
Press Freedom, Professionalism and Proprietorship: Behind the Zimbabwean Media Divide

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Abstract

The interplay between press freedom, professionalism and proprietorship in Zimbabwe is the focus of this paper. Zimbabwean news media are increasingly becoming an antidemocratic force owing to the political, economic and professional problems that are continuously bedevilling the profession of journalism in the country. Public and private media owners have created 'regimes' that undermine professional and ethical roles of journalists. What is even more troubling is that the country's journalists have resigned to these developments, seeing them as 'normal', and finding it natural that they have to adjust their professional roles to suit the new environment. Whilst the journalist cannot take all the blame, the state and media proprietors are publicly mandated to promote and uphold the highest standards of professional journalism. This means that levels of remuneration and benefits must not be used to defeat professional journalism and ethics. However, my findings importantly also showed that far from being docile victims of the hostile media environment obtaining in the country, most Zimbabwean journalists have 'resisted', 'rebelled' and are developing sophisticated ways of negotiating the pressures exerted on them by private and public media proprietors. My argument is that free and open media practices are important for democratic processes to fully take root in Zimbabwe.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that journalists are re-trained when they join new newsrooms. On the face of it, there is nothing wrong with this practice. After all, whenever someone joins an organisation they would need to be schooled about its dos and don'ts! However, within Zimbabwean journalism I will argue that this practice goes much further than the usual re-orientation. It is turning out to be a thorough ideological repositioning of new recruits in the norms of the profession according to press proprietors' policies and politics.

My respondents, from the privately owned *The Daily Mirror* and *The Financial Gazette* informed me that when dealing with new recruits from *The Herald* and *The Standard*, their task involved eradicating 'entrenched habits' of writing one-sided news stories, even though the Zimbabwean scribes I interviewed saw no need for this kind of reorientation as their 'professional training' allowed for a more natural accommodation of the requirements of different news organisations. Respondents openly acknowledged conforming to both 'subtle' and 'direct' pressures exerted on their jobs by their immediate managers, who in turn took orders from the proprietors. It was seen as the natural thing to do if you want to keep up with 'the bills'.

Sociology of news debates about social control in the newsroom indicate that professionalism is negotiated by a complex set of factors. Warren Breed (1999, 79), for example, argues that journalists' conformity in newsrooms is not automatic for three reasons: Firstly, due to the existence of ethical journalistic norms to which journalists adhere. Secondly, newsroom subordinates are vested with more 'liberal' attitudes than the publisher, making conformity difficult. In most cases such subordinates can invoke journalistic norms to justify anti-policy writing. Thirdly, ethical taboos prevent publishers from openly commanding subordinates to follow laid down policy.

My aim in this paper is to establish the extent to which Zimbabwean journalists 'cooperate', 'resist' or 'conform' to existing newsroom policies. Using journalism's feedback, I examine the effect of proprietor-driven controls on press freedom, ethics and professionalism in Zimbabwe. Open and subtle pressures existed in both publicly and privately-owned newsrooms. Political and economic pressures were the most difficult to deal with. Zimbabwean journalists have had to change jobs in order to reject and resist 'unprofessional' newsroom policies. The scribes internalised, maintained and, at times, by-passed laid down newsroom policies. However, rebels did not always lose or change jobs. They developed sophisticated ways to manipulate or play along with the whims of their employers. This article contributes to the debate on press freedom in Zimbabwe by exposing external and internal threats to the profession of journalism.

The importance of journalism in African societies needs no introduction here. Needless to say, as everywhere else, African journalists perform a major role in terms of citizenship, entertainment and democratic processes in their countries (Ansah 1985). It is because of these crucial roles that journalism is meant to play, or actually plays, in society that we need to properly understand and question what it does. Within the sociology of journalism, the profession has largely been critiqued within two main categories namely, the competitive and dominance paradigms (McNair 1998). The competitive paradigm has been associated with a more normative approach, an idealistic concern with how the media ought to be.

The dominance paradigm, on the other hand, has been concerned with the gaps between the real and the ideal journalism. The distinction is analytical as the two paradigms overlap and in reality sociology of news accounts often combine these two paradigms (see, for instance Curran 2002).

