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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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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.⁸⁴ 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%”.⁸⁵

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.⁸⁶ 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

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

⁸⁵ 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.

⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸

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.

⁸⁷ Edmond Musengi Jaricha, *The Politics of Food in Zimbabwe*, unpublished MA Thesis (University of Alberta: 2009).

⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ 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.'⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹ 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

⁸⁹ 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.

⁹⁰ 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.

⁹¹ '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.⁹² 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.⁹³ 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

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, 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.⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶ 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

⁹⁴ ‘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

⁹⁵ ‘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

⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ 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”.⁹⁸

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.

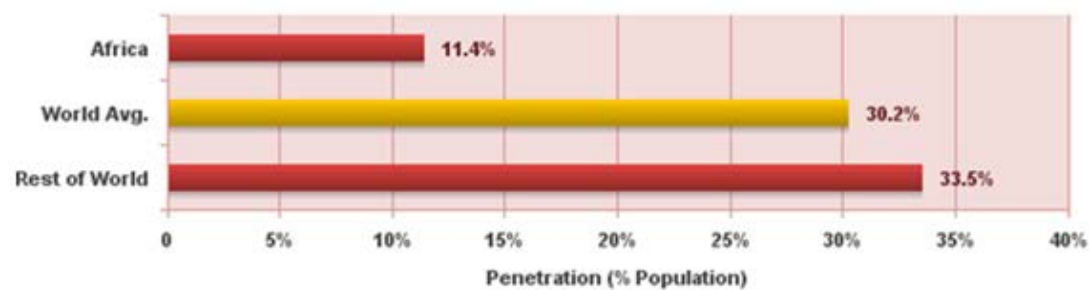
With prospects for independent journalism diminishing due to the government’s supposed media-unfriendly laws,⁹⁹ several Zimbabweans in the Diaspora set up mostly pro-opposition web-based magazines. Since 2000, these web-based magazines have freely and openly reported on issues affecting the country, 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.

⁹⁷ 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.

⁹⁸ 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, accessed 4 March 2010.

⁹⁹ 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
118,609,620 estimated internet users in Africa for March 31, 2011
Copyright © 2008, Miniwatts Marketing Group

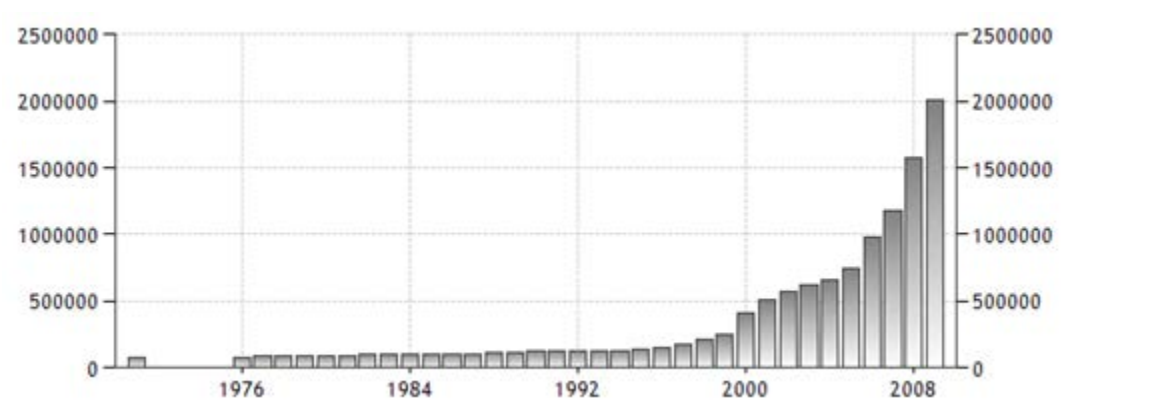
Depending on one’s definition of democracy, democratic participation has had a long history of constrained success in Africa. But it seems likely the waves of change, marshaled by innovation and Internet technology, are set to dominate the continent’s political and social state of affairs over the next decades. In the case of Zimbabwe, various websites, including swradioafrica.com, newzimbabwe.com, thezimbabwean.co.uk and 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.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ 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,

¹⁰⁰ 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, accessed 15 May 2010.
¹⁰¹ ‘Internet in Africa’, [web page] 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.¹⁰² This figure does not include Zimbabweans living abroad. Eight years before these statistics were released, the penetration rate was only 0.4 percent.¹⁰³ 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,¹⁰⁴ 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

¹⁰² 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.

