are the people who are keen to tell the truth.

### **8.3 Content analysis results**

The results of the content analysis showed unquestionable evidence of favouritism towards Tsvangirai's MDC party. The content analysis revealed how the use of words that depicted ZANU PF in negative tones may have benefited Tsvangirai's MDC. For example, words associated with propagandistic techniques featured prominently in the articles published within the prescribed timeline. Glittering generalities such as the use of the word "hope" featured prominently in articles published on the four news sites. The same can be said with the use of "God". In deeply conservative Zimbabwe, "God" plays a very important role. More than 50 articles made reference to God especially when pleading for peaceful, free and fair elections in the country. Tsvangirai also may have benefited from being portrayed as a common man. A former labour leader, he never had the higher education that Mugabe received. Table 8.1 shows the frequency of words in the four digital articles in the period leading to the elections.

**Table 8.1: Content Analysis Indicators**

Key Word	Frequency
Intimidation	48
Corruption	38
Hope	53
Economy	63
Bias	35
God	59

Headlines showed the extent to which the four newspapers favoured Tsvangirai. From the four, only Newzimbabwe.com, which normally reproduced articles from press agencies such as Reuters, published articles that also gave a voice to Mugabe’s Zanu PF. For instance, the site ran a story headlined “Mugabe says Makoni worse than a prostitute” on February 1, 2008. The item referred to Mugabe’s virulent attack on former Finance Minister Simba Makoni who had formed his own Mavambo party, which was due to contest the elections. Newzimbabwe.com attempted to publish “fair” articles representing Mugabe and his party prior to the elections. Among its headlines: “Mugabe’s spokesman reads riot act on foreign correspondents”, Mugabe will not concede defeat” “Bomb explodes at ZANU candidate’s home”. The other three newspaper gave no room whatsoever to positive coverage of Mugabe. Coverage of Mugabe in Zimdaily, The Zimbabwean and SW Africa was scathing; Tsvangirai’s image was consistently positive. SW Africa claimed to expose potential election fraud with articles such as “Mugabe changes law to allow Policemen in Polling booth” on March 19. In March alone, SW Africa, as shown through its archive pages, published 201 articles.<sup>503</sup> None of them came close to giving Mugabe a voice. Examples of the articles the radio station ran are: “Zanu PF heavyweights lose in landmark elections”, “MDC wins in ZANU PF strongholds”, “Riot Police intimidate voters in Bikita”, “Opposition polling agents flee Bikita”, “Tension in Bulawayo as army trucks and water cannons on streets”, “Mugabe threatens business with price cuts”, and “Mugabe says MDC will never rule Zimbabwe”.

<sup>503</sup> ‘Previous news stories March 2008’ [web page]  
[http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/previous\\_mar2008.htm](http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/previous_mar2008.htm), accessed 15 December 2011



**Table 8.2: Number of endorsements for four online newspapers**

Online newspaper	Mugabe	Tsvangirai
New Zimbabwe.com	9	16
The Zimbabwean	0	42
SW Africa	0	39
Zim Daily	0	47

The four online newspapers that I reviewed in the content analysis displayed pro-Tsvangirai voting. Only four of the articles that appeared on New Zimbabwe.com were slanted towards endorsing Mugabe. Even in those cases, the stories were not editorials from the newspaper itself but were written by its pool of commentators. The other three online newspapers chose to neglect pro-Mugabe endorsements altogether. News material endorsing Tsvangirai or the policies of his party were given priority in these newspapers, clearly showing an anti-Mugabe bias. This shows to some extent how these newspapers had played a critical role in campaigning for Tsvangirai even though, as is argued in this research, there is no evidence that these newspapers boosted outright the participation of citizens in the political playground. The content analysis showed that journalism is on the decaying end in the age of the Internet. The honesty in the news that De Jong propounds as a good value of Journalism and objectivity are no longer the top priorities of news organisations.<sup>504</sup> Online newspapers take stances with the aim of buttressing their political candidates’ support bases.

For its part, *The Zimbabwean* repeatedly trashed Mugabe and his followers. The article “Torture widespread” published on 27 February was based on an “exclusive interview” with Professor Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture. Interestingly, there was only one direct quote from Nowak and the story, less than 400 words, is too short to be an exclusive. It is not clear what exactly Nowak said. No views from the Zimbabwean government were sought for this article, which is blatantly biased against Mugabe. On the same day, *The Zimbabwean* ran a story headlined “Soldiers, diplomats vote in secrecy”. In the story, an official from the pro-Tsvangirai Zimbabwe Election Support Network

<sup>504</sup> Jaap de Jong Professorial Inauguration Leiden University [web page] (4 November 2011) <http://www.news.leiden.edu/news-2011/two-sides-to-the-reliability-of-news.html>, accessed 27 March 2012.

(ZESN) is quoted as telling the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) to ensure voting by security forces and diplomats was transparent. That is as far as it goes. Neither the official nor the newspaper give any thread of evidence showing diplomats and soldiers were voting in secrecy as part of what the newspaper called election fraud. This is more evidence of an open bias toward Tsvangirai.

New media thus empowered Zimbabweans with information, but political participation requires more than just access to information. They may be exposed to information but the biggest threat to full and enhanced participation lay in their ability to overcome the fear of the unknown that is the fear of the government's secret service. As far as I am concerned, they are fighting and perhaps winning, a cyber-war against Mugabe, but that does not change the status quo in Zimbabwe. Mugabe remains in power and it looks like he alone, and not even the West, will decide when and how he can go. Notably, even though there are conspicuously thousands of brave people, who by all means choose to fight Mugabe's alleged totalitarianism, one quotation from an interviewee summarizes what appears to me like the general view about active participation in Zimbabwean politics: "To live happily in Zimbabwe, stay out of politics". In other words, the masses are afraid. The fear factor plays a crucial role in keeping the Mugabe regime intact. If you read newspapers, you will of course find articles about citizens being abducted or tortured by the secret service. Empirical evidence showing people are indeed abducted is lacking.

#### **8.4 Citizen journalism: Reflections by Zimbabwean journalists**

To best assess the future of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe we need to first look not only at who is sponsoring efforts in participatory journalism in Zimbabwe but also profile the "types" of citizen journalists we have. Citizen journalists in Zimbabwe – as five of the 20 interviews conducted with journalists and members of the NGO community in Zimbabwe – do not always meet the widely accepted definition of having no formal training in Journalism education. The decade-long political and economic crisis, which ended in 2009 when ZANU PF and MDC joined forces to form a new government, affected almost every professional in the country. Many journalists left the country. These are the journalists now leading the online networks that were analysed in this research. Some

journalists chose to stay in Zimbabwe and some of them chose to become citizen journalists. As one of them revealed in an interview, for the “purposes of survival” they were happy to do anything that paid them: “I was working for the Zimbabwe Independent but at the same time I was writing for *The Zimbabwean* and Voice of America’s studio 7. I also blogged for an international website earning 100 USD a month. That’s how I survived”.