On the one hand, the competitive paradigm triumphantly emphasizes a more liberal role of the media in modern politics and culture. It sees journalistic media in terms of sources of information and societal watchdogs. Crucially, within the competitive paradigm, the journalist is depicted as a servant of the public interest: 'Even those working in the commercial media sector are viewed as necessary, socially useful elements of a system which taken as a whole provides for genuine competition of thought, opinion and ideology' (McNair 1998, 21). On the other hand, the dominance paradigm depicts the reality of journalism that does not serve the public interest but rather the more 'dominant, private, selfish interests of a society stratified along lines of class, sex and ethnicity, to list three criteria of differential resource allocation familiar to all who live in capitalist systems' (McNair 1998, 22). This trajectory sees the news media as serving to reproduce and reinforce the existing ideological or value systems in a given society at a given time. Journalists are subject to control by political elites, media owners and their superiors. It recognises the constraints and limitations of journalism.

It is not surprising that the dominance paradigm depicts journalists as people who seek to please their masters in the newsrooms in which they work:

The newsman's source of rewards is located not among the readers, who are manifestly his clients, but among his colleagues and superiors. Instead of adhering to societal and professional ideals, he redefines his values to the more pragmatic level of the newsroom group. He thereby gains not only status reward, but also acceptance in a solidarity group engaged in interesting, varied, and sometimes important work. (Breed 1999, 84)

It is also the case that behind such rewards are realities of proprietorial controls 'exercised, as in any other capitalistic organisation, through the appointment of likeminded personnel in key management positions who are delegated to carry out boss's will' (McNair 1998, 107). A process of 'socialisation' ensures that journalist come to know what the media owners want them to do. Amongst other aspects, journalists are socialised into the particular policy of the news organisation for which they work (Breed 1999).

Outside these two paradigms is the world of journalists who see themselves as professionals. Journalists see their work as motivated by truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity and balance, all of which are vital in legitimating the journalistic text

(McNair 1998). Journalists independently define and describe what they actually do. For example, Gans' (1980, 234-5) study discovered that journalists see themselves as professionals working for a predominantly lay clientele, the audience who the journalists give what they need rather than what it wants. The study also noted that: 'The primary supplier of journalistic feedback is, of course, the person (or persons) who hold power over the journalists'. Crucially, when he asked journalists 'for whom they were writing, producing, or editing, they always began with their superiors, and some went no further.' The journalists' accounts also included 'the known audience' who, for the most part, turned out to be family members, neighbours and people journalists meet (Gans 1980, 235-6). These findings suggest that journalism as a profession can mean three things: Earning a living through journalism, achieving an independent practical competence in journalism and, thirdly having a certain social position, which, however, as seen from the account above is hard to achieve. Although journalists consider themselves professionals in all three senses, professionalism is by no means straightforward. Journalists nevertheless believe that they are professionals and such an idea is important in understanding how they negotiate control in their profession.

Journalists' professional norms often conflict with business norms, especially with proprietor and advertiser values. In his argument for the normalisation of the conflict between professional and commercial norms, Bantz (1999, 136) illustrates some of the usual outcomes in the conflict: The incompatibility of professional and business norms can produce a variety of effects: (1) workers leave the workplace, seeking work in organizations that seem to have developed norms more consistent with their training; (2) workers may alter their meanings and expectations to become more consistent with the workplace they currently are in, or (3) workers may make the conflict between professional norms and existent organizational norms (e.g. business norms) itself an expected occurrence –i.e. make conflict a 'norm'. He notes that the incompatibilities caused by professional norms and business norms result in conflict that can be seen as ordinary, routine and perhaps even valuable.

The conflict may serve to stimulate the organization toward competition with other news organizations: 'The professional norms associated with getting the story before the other station or paper does...generate competition between journalists and between their organizations' (Bantz 1999, 138). Although Bantz (1999, 139), below, is referring to television his understanding and characterisation of this conflict is equally applicable to newspapers:

This conflict is intensified by business norms that often characterize the competition between organizations as warfare (the prevalence of military and war metaphors in organizations has often been commented on...). In

addition to the professional competition between reporters, news competition may escalate into interorganizational conflict where the television stations compete for stories, news workers, prestige, and ratings as well as advertisers' dollars.

Not only is the competition between news organizations and between journalists defined as necessary and useful, but defining it as such creates the expectation that newswriters will seek to do better than their 'competitor-colleague and their organizations' (Bantz 1999, 139).