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

¹⁰⁴ ‘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”.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶ 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”.¹⁰⁷ 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 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”.¹⁰⁸ 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.

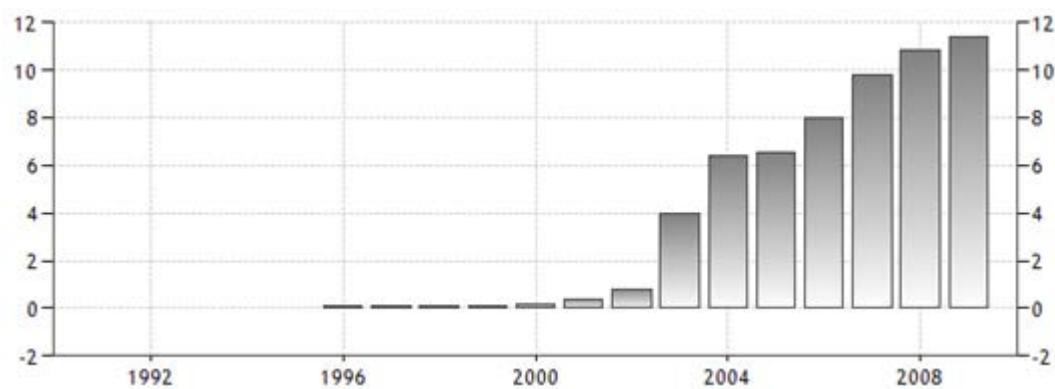
¹⁰⁵ Lance Gama, ‘Survey reveals increase in internet use in Zimbabwe’, SW Radio Africa [web page] (18 February 2011) <http://www.swradioafrica.com/news180211/survey180211.htm>, accessed on 1 June 2011.

¹⁰⁶ 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.

¹⁰⁷ 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.

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

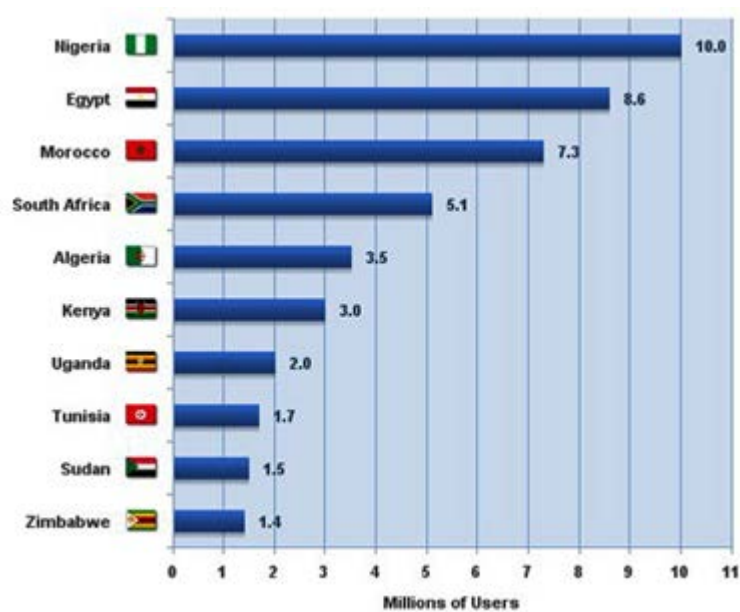
Figure 3.3: Internet users (per 100 people) in Zimbabwe



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.¹⁰⁹ 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, Copyright © 2008, Miniwatts Marketing Group*

¹⁰⁹ 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, 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”.¹¹⁰ 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”,¹¹¹ 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.¹¹² 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.¹¹³ 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

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

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

¹¹² 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.