Notably, this journalist has not stopped sending citizen-based stories to *The Zimbabwean* newspaper. Trained at the Christian College of Southern Africa in Harare, he is a professional journalist, who has since stopped working professionally but earns a living by contributing “blogging material to sites run by NGOs”. Another journalist, who also considers himself a citizen journalist, insisted that very few people “I know are trained journalists. You don’t train journalists. They just become [a] journalist themselves”. He has a degree in Sociology from the University of Zimbabwe and has written stories for local dailies, also supplying new material to international newspapers. But most of his money, he says, comes from blogging. He is one of the journalists that frequent a place in central Harare where American press freedom giant Freedom House has an open space where journalists can freely use computers and send in their stories. He believes the world deserves to know what is happening in Zimbabwe but the reality is “I also need to live and survive”.

My only concerns talking to these journalists was two-fold. First I struggled categorising them as citizen journalists. They both thought they were, but their idea of citizen journalism was centred on the idea that they were citizens who happened to have journalistic skills which they were using to tell the world the Zimbabwean story. The other problem was the ethical side of their work. Dedicated and determined as they seemed, it looked to me like they were equally ready to write stories tarnishing Mugabe and his party in a bad light as long as they would get paid. One of them did not mince his words: “No one out there wants to hear anything legitimate about Mugabe. He hasn’t got anything legitimate anyway.” This statement goes on to show why stories about Mugabe have not always been accurately presented in Zimbabwe and abroad and it seems like no

one cares, because for the sake of getting paid some journalists have turned to citizen journalism, which has little or no ethical requirements than the more demanding traditional school of journalism.

I also interviewed a foreign blogger working for a leading NGO in Zimbabwe, as well as a Zimbabwean working in the communication department of the Western Embassy. The two similarities they had was that they both maintained a blog in which they wrote about their experiences in Zimbabwe. They considered themselves citizen journalists too. They both had worked as journalists previously. They were free to write what they wanted, they said. Their bosses did not interfere with what they wrote even though their stories were published on the official websites of their employers. The embassy official said her views did not reflect the official policy of her mother country towards Zimbabwe. Both said they had no hidden agenda concerning Zimbabwe. “I find it hard to write about positive things because there is very little positive to note. They have a new government but squabbles are all over the place”, the embassy official noted. Asked whether he also tried to post positive material about Zimbabwe on his blog, the NGO worker differed with the embassy official even though they both knew each other: “I am looking for positive stories here. The accusation we get from the Zimbabwean government is that we only want to tarnish the image of the country. I write about the positive reflections and resilience of the people here.”

One non-affiliated blogger said she wrote about “everything but politics”. Her views were that journalists only focussed on politics “as if there is nothing to talk about it Zimbabwe”. She said she was not a journalist but a social activist. She enjoyed writing about people living in rural Zimbabwe and documenting their interesting “beautiful stories”. She did not have a personal blog but she contributed her stories to several blogs for free. She did not consider blogging “a profession but more of a hobby.” Data from the five respondents show the confusing dynamics of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe. It is no easy task defining who is a citizen journalist and who is not because those who post pictures that reveal information that politicians may want to conceal (on Facebook) also call themselves citizens journalists. Citizen journalism in Zimbabwe is thus seen from the

window of political activism. Only one respondent felt politics did not define what she wanted to write; the majority of the respondents admitted it was difficult to separate politics from the Zimbabwean way of life. Political activists, who also considered themselves citizen journalists, clearly confirmed that their presence of Facebook was politically-inclined. “I wouldn’t have a Facebook account had I not been a political activist for the MDC”, one of them said.

The problem with citizen journalism in Zimbabwe is that it is not people-driven. The educated elite living in bigger cities and towns are in most cases the driving force behind this revolution. When I put it to a politician that the rural dwellers were mostly left out in this citizen participation since not all of them had the technological knowhow to report and send stories to other people, the politician retorted: “You are wrong there. You should not underestimate our people. My mother is 71. She has a cell phone. When she has no credit in her phone, she sends me a message, asking me to call her back. So you think if some political rivals attack her, she won’t be able to send me a sms telling me what’s going on.” The politician revealed that her mother’s cell phone could take pictures and she knew “how to take pictures.” That made the politician’s mother a potential political participant, but I could not verify how many 71 year olds in Zimbabwe were in possession of a cell phone.

Zimbabwe also has its own emerging public sphere. The blogs are dominating the political space. NGO involvement is key to this expansion. Several NGOs, including the Netherlands’ HIVOS, which has its regional African office in Harare, are actively involved in pursuing citizen goals to actively participate in political digitally by financing courses for Zimbabweans seeking to learn more about the digital environment. I have spoken to young Zimbabweans who have participated in these courses. I have also been asked to teach one of these courses in Harare. Young people learn a lot about writing short stories and blogging and sharing content with fellow bloggers. Mugabe and his ZANU PF party have been reluctant to crack down on the blogosphere despite numerous threats from several politicians within his party to do so. Perhaps they just realise the Internet has got the capacity to bring them down. Some of them still think only the urban

dwellers have got access to the Internet, but as we have shown here those living in rural areas, the traditional political hotspots for ZANU PF dominance, now have mobile phones and also have Facebook accounts.

#### **8.4.1 Theoretical contribution**

Given the scope of an overpowering and commonly acceptable view that new media technologies are at the centre of bringing democratic revolution globally, this study's contribution appears twofold. Firstly, and perhaps more significantly, there has never been a better time to pursue research in this area, as such an undertaking will only serve to avoid empirically unproven notions such as the those seeking to link the Internet with humanising the democratic institutions of a country. This study has without doubt shown how powerful the Internet and new technologies have been in empowering people with information in Zimbabwe through an analysis of data that revealed an overwhelming presence and participation of Zimbabwe on the web. However, it has also highlighted some of the complexities surrounding the possible success of the digitalised culture, exploring issues such as access, availability, legal frameworks and state skepticism. Therefore, there should be no reason to think that since the Internet has been instrumental in democratising Egypt, the same can be done in Zimbabwe, simply because of the geopolitical and cultural differences between those countries. It is dangerous to assume that the same tactics used in the Egyptian revolution can be reproduced with corresponding success in another country, as no evidence has been given to support such a position.