Professional Journalism in Zimbabwe

The debates above are background to the concerns of the current paper. Its mobilising point is the professional role of journalism in the Zimbabwean media. Ironically in July 2001, the Zimbabwe government's Department of Information and Publicity in the Office of the President and Cabinet commissioned a six-member committee, headed by Tafataona Mahoso, to inquire into *Media Professionalism and Ethics*. Needless to say the Mahoso *Inquiry* was met with resistance from some journalists who saw its role as no more than a mouthpiece for the Zimbabwean government. However, the point to be made here is that the committee found that 'no one [including the Zimbabwean government] was happy about the general situation and performance of the media in Zimbabwe in 2001'. This conclusion came after a 'broader outreach', involving media analysts, media critics, individual citizens, state departments, educational institutions, cultural groups, social care institutions, churches, political parties, non-governmental organisations, chiefs, traditional leaders, war veterans and other organised groups.

The current paper is unfortunately not based on such a 'broader outreach'. Its mobilizing point is the interplay between journalistic professionalism, press freedom and proprietorship in Zimbabwe. It discusses findings of interviews held with Zimbabwean journalists from December 2004 - February 2005. I asked the scribes to answer a set of related questions about professionalism, press freedom and proprietorship in Zimbabwe. I held the interviews in Harare and London. My research focused on journalists who had worked for more than one media house in Zimbabwe. Given the sensitive nature of the topic and the questions I was asking, I guaranteed them anonymity. Zimbabwe has a small media sector and this makes it easy to trace back statements to certain scribes. The respondents also feared retribution from their current and future employers. In Harare, I interviewed 5 respondents (1 female and 4 male) journalists and in this report I will refer to them as H1-5, in this case the letter 'H' standing for Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. The five respondents were working for *The Daily Mirror*, *The Herald*, *Voice of the People* (VOP) radio and *The Financial Gazette*. In London, I used findings

from the feedback I received in response to a message I posted on a list-serve of exiled Zimbabwean journalists, based in the UK. These respondents will be identified by the L1-5, 'L' stands for London, the British capital where the majority of the UK respondents were based. In both cases, I asked journalists to answer the following questions:

1. Why do Zimbabwean journalists change employers?
2. Do such changes affect their professionalism?
3. How does media ownership affect journalism in Zimbabwe?
4. Who is the best or worst employer and why?
5. What can be done to improve professionalism and press freedom in Zimbabwe?

While my Harare respondents felt uncomfortable with my use of a recorder, e-mail respondents seemed more comfortable and reflective, as shown by their detailed feedback. The e-mail method did not provide me with ample opportunity to ask follow-up questions.

Zimbabwean journalism is not unlike much of African journalism in the sense that as a form of communication it came to Africa 'first as a weapon of intervention' which was hostile to African communication systems and techniques and anything outside the colonial project (Media and Ethics 2002). However, after attaining independence most African states have, with varying degrees of success, attempted to stop this 'external interventionist function of journalism' by indigenising the practice and experience of journalism, to meet African needs. At independence, Zimbabwe inherited, a complex dual legacy, of democracy and authoritarianism. Rønning and Kupe (1998, 157) note that the Zimbabwean media sector 'carry contradictions which have roots in the colonial period'. They discussed this in terms of a more complex dual heritage made up of colonial and anti-colonial media, social and cultural institutions. Hence the contradictions between the authoritarian and democratic impulses in Zimbabwe are much more conspicuous than elsewhere.

The new government attempted and to a large degree succeeded in reforming the Zimbabwean media landscape after independence (Saunders 1984). The public media mandate was broadened from 1980 to especially include the previously disadvantaged rural poor. However, it is an open secret that Zimbabwean media has gone through a very difficult phase in recent years, particularly after the start of the land redistribution programme and in the period after 2000, when the labour-backed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed (see Waldahl 2004; Willems 2004). The Zimbabwean government felt desperate and isolated, particularly after it was slapped with 'targeted sanctions' by British, American and European governments. The news media was affected by these changes (Wadahl