¹¹³ 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.¹¹⁴ 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.

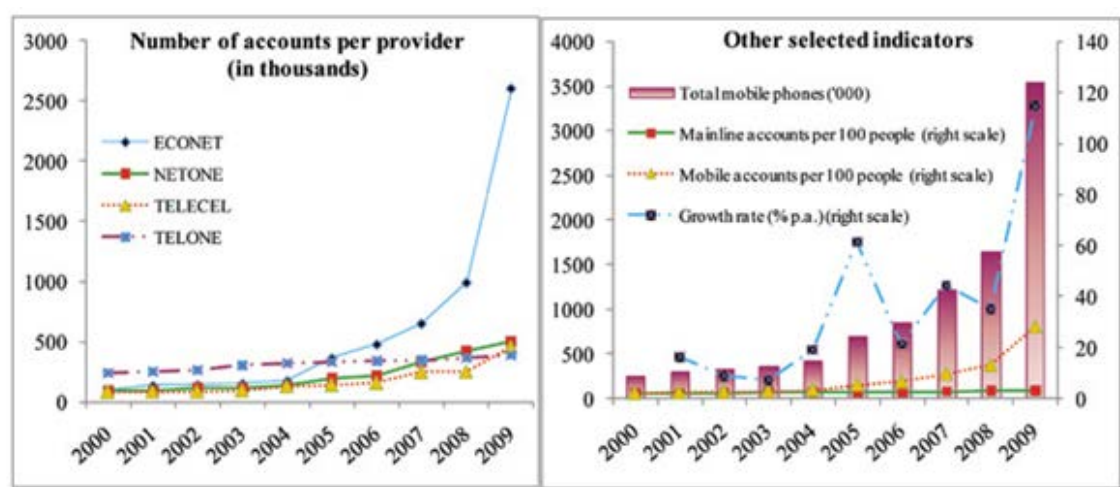
One of the key aims of this research was therefore to contribute to the overall understanding of the role of Internet in political and democratic participation with specific reference to Zimbabwe. The Internet, it can be argued, has forced dictators to rethink their positions, particularly in terms of 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.¹¹⁵ 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.

¹¹⁴ 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).

¹¹⁵ 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”.¹¹⁶

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”.¹¹⁷ 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”.¹¹⁸ 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

¹¹⁶ SW Africa’s Aims and Objectives, [web page] <http://www.swradioafrica.com/pages/mission020609.htm>, accessed 1 February 2011.
¹¹⁷ Shame Makoshori, ‘Zimbabwe: Sim Card Shocker’, Financial Gazette, [web page] (27 January 2011) <http://allafrica.com/stories/201101271074.html> Accessed 14 April 2011.
¹¹⁸ 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 2005.¹¹⁹ 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.¹²⁰ Gerald Horney has argued that the United States secretly supported the Smith regime.¹²¹ 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.¹²²

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

¹¹⁹ 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, accessed 1 August 2010.

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

¹²¹ 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.

¹²² 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,¹²³ 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.¹²⁴ 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”.¹²⁵ 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,

¹²³ Encyclopedia on Zimbabwe land reform, chronicling the important dates and events.

¹²⁴ Encyclopedia on Zimbabwe land reform chronicling the important dates and events.

¹²⁵ 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.¹²⁶ 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.¹²⁷ 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.¹²⁸

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.¹²⁹ 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 2000.¹³⁰ Some of Mugabe's

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

¹²⁷ 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.

¹²⁸ UNICEF country statistics http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zimbabwe_statistics.html#67, accessed 3 February 2011.

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

¹³⁰ '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, accessed 5 February 2011.

closest political allies, including those from the Ndebele tribe, have called Gukurahundi a “Western conspiracy”.¹³¹ 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”.¹³² 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”.¹³³

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.