Secondly, through this study, we have learned that the biggest obstacle to the success of digital technologies in improving the citizens' democratic participation in Zimbabwe is fear. Participation can be subjective. It certainly does not necessarily mean voting against Mugabe. Zimbabweans need to overcome fear in order to realise the full potential of the digitalised world. Through the Internet, citizens can have access to empowering information. But more important is what they do with that information. True, knowledge is power, but without understanding how to utilise knowledge, power remains out of reach. In the March 2008 elections, citizens had information about what was going on in

the country through access to the Internet or via messages from relatives and friends abroad. That information empowered them to make their choice of candidate, yet some still voted for President Mugabe because they feared the consequences of voting for the opposition.

A chapter analysis of the inductive parts of this research also shows the important contribution of this research to the field of media and African politics. Through a critical reflection of the conflicting historical and contemporary positions of Zimbabwean politics, it is apparent that Zimbabwe has seen itself facing the challenges it has been encountering since 2000. These problems did not just begin with the land reform. They go back to the colonial involvement of the British in Zimbabwe. Land is a highly emotive and contested issue, which despite all its agrarian potential has literally contributed to the downfall of the country. The same chapter also revealed how much of the colonial laws – ironically issued by the previous White governments – are now being used by Mugabe to oppress his own people. Rhodesian media laws, which gave dominance to the state-run broadcaster, are still very much alive. At the same time, the chapter shows the origins of media discontent. Zimbabwean journalists had good cause to embrace the Internet revolution. The Internet offered a voice to those who could not criticise Mugabe from within the country, and the same digital technologies could be manipulated to tarnish the image of ZANU PF.

Chapter four also shows the relationships between new and old media in the Zimbabwean context. *The Herald* newspaper's position in the Zimbabwean political market is scrutinised to understand its power and to show how difficult it may have been for Mugabe to achieve his political aspirations without the assistance of this brazenly loyal newspaper. But the advent of the Internet has forced *The Herald* to adopt and embrace the new media. Citizens' participation through citizen journalism, I also conclude, is not a distinctively new phenomenon, as citizens have historically been participating in issues surrounding their own interests. This conclusion also reveals a rather pessimistic view on the overall contribution of the Internet in improving the way citizens participate in the Zimbabwean political space. This is a significant contribution because I have yet to see

other studies that question the notion that new media technologies have significantly improved the way Zimbabweans participate politically.

#### 8.4.2 Conclusion

I have come to a congenial conclusion that new media technologies, far from eloquently improving the way Zimbabweans participate politically, are yet to fully demonstrate their full potential. This is not because of their inability but rather the citizens' unwillingness and powerlessness to actively participate in politics due to their fear of the unknown. You may have the Internet, you may have unrestricted access to it but what is important is your willingness and determination to use it for political purposes. That is still lacking in the case of Zimbabwe. Obviously, this is a generalised view that came out my research. There are plenty of fearless people who have confronted Mugabe. Indeed, there are plenty of people who have taken Mugabe to task by using the Internet and new media platforms to denounce his alleged misrule. However, there is still a long way to go before the platforms can have a direct influence on the Zimbabwean political climate. There are several reasons prohibiting the influence of the Internet in Zimbabwe including:

- a) **Mugabe's grip on power:** While access to Internet has, as has been shown in this research, significantly improved in Zimbabwe, there is no evidence to suggest that Mugabe is about to relinquish power. He remains the world's oldest president and he is set to run for reelection in 2013 when he will be 89 years old. People may have Internet, but Mugabe has the power. The Internet could empower them but still they still need to deal with Mugabe's tight grip on power.
- b) **Fear:** Protests are not tolerated in Zimbabwe. They have never been tolerated in the country. Opponents of President Mugabe have in the past been arrested and put in jail for simply expressing views that were opposed to Mugabe or his party cadres.
- c) **Accessibility:** While the mobile phone revolution has reduced concerns over accessibility, literature reviewed in this research also showed that those living in the rural areas were still struggling to gain access to it. Also, those who have access to it, may use it for reasons other than political.



- d) **Lack of triggering events:** Zimbabweans are not the only ones living in a dictatorship. There has not been a country in sub-Saharan Africa where Internet-influenced protests have led to a genuine regime change. The Arab Spring may have shown others in Africa how they could revolt against dictatorships. However, there are several political, economic and ideological differences between the Arab and African states. If anything, the Arab Spring, I believe, was an eye opener for dictators across Africa, helping them further maintain their grip on power. They saw that while “people power” was inevitable in countries such as Egypt, they needed to be equally prepared to deal with potential revolts.
- e) **Diaspora intervention:** While those living in the Diaspora could essentially play an important role, in the case of Zimbabwe it is a different story because Mugabe does not trust Zimbabweans living abroad. For that reason, as shown in this dissertation, they are not allowed to vote and some, including established journalists, have been blacklisted and cannot return home as long as Mugabe is still in power.

Fear, as already discussed, is one of the reasons why it will probably take a long time before Zimbabweans realise the full potential of the Internet. Another factor affecting the dichotomy of information-sharing between Zimbabweans at home and their fellow citizens abroad pertains to the general mistrust of Zimbabweans who are living in the Diaspora. While many people can easily identify their contribution to the country's economy, not everyone, as shown from the analysis of 20 interviews with Zimbabweans living in the country, is happy with their attitudes toward the country. Some see the Diaspora Zimbabweans as sell-outs, while others consider them cowards who could not stand the heat. Some are not happy that among Zimbabweans in the Diaspora there were people who created versions of alleged brutality from Mugabe with the hope of securing a visa and residence permit in the West. All these factors have contributed to the general mistrust of Zimbabweans in the Diaspora.

While the Internet should be credited for providing information to previously underprivileged citizens, it should not entirely be credited for influencing the way people

participate in their political affairs. Within the context of the 2008 elections, it can be argued that the Internet played an information-providing role as evidenced by the confirmation given by some of the 50 interview respondents. However, not everybody who got the information from the Diaspora unconditionally chose to vote for Tsvangirai, as six of the voters confirmed that they decided to vote for Makoni instead. Five of the voters who got advice to vote against Mugabe still decided to vote for him, against the wishes of their friends and relatives abroad. In this case, the Internet was not entirely central to the voters' choices.