2004). The post-2000 atmosphere presented the media with new political, economic and legislative challenges. The visibly cornered Zimbabwean government accused private and foreign media of writing falsehoods to tarnish its image at home and abroad. To a certain extent there was some truth in this accusation. Some public and private journalists were acting as foreign correspondents for Western media, some of which are traditionally hostile in their coverage of Africa. However, my overall observation here is that the Zimbabwean government overreacted. At the instigation of the government, a number of journalists were arrested, deported and (the BBC) banned. *The Daily News*, a new private daily that was critical of the government had its offices bombed in 2002. The state eventually shut down the paper ostensibly for failing to register with the Media and Information Commission (MIC). *The Daily News on Sunday* and *The Tribune* were also closed, leaving multitudes of journalists out of work. The difficult economic environment and tight regulatory environment in Zimbabwe at the start of the new millennium resulted in the closure of a number of titles, especially those seen to be too critical of the government. Journalists have been forced to find work in the remaining media houses. Others have changed careers completely opting for public relations rather than journalism.

Respondents sought jobs across the media divide, sometimes finding work in newsrooms with media policies that conflict with their own sense of professional norms, largely because of the need to earn 'decent salaries' and 'attractive benefits'. In some cases, decisions to change employers were motivated by journalists' need to follow 'professional principles and ethics'. However, better remuneration was the main reason why Zimbabwean journalists switched newsrooms. As one self-exiled Zimbabwean journalist put it: 'journalists are also human beings with families to feed!' (L1, February 2005). The search for better remuneration was the main reason given for changing employers. It was reported that some Zimbabwean journalists left journalism for good after landing high paying jobs in the public relations industry. Journalists changed employers because the training they received enabled them to work 'wherever they find [better paying] jobs'. For example, a male Zimbabwean journalist in his 30s, currently studying in the UK, explained:

Most employers are cognisant of the fact that most journalists from either side of the media divide (private and government) are capable of performing within set editorial policies. They have proved to be malleable and capable to adapt. Put simply, a journalist working for pro-government *The Herald* today can work and even succeed in the private media. Whether this is a compliment or a weakness is indeed debatable (E-mail interview with L2, February 2005)

The above response was typical of the taken-for-granted and almost naturalised explanation of what journalists actually do. Journalists were seen to be

professionally 'malleable' and capable of adapting to the environment in which they find themselves. H1, a male journalist in his 20s working for *The Herald* told me that journalists are like 'lawyers, they change their clients but remain professionals'. They tend to deal with whoever is paying them money, just like lawyers do (H1, January 2005).

To back up this point, L2 cited, as an example, the way in which a number of Zimbabwean journalists use state media as a training ground. Once they hone their skills they start looking for better paying jobs elsewhere: 'In fact, a majority of journalists who ended up working for the private media honed their writing skills at Herald House or indeed other government-controlled establishments, e.g. ZIANA [News agency], Community Newspapers Group, ZBH (formerly ZBC)'. Most Zimbabwean journalists are known to leave public media houses in search of greener pastures and rewards that include a company car. Similarly L1, a Zimbabwean journalist noted that:

Zimbabwean journalists change employers mainly because of poor pay packages. Journalists in Zimbabwe have for a long time been poorly paid and this has been the major cause of them moving from one media house to another rather than principle (L1, February 2005).

The move from one newsroom to another was not without an effect on professional journalism and freedom. According to L1: 'Such changes do affect their professionalism because, at the end of the day, with the polarity within the media in Zimbabwe at the moment, when you move from the state media to the independent media you have to do as the Romans do and vice versa'. Conformity to media policies was seen as inevitable and necessary. H2 revealed that when you move from one media house to another you lose the 'trust and confidence' of your sources. He gave an example of what happened when he moved from a private newspaper to *The Herald*: Job Sikhala, an opposition (MDC) politician who was friends with him, started distancing himself from him once he realised that he had changed employers. Except for 'openly accessible news sources' like Dr Lovemore Madhuku, a constitutional reform activist, a number of news sources in Zimbabwe restrict their interviews to publications of their liking and in most cases along political lines. Changing jobs usually meant that scribes lost contact with some of their established news sources.