¹³¹ 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.

¹³² ‘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

¹³³ 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”.¹³⁴ 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.¹³⁵ 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”.¹³⁶

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.

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

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

¹³⁶ 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.¹³⁷ 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”.¹³⁸ 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.¹³⁹

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”.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ ‘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.

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

¹³⁹ Constitution of Zimbabwe [web page] www.parlzim.gov.zw/cms/.../ZimbabweConstitution.pdf, accessed on 27 January 2010.

¹⁴⁰ 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”.¹⁴¹ 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”.¹⁴²

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”.¹⁴³ As such, publicly making statements that may cause “hatred, contempt or ridicule” of the president, or any “abusive, indecent, obscene or false statement”¹⁴⁴ 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

¹⁴¹ 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, accessed 4 February 2011.

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

¹⁴³ POSA 2007 [web page] http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa_amd_071214.pdf, accessed 11 August 2011.

¹⁴⁴ POSA 2007 [web page] http://www.kubatana.net/docs/legisl/posa_amd_071214.pdf, accessed 11 August 2011.

this law.¹⁴⁵ 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.¹⁴⁶ 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 1982.¹⁴⁷ 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.¹⁴⁸ 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.¹⁴⁹ The Trust in turn established Zimbabwe Newspapers, Ltd., which to this day is the chief

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

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

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

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

¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰ 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	Precentage
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

¹⁵⁰ 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.¹⁵¹ 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

¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵² 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”.¹⁵³

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”.¹⁵⁴ 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”.¹⁵⁵ A 2003 parliamentary investigation into the conduct of the ZBC concluded that opponents of the state and

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ 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).

¹⁵⁴ 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.

¹⁵⁵ 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.¹⁵⁶

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.¹⁵⁷ 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.¹⁵⁸ 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”.¹⁵⁹ Teshome’s assessment explains why real challenges to Mugabe’s power had been limited before the formation of MDC.

¹⁵⁶ ‘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.

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

¹⁵⁸ 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.

¹⁵⁹ 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.¹⁶⁰ 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

¹⁶⁰ 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.¹⁶¹

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

¹⁶¹ ‘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.¹⁶² 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

¹⁶² '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".¹⁶³ 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".¹⁶⁴ 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.¹⁶⁵ 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.¹⁶⁶ 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

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

¹⁶⁴ 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.

¹⁶⁵ 'List of Zimbabwean beneficiaries of the Fulbright programme', US embassy, Harare Zimbabwe [web page] http://harare.usembassy.gov/fulbright_zimbabwean_scholars.html, accessed 1 October 2011.

¹⁶⁶ '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.¹⁶⁷

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".¹⁶⁸

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,

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

¹⁶⁸ 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”.¹⁶⁹ Mathuthu, whose name appeared on the online of University of Glamorgan’s Bachelor of Laws graduates for 2008,¹⁷⁰ 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”.¹⁷¹ 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”.¹⁷²

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

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

¹⁷⁰ 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.

¹⁷¹ Zimbabwe: Mapping Exercise, International Organization for Migration 2006 report www.iomlondon.org/doc/mapping/IOM_ZIMBABWE_MR.pdf, accessed 16 February 2011.

¹⁷² 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”.¹⁷³ 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”.¹⁷⁴

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

¹⁷³ Mduduzi Mathuthu profile [web page] <http://km-kh.hi5.com/friend/p39716208--Mduduzi--html>, accessed 16 February 2011.
¹⁷⁴ 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.¹⁷⁵ 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.¹⁷⁶ 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".¹⁷⁷

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

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

¹⁷⁶ 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.

¹⁷⁷ 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”.¹⁷⁸

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.¹⁷⁹ 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”.¹⁸⁰ 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.¹⁸¹

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

¹⁷⁸ 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.

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

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

¹⁸¹ 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, Zimbabweanguardian.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?"¹⁸² 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

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