There is only one thing that can strongly validate my hypothesis. If participation means going on the Internet and sending emails to politicians, questioning their positions in order to ensure transparency, then Zimbabweans still have a long way before they can solidly conclude that the advent of the Internet has boosted their online political activism. However, if participation just means accessing and sharing online political information with friends and relatives, then Zimbabweans are already doing that. But not everyone is participating. In fact the majority of the rural dwellers have no idea what Facebook is. My view is that participation should not be half-baked. It should be a process that not only involves making voting choices but taking politicians to task for the decisions they make. Participation should also mean that the distance between the political players and the constituencies they represent is shortened. That is still not the case in Zimbabwe. Politicians remain rather untouchable and it is still a bit early to think that the Internet is helping make them accountable for their decisions and actions. Zimbabweans should first deal with more pressing issues, such as securing access to the Internet. Despite all these problems, one would be a fool to dismiss the democratic potential of the Internet, as has been argued throughout.

#### **8.4.3 Possibilities for further research**

The fact that power of the Internet and new media technologies to influence democratic participation have not been wholly proven in Zimbabwe should not be taken to mean the case is the same in each and every country. The Internet, I predict, is going to play a much bigger role in determining the pace of democratic participation in the future. It

takes a significant amount of time for people to realise their potential. Confronting supposedly autocratic regimes is a risky business and many people living in Zimbabwe are well aware of this. But then the question should also be asked if that is what the people want. Is it true that the people of Zimbabwe are sick and tired of Mugabe, or would they rather keep him in power? This research offers plenty of possibilities for future research. The growing mobile phone technology is seen as playing a leading role in democratising the political space in Africa especially by those in the West.

Elsewhere in Africa, for example in Kenya, cell phones have been credited with helping the independent media (mostly radio) provide accurate coverage of elections. Can Zimbabweans also turn to mobile phones to help end President Mugabe's decades-old political reign? Mobile phones have virtually changed the communication landscape across the African continent. Loader is of the view that new media technologies provide citizens with a chance to engineer change in democratic institutions and practices.<sup>505</sup> But it is important to note that optimism has dominated largely unsubstantiated and seemingly idealistic claims linking participatory journalism and digital technologies with the enhancement of democratic participation in Africa. But once again empirical evidence backing these notions remains lacking. Rigorous research is thus needed.

Press rights are also arguably improving in Zimbabwe. The Internet has forced *The Herald* to allow citizens to freely comment on issues as they wish without fear or favouritism. This is pretty unprecedented. Reading *The Herald* these days, you can see readers' comments criticising President Mugabe's foreign trips or anything written about him or his party. Zimbabweans are not accustomed to this. Traditionally, criticising the President has not been openly allowed. In fact legally, as I have shown in this research, some people have been brought to court after criticising the President. However, in the digital age just like you can find satires taking a free ride against the President on YouTube, you can also equally find readers expressing their views in *The Herald*. Without any doubt, this is going to be another interesting area to investigate further.

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<sup>505</sup> Brian Loader, 'The Citizens' Voice in a Wired World: Experiments in e-democracy', paper presented at the ANA Hotel, Tokyo (14 November 2001).

What is causing this sudden policy change? Are editors at the newspaper ignorant enough not to see the Internet's potential? Zimbabwe has also authorised the establishment of a few more independent newspapers since Tsvangirai joined the government in 2009. Even better, in June 2012, the ZBC's 32-year broadcasting monopoly came to a sticky end after a new local radio station went on the airwaves. While this radio station is run by *The Herald*, I still think this is quite a development considering ZBC has been left to do whatever they wanted for over three decades. At least now they will get some competition. Another radio station run by Supa Mandiwanzira, a former ZBC and *Aljazeera* correspondent in Zimbabwe, is also in the cards. It has already been given a green light to broadcast. These are indeed new developments that are worthy exploring scientifically in the future.

Ethical dilemmas necessitated by the digital environment should be researched further. This has become a problem not just in Africa but elsewhere around the world. Are traditional journalism ethics still relevant in the digital age? This research has also revealed how, for example, seeking quotes from official sources, which for many years has stood firm as the basic requirement for good journalism, is no longer as important as it used to be as a new generation of ambient journalists continue to dominate the digital age. While online regulation is almost impossible, journalists ought to accept that the era of ethics is gradually coming to end. There will be those who will continue to respect the ethics, many of them in fact will perhaps continue to abide by them, but they will face stiff competition from internet publishers, some of whom may not see the relevance for respecting the ethics of journalism. In fact, the majority of bloggers are not journalists. They have not been trained as such and will most likely not seek any journalism training of any sort. However, their influence on the web will continue to determine the flow and acceptability of news. It must also be noted that considerable confusion continues to rage as well-established news organisations such as BBC have also incorporated bloggism into their mainstream reporting strategy. What does all this lead us to? How does the future of journalism look in the wake of all these digital developments?

#### **8.4.4 Limitations of this research**

It is not always easy writing about a subject to which you have an emotional attachment. As a Zimbabwean by birth, I have naturally followed almost every news item in which Zimbabwe features. I have read news from traditional news sites as well as new media websites. I have also read a great deal of literature tied to this research. I have obviously formed my own opinions about the subject. To this end, I have also contributed several opinion articles in newspapers in the Netherlands and Zimbabwe. Writing about the Diaspora's contribution towards democratic participation was therefore very difficult since I was also an active member of the Diaspora community. Still, I made sure that my research was not by and large influenced by my own views.

I could have spent more time in Zimbabwe directly observing the impact of the crisis. In the last three years, I have made five trips to Zimbabwe, three of them specifically as part of my data gathering process. In total, I spent 91 days in Zimbabwe working for my research. Even though most of the interviews were conducted in the UK with Zimbabwean expatriates there, I still feel spending more time in Zimbabwe could have boosted the analysis of this research. I have become very skeptical about the Western media's reports on Zimbabwe. I tend to prefer relying on good empirical work rather than media reports, hence the argument that spending more time observing and talking to people on the ground would have complemented the findings of this research. However, at the same time, I am quite pleased with amount of data I was able to get and use for this research.

## DUTCH SUMMARY

De beschikbaarheid van nieuwe mediatechnologieën wordt alom gezien als een mogelijkheid voor Afrikaanse activisten om te kunnen strijden tegen dictaturen en om het continent dichter naar democratie te kunnen brengen. Gebeurtenissen in het Midden-Oosten, zoals de Arabische lente, geven Westerse overheden en pro-democratische activisten de hoop dat Afrikaanse landen een voorbeeld kunnen zijn voor activisten die in deze landen een eindeloze strijd voeren tegen de aanwezige wanbesturen en dictaturen.