The respondents cited cases where Zimbabwean journalists switched employers to safeguard their professional principles. Several names of principled journalists were put forward (Willie Musarurwa, Geoff Nyarota, Henry Muradzikwa, Matthew Takaona). They included Shepherd Mutamba who forfeited huge benefits when he resigned from the state-controlled ZBC citing political interference. In such cases, pay and working conditions in the work place may not necessarily be better in the

journalist's new workplace. The journalists sought work environments that agreed with their own professional principles. L2 noted that: 'Journalists may move to escape the shackles of partisan editorial policies. For example, some journalists who had served at *The Herald* left the newspaper, or its sister papers, because they wanted to exercise some form of journalistic freedom, even if such moves did not come with huge financial rewards'. Therefore, the aim in such cases will be to avoid principles that conflict with the journalists' own sense of professionalism:

It is common knowledge that papers under the Zimpapers stable are government mouthpieces. It is also common cause that you hardly find a code, which states that journalists should be propaganda agents for the government, but this is achieved through a process of socialisation in the newsroom. The way one's stories are treated help a reporter, especially new ones, form an impression of the editorial position or course of a publication. Such editorial policies are maintained by serious meddling by the government and its ministers. Editors are then reduced to pawns in political and power struggles rather than act independently as professionals with the freedom to make their own decisions (L2, February 2005).

L2 put forward a number names of Zimbabwean journalists were put forward as examples of the manner in which journalists can resist proprietors' pressures:

John Gambanga, for example, ended up assuming the position of news editor at *The Daily News* after resigning as editor of *The Manica Post*. (Zimpapers publication) The information minister derided him for abandoning a senior post for a junior post. It is also important to note that some if not, most of *The Daily News* staffers, had had a connection with Zimpapers before joining the paper (L2, February 2005).

In some cases 'principled' Zimbabwean journalists have sought work in more secure international news organisations, such as Reuters and Agence France Press (AFP). Some have opted to act as foreign correspondents for international newspapers and media organisations. Professional principles would then be exercised in news organisations that pay better, in hard currency. Zimbabwean journalists have also changed profession by relocating to other places. For example, a journalist relocating to Bulawayo will not likely avoid working for *The Chronicle*, the only daily newspaper in Bulawayo at the moment. Both government and private media business were seen as a problem for journalism. Asked which employer was good or bad and also to suggest reasons for their view, the journalists offered very conflicting accounts about their relationship with Zimbabwean newspaper proprietors.

H1, a journalist currently employed by the government-controlled *The Herald* newspaper preferred working for an institutional rather than an individually owned newspaper. Individual-owners, H2 also suggested, are usually (physically there) interfering with the operations more than an institutional employer would. However, in London, L1 mockingly suggested that:

The best employer so far has been Jonathan Moyo - in my own opinion - and the government because in the state media they use journalists to parrot their line and they do that without questioning and at the end of the day those who have done that have been rewarded accordingly. Journalists are human beings with families and extended families to support and they want good packages to be able to do their duties well (L1, February 2005).

This reinforces Gans' (1980) point that journalists write and act to please their superiors in the newsrooms more than anybody else. When the business side wants to save money by paying less (Breed 1999), the professional journalists maybe forced to move on, as evidenced by the following response from one of the former workers at *The Daily News*:

As a journalist who worked on an independent paper I can tell you that one of our major battles was why we were getting far less than those people who were not targeted by war vets, the government etc. that is why most people eventually left, esp. women, to join PR and so forth because the money and the risk did not tally (L1, February 2005).

Zimbabwean newspaper owners were depicted as vindictive and ruthless. Zimbabwean journalist were vulnerable to pressures exerted by their proprietors:

In some cases, people are, of course, forced to move on, through dismissal. Bornwell Chakaodza, editor of *The Standard*, was once the editor of *The Herald*. He was dismissed after straying from the 'recommended' editorial path of the paper. Geoff Nyarota was virtually dismissed from *The Chronicle* after exposing the Willowgate Scandal. He became the founding editor of *The Daily News*. Funny Mushava ended up editing *The Tribune*. Though owned by a Zanu PF MP, Kindness Paradza, it did not toe the government line all the time. The paper has since been shut and Paradza barred from participating in elections on a Zanu PF ticket. Some journalists are forced to move because of victimisation. Where journalists might not experience outright dismissal, employers have victimised such reporters, forcing them to change employers. (L2, February 2005). (Emphasis original)

Private proprietors also had their fair share of blame. Respondents felt that journalists moving to *The Independent* could not be expected to write anything sympathetic to the ruling Zanu PF government:

Almost always, it has to be critical' of the ruling party and government. Private media were considered as having a modicum of professionalism could be witnessed in the following ways: a) Private media hold the government to account, a role not performed by pro-government Zimpapers publications. b) Private media try to achieve some measure of balance but lack of co-operation from government makes this unachievable. c) Private media operate in environments, which are restrictive and largely hostile towards them. d) Journalists from the private media are often arrested and sometimes their establishments bombed (as happened to the premises of *The Daily News* in 2002) (L2, February 2005).