Er is echter behoefte aan onderzoeken zoals het onderhevige om de vraag te beantwoorden of deze beweringen kloppen. Empirisch onderzoek is nodig ter ondersteuning van ongegronde beweringen dat de nieuwe mediatechnologieën het platform ter bestrijding van dictaturen kunnen zijn. Met behulp van Zimbabwe als een casestudie, heb ik getracht antwoord te vinden op de vraag in hoeverre digitale media de democratisering van Afrikaanse landen kan bevorderen. Ik betoog in dit onderzoek dat, terwijl de mogelijkheden van nieuwe mediatechnologieën er voor iedereen zijn, het waarschijnlijk te vroeg is om al te concluderen dat het decennialange bestuur van President Robert Mugabe omver zal worden geworpen als gevolg van digitaal mogelijk gemaakte protesten.

Dit proefschrift opent met een verkenning van de historische aspecten van de Zimbabwaanse politiek en media in het eerste hoofdstuk. Dit is een belangrijk deel van het onderzoek omdat het de wortels van politieke en sociale moedeloosheid in het hedendaagse Zimbabwe aan de lezer introduceert. Dit historisch perspectief belicht hoe en waarom dingen mis zijn gegaan in de hedendaagse Zimbabwaanse samenleving. De Britse koloniale betrokkenheid biedt de cruciale context voor de politiek. Ik zal de omstreken Zimbabwaanse landhervormingen introduceren. Het twistpunt daarvan komt voort uit een conferentie gehouden in 1980 in Groot-Brittannië waarin de basis voor het oprichten van de staat Zimbabwe werd gelegd. In dit hoofdstuk wordt, naast een up-to-date profiel van president Mugabe, ook de Zimbabwaanse mediageschiedenis verkend, met een kritische blik op de zogenaamde strenge mediawetgeving en de rol die zij speelt

in de samenleving. Er zal literatuur worden geanalyseerd over veranderingen in de politieke communicatie, als een direct gevolg van de marktpenetratie van de informatie- en communicatietechnologie (ICT). Hierna maak ik profielen van dissidente nieuwswebsites beheerd door Zimbabweanen in de Diaspora en ook beoordeel ik hun invloed en bijdrage aan de politieke participatie in hun thuisland.

Het methodologische deel van deze studie bestudeert de belangrijkste onderzoeksmethoden, en kijkt voornamelijk naar kwalitatieve onderzoek mechanismen in sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek. Dit hoofdstuk toont kennis van onderzoeksmethoden in communicatiewetenschappen, één van mijn hoofdzakelijke onderzoeksinteresses. Conceptueel gezien draagt dit hoofdstuk bij aan de bevindingen in de vier volgende empirische hoofdstukken. Vanuit een structureel oogpunt beoogt dit hoofdstuk, door een analyse van relevante literatuur gerelateerd aan sociaal-wetenschappelijk onderzoek, te rechtvaardigen waarom ik heb gekozen om gebruik te maken van etnografische interviews en observerend onderzoek. Deze vloeiden voort uit mijn rol als actieve deelnemer en lid van de Diaspora en van een vergelijkende inhoudsanalyse van dissident-, pro-overheids-, en burgerjournalistieke nieuwssites om de impact van deze sites op kiezers te beoordelen.

Hoofdstuk 4, het eerste empirische hoofdstuk, gaat in op de lacunes en ideologische verschillen tussen de nieuwe en traditionele media. Door middel van een discoursanalyse van een krant die door sommigen bekritiseerd wordt als zijnde een mondstuk van Mugabe, ben ik van plan het belang van de traditionele media voor regimes met een traditionele school van politiek denken zoals dat van Mugabe te tonen. De onderzoeksmethode die ik hiervoor heb gebruikt was een discoursanalyse van de artikelen die deze krant publiceert. Interessant voor dit onderzoek is dat traditionele media zoals *the Herald* ook gedwongen zijn om nieuwe mediakenmerken aan te nemen. De vraag die ik stel is als volgt: Wat betekent dit voor een conventioneel politiek leiderschap, dat sceptisch is over de invloed en de macht van het Internet en het geluid van de nieuwe media? Deze beoordeling zal zo ver gaan als te kijken naar *The Herald's* historische banden met Mugabe, hoe deze overleven in het digitale tijdperk en of

daadwerkelijk de monopolie als nieuwsleverancier in Zimbabwe is verloren. Hoewel het Internet is gecrediteerd met het verspreiden van informatie over de slachtoffers van geweld terwijl de overheid probeerde om berichtgeving hierover in de media te onderdrukken, zal dit onderzoek voornamelijk kijken naar de rol van het Internet voor de ‘empowerment’ van het electoraat met pro-oppositie nieuwsmateriaal.

Hoofdstuk 5 is gebaseerd op een artikel dat ik samen schreef en presenteerde met twee van mijn BA studenten, Simon Columbus en Iris Leijendekker, tijdens het *13th Symposium on Online Journalism* aan de Universiteit van Texas, Austin in april 2012. Hierna volgen er nog twee empirische hoofdstukken die de trends in de burgerjournalistiek onderzoeken. De eerstgenoemde is gericht op Zimbabwe en de laatstgenoemde op het geven van een kritische reflectie van de ethiek in de Afrikaanse online journalistiek. Hiervoor werd een onderzoek dat was gericht op een verkenning van de rol van het Internet in de Zimbabwaanse democratische ruimte, gestut door vier quasi-onafhankelijke empirische onderzoeken, die trachtten de bijdrage van Internet in het versterken van de democratische participatie in Zimbabwe specifiek en in Afrika in het algemeen na te gaan. De reflectie en conclusie bespreken de algemene, wetenschappelijke, theoretische en empirische evaluaties van dit onderzoek. Ook kom ik terug op de belangrijkste vragen eerder in dit onderzoek naar voren gebracht. De conclusie geeft ook een samenvatting van argumenten over waarom ik van mening ben dat de Zimbabwaanse Diaspora een belangrijke rol heeft gespeeld in democratische participatie, en hoe zij dat gedaan hebben. Hoofdstuk 7 onderzoekt de uitdagingen en kansen voor burgerjournalistiek in Zimbabwe. Hoofdstuk 8 zal een analyse geven van hoe dissidente journalisten en burgers in de diaspora hun momentum op het Internet hebben kunnen handhaven en versterken, en zo hebben kunnen helpen met het ondersteunen van de democratie in hun thuisland, terwijl ook een reflectie wordt gegeven over enorme uitdagingen waarmee zij worden geconfronteerd. Hiernaast zal ik de mogelijkheden voor toekomstig onderzoek op dit gebied beoordelen en de beperkingen hiervan bespreken.



Door Zimbabweanen woonachtig in het buitenland te interviewen, was het mogelijk hun ervaringen en meningen te gebruiken om te onderzoeken of voor hen blootstelling aan nieuwe mediatechnologieën in het westen bijdroeg aan democratische veranderingen in hun thuisland. De resultaten van het onderzoek waren duidelijk. Terwijl hun Internet activiteiten er zeker aan hebben bijgedragen om het politieke landschap te veranderen, is hun voornaamste uitdaging hetzelfde gebleven: omgaan met President Mugabe. Hoewel hij al sinds 1980 het land regeert, neemt hij op 89-jarige leeftijd opnieuw deel aan de verkiezingen in 2013. Al is er geen twijfel mogelijk over de publieke ontevredenheid over zijn regime, toch is de rapportering van de media over Mugabe niet altijd eerlijk en accuraat. Zo werd er bijvoorbeeld in 2012 in de Westerse media, waaronder door CNN, gespeculeerd dat Mugabe mogelijk was overleden tijdens een reis naar Singapore. Uiteindelijk bleek dat dit niet waar was.

In dit onderzoek wordt er onderstreept dat de meningen over Mugabe verdeeld zijn. Hoewel activisten alles hebben gedaan om de Morgan Tsvangirai Movement for Democratic Change via online en digitale middelen te populariseren, is Mugabe nog steeds onafgebroken aan de macht. De grootste les die we uit deze ontwikkeling kunnen trekken, is dat we moeten voorkomen dat we de invloed van het Internet en digitale informatie- en communicatietechnologieën in de democratisering van Zimbabwe overschatten. Er is namelijk meer nodig dan alleen het Internet om een despoot van zijn macht te ontdoen. Zimbabweanen zijn gesterkt door wat zij zien en lezen dankzij de technologische vooruitgangen. Democratie wordt echter niet alleen via digitale middelen bereikt. Het Internet speelt een zeer belangrijke rol, maar Zimbabweanen moeten nog veel overwinnen voordat ze democratie kunnen bereiken.

Dit onderzoek identificeert de sleutelrol die de nieuwe mediatechnologieën spelen in het brengen van democratische verandering naar Zimbabwe, maar benadrukt tegelijkertijd dat er een aantal hindernissen zijn die dit proces in de weg staan. De kracht van het Internet moet niet worden overdreven. Hoewel het Internet mensen kan ondersteunen met broodnodige informatie, zoals we tijdens de Arabische Lente zagen, kan het gevecht niet worden gewonnen op het Internet, maar zal het ook op straat moeten worden

uitgevochten. Dit onderzoek concludeert dat Zimbabweansen de consequenties vrezen die directe confrontatie met het regime aangaan zal hebben. Het vergt nog steeds veel moed om op te staan tegen Mugabe. Eerdere pogingen zijn meedogenloos verpletterd. Als het Internet volwaardig wil bijdragen aan democratie in Zimbabwe zal de onvrede die wordt uitgesproken in chatrooms en andere plekken op het Internet vertaald moeten worden naar concrete actie.

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## **APPENDIX 1: Zimbabwean Diaspora speaks out**

*In this Appendix, views expressed by Zimbabweans in the Diaspora with regards to their contributions towards democracy in Zimbabwe are shown.*

### **Cover letter I**

*August 02, 2010*

Dear participant,

I am a registered research student at the University of Hull. I am writing to invite you to participate in an interview series as part of my research degree. I am targeting Zimbabweans living in the UK since my thesis will evaluate the role that these immigrants have played in safeguarding democracy in their country of birth through the use of digital technologies. In addition, I also intend to interview Zimbabweans living in Zimbabwe with the view of comparing results from these two separate research activities. The-face-to-face interviews, which will take between 30 minutes and 1 hour, will follow the strict University of Hull ethical code for researchers as outlined below

<http://www2.hull.ac.uk/administration/researchfundingoffice/usefulinformation/ethicspolicy.aspx>

I will conduct the interviews in person. Considering the fact that you may be working during the week, interviews could take place during any weekend of your choice between SEPTEMBER and DECEMBER 2010. Once you have indicated your intention to participate, I will send you a follow-up briefing with more details concerning the time and eventual location of the interview.

Many thanks for your time

Bruce Mutsvairo

## Responses

Total Number of respondents: 25

*How long have you lived in the UK?*

All respondents stated they had lived in the UK for a period between 3 to 10 years.

*Do you see the Internet as a major factor in improving democratic participation in Zimbabwe?*

Mixed results emerged from this question. Thirteen respondents were quite clear the Internet has no major role to play in supporting the Zimbabwean democratic process. They all gave their different reasons for their standpoints but one thing that was clear was that they seemed to agree that not everyone was as interested in politics as the media was. Their assumption was that the Internet in Zimbabwe is used for various other purposes, such as making financial transfers, rather than for political reasons. Politicians, especially those from ZANU PF, were so traditionally minded that they doubted if half the cabinet had an email address. They said people used Facebook for example to discuss issues related to their social issues. Zimbabweans, they claimed, were too tired of politics to be discussing it every day on the Internet. The Internet, they added made it easier for people to communicate but it “could not decide what has to be discussed” as one of them said. Four respondents gave the Internet a thumbs up, however. They said dictators would not withhold information as they had, in their view, historically done. The other respondents gave answers that both doubted the Internet’s ability in contributing to enhancing democratic participation but also made it clear it was difficult to predict.

*Do you think the Internet has been used to unfairly target Mugabe?*

Twenty-two respondents did not shy away from making it clear Mugabe was a victim of Western media bias. Only three were adamant that Mugabe’s “propaganda machine” *The Herald* peddled lies against other nations and the president’s rivals so as far as they were concerned, there was nothing wrong with other media doing the same against Mugabe.

*Do you think Mugabe has overstayed?*

All but four agreed that Mugabe should hand over power to a younger, capable leader. However, in another sign Mugabe's policies are not as unpopular as the private media normally claims, five of them said whoever takes over from him should continue with his pan-African ideas. One respondent said Mugabe was giving back the land and mines stolen by colonialists so there was nothing wrong with him staying in power. A staggering 21 respondents said they were afraid that whoever takes over from him would be too pro-West with one disclosing his fears for a leader that would "give back the country to the foreigners". While supporting Mugabe, they said his less diplomatic, hard-hitting stance was not always the solution.

*Do you think Zimbabweans should be left to sort their own problems?*

Mixed results came from this question. At least slightly more than half of those interviewed said Zimbabwe did not have the capacity to solve its problems. One of them even went as far as suggesting that since we are living in a globalised world, no country could solve its problems alone. Much of their reasoning was based on the fact leaving Zimbabwe to sort its problems would enable Mugabe to extend his perceived illegitimacy. Interestingly, some of the respondents, who had said Mugabe should stay in power, also admitted they doubted his legitimacy. "Give me an example of a legitimate leader in Africa. None", one of them declared. Eleven respondents said only African countries should be left to deal with Zimbabwean problems while a paltry two suggested all means possible including military action should be used to get rid of Mugabe.