Respondents, however, lamented the lack of balance and fairness in private media news coverage. When it comes to the government, they use the 'the-nothing-can-ever-come-out-of-this-wretched government attitude. It is the behaviour of the aggrieved' (L2, February 2005). The private media, it could have been added, failed to report on corporate abuses for fear of losing advertising income. As is noted by James Curran, a British media historian: 'the market can give rise not to independent watchdogs serving the public interest but to corporate mercenaries which adjust their critical scrutiny to suit their private purpose' (2002, 221). In Zimbabwe, three particular cases were advanced to illustrate how public and private proprietors manipulate journalism: Firstly when, in 2002, Zimbabwean telecommunications tycoon, Strive Masiyiwa obtained 60 percent shareholding at ANZ, he instituted far reaching editorial changes. Masiyiwa appointed his own man, Sipepa Nkomo, as Chief Executive. Geoffrey Nyarota was fired soon after, and was replaced by Francis Mdhlongwa who, in turn, crippled *The Financial Gazette* by luring most of his former subordinates.

The second case cited by Zimbabwean journalists is that of Trevor Ncube, a prominent Zimbabwean journalist and publisher, who initiated major editorial changes when he became the majority shareholder of *The Standard* and *The Independent* (and now the South African *The Mail and Guardian*). Before him, the critical editorial stance of these newspapers was interpreted along racial lines. It was felt that even now, criticism of the government by the three newspapers has assumed tribal dimensions, considering that Ncube is originally from the 'aggrieved' Ndebele tribe (L2). The third case involves *The Financial Gazette*, Zimbabwe's leading financial weekly. Gideon Gono, the current Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) Governor, is reported to have an interest in *The Financial Gazette*. Gono's former spokesman, Sunsleey Chamunorwa, is now editor-in-chief of the newspaper and during his tenure 'the newspaper has assumed a pro-RBZ stance and singing praises of reforms instituted by the bank. The paper is seen to have 'lost the sharp edge it had in the past'. The three cases were put forward as strong evidence that proprietors are tweaking the editorial policies in the newsrooms.

The respondents believed that: 'Individual or private proprietors at times tend to be very dictatorial. Everything that goes into the paper has to bear their mark and stifles the capacity in you as an individual... We have learnt to tolerate this because of the need to keep our jobs' (H2). A sole newspaper owner can dominate his newsroom. Institutional owners were at times seen to be better, secure and more resourced. Individual owners would simply show you the door if a salary increase was negotiated whereas workers at government parastatals can afford to strike. In this regard in the UK media, it has been found that:

The political culture of liberal democracies is very alert to the threat posed by governments to the freedom of public media, but is much less concerned about the threat posed by shareholders to the freedom of the private media. Government ministers are attacked if they seek to dictate the contents of public television, yet proprietors are not exposed to equivalent criticism if they seek to determine the editorial line of their media properties (Curran 2002, 224).

In Zimbabwe, there is a tendency to believe that private media owners are more liberal and hold the public interest at heart. Although this is understandable given that the private media serve as an important counterbalance to state-controlled media, there is need to be equally vigilant of the controls coming from private media owners in Zimbabwe.

The above finding corroborates the view that Zimbabwean journalists are 'often coerced to change their stories and suppress or fabricate "facts" in their news stories. In private and public newsrooms it is also the case that editors 'may arbitrarily rewrite reporters' stories and delete crucial facts without telling the reporter, and yet still attach the reporter's by-line to the now unrecognisable product' (*Media Professionalism and Ethics* 2002, xii). Needless to say such practices undermine professionalism and freedom of the news media. Without adequate job security, Zimbabwean journalists tend to follow the whims of the editors, who themselves are at the mercy of media proprietors.