*Do you trust the media, be it Zimbabwean or foreign?*

All respondents apart from one were quite clear they didn't trust Zimbabwean or foreign media. They said all media outlets always have their own agendas. "Media is business. It's like selling tomatoes. Do you go around telling people I am selling rotten tomatoes even when you know your tomatoes are rotten", one respondent said. Some of them however also admitted that even though they didn't fully trust the media, they were left with few options in terms of where to get information. They said while reliability was a major issue among media organisations reporting on Zimbabwe, they needed news



organisations to supply them with information. One respondent said she had never been let down by the British Broadcasting Corporation so she trusted it.

*So you rather have citizen journalists as the main source of your news?*

Only seven respondents recognised citizen journalism as an alternative to traditional media. Despite their dislike of traditional media, respondents said citizen journalism was too new to be trusted. Some of them didn't understand the concept. Some said everyone writes what they want about Zimbabwe to such an extent it didn't really matter which platform was used. Professionalism was emphasised here by at least 6 respondents. Even though trusting them was a big concern, at least traditional journalists were professional. Unlike citizen journalists, they had a duty to serve. The most underlining issue here was trust. Zimbabweans do not trust the media and this is perhaps a result of ZANU PF's protracted domination of the local media scene. Interestingly, respondents also categorically stated that they didn't trust the Western media. "I don't even trust myself, why should I trust someone", a respondent declared.

*Why do you not trust news reports on Zimbabwe?*

Respondents pointed to the fact that politics was at play in Zimbabwe. Responses given by 20 respondents shared the similar argument that it was difficult to trust the media due to constant political meddling. In Zimbabwe, they said politicians would use the local media to defend their political stances while the Western media was used as platform to support the anti-Mugabe notion. Other respondents said their source of news was talking to their relatives and friends at home. Again trust emerged as a major issue here.

*What's the alternative?*

Respondents said that left with without much of an option, they opted to use websites run by Zimbabweans when it came to the Zimbabwean story. NewZimbabwe.com's dominance was confirmed as every respondent made reference to it. Some respondents accused the website of tribalism. Supporters of both sides of the political divide accused it of being either pro- or anti-Mugabe. I concluded the website must be doing a good job then.

*Did you supply news to relatives and friends back home ahead of the 2008 elections?*

All respondents said they had supplied information about what was going on in Zimbabwe but only five of them said they had unconditionally demanded a no-Mugabe vote from their parents. They said they still didn't know if their parents went on to vote against Mugabe because as you know "a vote is a secret. Not even your father will tell you which candidate they voted". Other respondents said they were not sure if relaying information back home had an impact because they couldn't force relatives on who to vote for. Their relaying of information was not structured. When they talked about what was happening in the country they didn't make it clear it was time for Mugabe to go even though some of them confirmed their dislike of Mugabe ahead of the elections.

*Is Mugabe right when he takes land from Whites to Blacks?*

While some of the respondents said they didn't agree with Mugabe's methods, 17 of them said the land belonged to Zimbabwe regardless of colour or creed. The land, in their eyes, should therefore be given to landless citizens of Zimbabwe.

## **APPENDIX 2: Face to face with victims of Zimbabwean tyranny**

**Zimbabweans from the nation's all provinces shared their views of Mugabe's alleged tyranny. The interview method was a vox-pop methodology where people from all walks of life were asked to answer a few questions without prior formal interview requests.**

Total Number of respondents: 19 plus 1 (non-Zimbabwean)

*You have relatives and friends abroad: (Yes – All)*

*They influenced your decision on who to vote for during the 2008 elections?*

Six respondents said they had planned to vote for Tsvangirai regardless. Other respondents said there was some influence in the sense that they heard about things that they were not aware of but ultimately it was their decision to choose who to vote for. At least five respondents said their friends and relatives abroad tried to influence them to vote against Mugabe but they couldn't buy such "misguided" as one of them said, advice. They had always voted for Mugabe and they were quite sure they would continue to vote for him.

*Did you vote for Tsvangirai?*

Three respondents said "Yes", Five respondents said "No", the rest didn't want to disclose.

*You have access to Internet at home?*

Only seven had uninterrupted access to Internet via their mobile phones. Three said they had Internet access through their workplace. One respondent had no idea what Internet was. The rest knew what it was and had email addresses but did not have regular access.

*What is your major source of news?*

Interestingly, all but seven had access to CNN, BBC and major television stations via satellite. Seven respondents said *ZBC* and *The Herald* were their major source of news. Five respondents said they read online newspapers via the Internet.

*Are you concerned about world news at all or you only care about Zimbabwe?*

Seventeen respondents said they cared a lot about what was happening in the world. They insisted that worldview was very important insofar as developments in Zimbabwe were concerned. The remaining eight respondents said what was interesting to them was what only was happening in Zimbabwe. They only heard about international news through their relatives and friends living abroad

*Have you ever heard of SW Africa Radio?*

All respondents said they knew the foreign-funded station. Eight respondents accused the radio of peddling lies about Zimbabwe. They said since it was foreign funded, they found it hard to trust it. Other respondents said they listened to it because it told a story “you will never hear on ZBC”, as one of them declared.

*Do you consider yourself a citizen journalist?*

Fifteen respondents said they didn’t think they were citizen journalists because they had little to do with the Internet. Some of them wanted me to first explain what exactly citizen journalism was. Two respondents, who had previously worked as journalists insisted that they were citizen journalists. Two other former journalists working for Western institutions including a non-Zimbabwean said they were citizen journalists pointing to their weekly blogs that are posted on their employers’ official websites. One other respondent, who had no formal journalism background, said she considered herself a citizen blogger. One other respondent claimed everyone who has a cell phone, including his 71-year old mother is a citizen journalist. Five respondents didn’t know whether to classify themselves as citizen journalists or not.

*Do you feel you are empowered with information that helps you make political decision?*

All respondent said they had enough information about what was going on politically. Seventeen respondents including those who supported Mugabe said they would not even try to participate in demonstration to topple Mugabe because they were too afraid to do so. They said they would be beaten. Eight of them said they would not participate in demonstrations because they believed in peaceful means.

## APPENDIX 3: Zimbabwean communities identify source of their dilemmas

### Cover letter II

17 December 2010

Dear participant

May I draw your attention to this attached questionnaire which is targeting Zimbabweans living in the UK. I am a registered student currently conducting research at the University of Hull. My thesis seeks to explore the significance of new media technologies in railroading democratic changes in Zimbabwe. Your participation is confidential.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Best regards,  
Bruce Mutsvairo

### **Responses (with results in parentheses)**

Total number of respondents: 20

- 1) You consider yourself as a Zimbabwean?  
**(20 out of 20 Answered Yes)**
- 2) You live in the Diaspora?  
**(20 out of 20 Answered Yes)**
- 3) You consider yourself anti-Mugabe?  
**(6 Yes vs. 14 No)**
- 4) Do you want to see political change in Zimbabwe?  
**(5 Yes vs. 15 No)**
- 5) Would you mind if a ZANU-PF official takes over from Mugabe?  
**(5 Yes vs. 15 No)**
- 6) The Internet can bring political change in Zimbabwe  
**(6 yes, vs. 10 Don't know vs. 4 No)**
- 7) I urged relatives to vote for Tsvangirai during the 2008 election  
**(4 Yes vs. 16 No)**
- 8) I shared information with relatives and friends at home during the 2008 elections  
**(18 Yes vs. 2 No)**
- 9) My primary source of news has always been online news sites such as newzimbabwe.com  
**(20 out of 20 answered Yes)**
- 10) Morgan Tsvangirai is unfairly represented in local news  
**(5 Don't care vs. 10 Agree vs. 5 Disagree)**
- 11) I would go back to a new democratic Zimbabwean  
**(18 Yes vs. 2 No Zimbabwe is a democracy)**
- 12) Western Press misrepresent the Zimbabwean story  
**(10 Yes vs. 10 No)**
- 13) If I had the means I would become a blogger and participate in actively removing Mugabe  
**(10 Don't know vs. 5 Yes vs. 3 No vs. 2 Unanswered)**
- 14) Zimbabwean crisis needs no foreign intervention  
**(9 Yes vs. 11 No)**
- 15) I have access to the Internet and I consider myself an activist  
**(7 No vs. 7 Yes vs. 6 Don't know)**
- 16) Mugabe is right when it comes to land reform  
**(16 Yes, 4 No)**

# APPENDIX 4: Africa’s citizen journalists share thoughts

Thank you for taking part in our survey.

1. First, please give us some information about your role as a media actor. For each point, please select the correct answer.

I currently make a living working for the media.

Do you have a blog, or write for a group blog?

Do you have a Twitter account?

I primarily work for online media.

I think of myself as a citizen journalist.

I self-identify as a journalist.

2. Which country do you primarily work in? Country:

In the next section, we will ask you some questions about the role of traditional journalists and citizen journalists in society. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements by selecting the respective number on the scale.

	Very Much Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Very Much Disagree
Press freedom should not be subordinated to any law.					
Unconstrained social media endanger public safety.					
An article in a newspaper may cover only one point of view.					
As a blogger, it is important to always present multiple perspectives.					
Some self-censorship from					

	Very Much Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Very Much Disagree
journalists is necessary to preserve national security.					
Criticising the authorities is not permissible. As a blogger, your articles should first and foremost inform the audience.					
The government should not be scrutinized by the media. A journalist must always name his sources.					
The government should censor online media if national security is endangered.					
The freedom of the press must be weighed against other concerns, such as security.					
For a blogger, it is permissible not to disclose the source of his information.					
The government should have a tight control over online media.					
Online media should always provide links					

**Very Much Agree**

**Agree**

**Neither  
Agree Nor  
Disagree**

Disagree

**Very Much  
Disagree**

to their  
sources.

Whether a story is true is more important than who it serves.

Bloggers should be careful in what they publish, so as to not endanger national security.

A journalist should not report a story that could endanger national security, even if it is true.

It is permissible to publish unconfirmed information on the Internet.

As a journalist,  
your first duty  
is to serve the  
public.

In this part, we will ask you to elaborate on some of the topics covered in the questions above. Please write down what you think about the following issues.

**4. As a journalist or citizen journalist, what is your primary motivation to report a story?**

[illegible]

**5. Do you think journalists and citizen journalists need to be objective in their articles?**

**6. Do you think that for citizen journalists, a different set of ethics counts than for traditional journalists?**



## **APPENDIX 5: Journalists views on Citizen Journalism**

Twelve journalists from Zimbabwean newspapers *The Herald* (3), *The Standard* (4) *The Independent* (1) and four freelancers were interviewed in December 2011 during one of the five trips I made as field research for this PhD. Since I had done my first journalism internship at the Standard newspaper, I contacted a friend and journalist, who was working there. Using his network, he set me up with other journalists, who agreed to be interviewed, airing their views on the impact of citizen journalism in Zimbabwe. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe. The purpose of the interview was to seek professional views on citizen journalism in the country.

### **Do you consider citizen Journalism, journalism?**

All journalists were keen to make a distinction between “real” journalism and citizen journalism. They seemed to agree on one point, which is the fact that citizen journalist do not get any formal train therefore they don’t make ethical considerations when they publish their stories

### **What role can citizen journalism play in Zimbabwe?**

All journalists were reluctant to offer their thumbs-up for citizen journalism. Journalists including those from the pro-government Herald newspaper said they the level playing field was not fair enough to allow citizen journalists to operate freely. One journalist from The Independent said repressive media laws meant citizen journalists would be afraid to operate as they feared arrests.

### **Who are the citizen journalists in Zimbabwe?**

Varied responses came from the 12 journalists. Some said citizen journalists were mostly trained journalists who had failed to secure jobs and were now contributing stories to online newspapers writing stories about Zimbabwe. Some considered citizen journalists to be anyone who owns a computer. Some journalists said in a politically polarized environment such as Zimbabwe most writers prefer to use pseudo by-lines.

**Would you consider working as a citizen journalist should you lose your job or should the situation forces you to?**

None of the 12 journalists was willing to work as citizen journalist under what circumstances.

**What challenges do citizen journalists face in Zimbabwe?**

Two of the 12 journalists saw citizen journalism as an opportunity for journalists facing repressive media laws. Others felt that the problem was that some of the citizen journalists were working as journalists without realizing their impact. It therefore was a new phenomenon, one that had plenty of opportunities but many people did not know what it was. The availability of new media would changes these dynamics, they all reckoned.

**What stories are covered by citizen journalists? What stories should they cover?**

The journalists conceded that since very little information was available about the workings of citizen journalists, it was very difficult to know what stories they covered. One of the journalists conceded that while he knew that citizen journalists were present in the country, he had never met one. All journalists said that citizen journalists should be free to write and cover stories as they wished.