Media watchdogs offer little or no protection, especially to journalists harassed by private media. The journalists' unions or laws in the country offered inadequate protection to Zimbabwean journalists:

In most cases there is hardly any help that you get besides shouting from ZUJ [Zimbabwe Union of Journalist] and MISA [Media Institute of Southern Africa]. They will be quoted as saying 'we condemn in the strongest terms, but the truth will be that you be fired! A good example is when the ZUJ president Matthew Takaona was harassed by his employers for representing *The Daily News* workers, none stood up for him. Hardly

anything happened. If people cannot support the president, what of lower level members of ZUJ!' (H3, January 2005).

MISA was seen as better and more helpful. It provided H2 with a lawyer when he was arrested. The respondents believed that the environment meant that proprietors (and the government) were more powerful actors. A Zimbabwean journalist defined professional journalism in terms of 'packaging news in observance of such tenets as accuracy, fairness, balance and so on' (L2, February 2005). Another saw 'problems with the notion of objectivity because in news there are always interests' (H2, January 2005). Professionalism was seen to operate at various levels and to be influenced by several factors that included training, news sources, proprietors and the broader environment.

The state was seen as the biggest threat to press freedom and professionalism. Zimbabwean journalists who work in state-controlled media organisations were seen to be lacking professionalism because they do practice 'fair journalism...reporters in these institutions are in essence, willing slaves or pawns' in games played by proprietors. The then minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo was described as the 'worst employer' given the way he crafted stringent media laws and interfered with newsroom decisions. The journalists were aware of 'censorship' in newsroom. The profession taught them to 'conform' with their newsroom superiors when they sensed 'subtle' pressure from editors. H2 noted that self-censorship was a regular and normal practice in Zimbabwean newsrooms: 'As a journalist one would know when to do what when confronted with specific situations'. Employees internalized the values of their employers. They cooperated rather than risk a fall out with the proprietor.

In response to my question about what needs to be done to create press freedom and more professionalism, the respondents advocated a collective form of action based on a genuine need to resolve problems common to the profession. For example:

Professionalism and press freedom can only be improved in Zimbabwe if the journalists suddenly woke up and realised that there was need for them to work together and fight for their rights together without being divided by politicians. As it is we cannot fight for one cause with such major disparities in terms of salaries, land etc and also for as long as journalists from the different media stables look at each other as enemies and not competitors. The journalists can only take on the government if they are united. As of now, it is impossible and that is why Jonathan Moyo and the government and even the private media can fire journalists willy-nilly and get away with it - it is because our efforts are so disjointed (L1, February 2005).

In the end, both private and public media were perceived to be enemies of professionalism and press freedom. Only by achieving a common strategy could journalists negotiate the professional hazards that they faced. Respondents felt that Zimbabwean journalism could re-attain its professional status by fighting for legal reform, government withdrawal from the business of newspapers and for better training of journalists.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to go beyond the existing public and private media divide in Zimbabwe by exploring the interplay between press freedom, professionalism and proprietorship in journalism. Although the analysis was based on interviews with a few journalists, it nonetheless sheds light on the pressures and general challenges being faced by Zimbabwean journalists. Both the state-controlled and privately-owned media presented journalists with constrained work environments. Independent investigative journalism was next to impossible. In the main, for the Zimbabwean journalist it seemed that: 'The most effective way to avoid pressure is to cooperate with those who can exert it; and journalists often cooperate with the powerful, even if not solely to ward off pressure' (Gans 1980, 270). The market, as Curran (2002, 225) reminds us, does not 'guarantee critical scrutiny of either public or private power'. Similarly, the state also subjects both market and public media to 'compromising restraint'. In both cases, professionalism, that is journalism in the service of the public interest, is seriously undermined. Zimbabwean journalists need to be more aware of these constraints and develop more effective ways of managing conflict between their professional norms and proprietor-driven pressures.

Lastly, given the plethora of challenges faced by Zimbabwean journalists (especially, low pay, dismissals and victimisation), it is very difficult for them, and the media on the whole, to play meaningful roles in the country's democratic process. Ironically, it was Jonathan Moyo (1993, 13), before he became a Zimbabwean cabinet minister responsible for information, who recognised that 'democracy cannot exist in an environment where violence and fear dominate the political process' and that something ought to be done to rectify this. Zimbabwe is a democratising country where the media have a crucial role to play at every stage. Media proprietors need to safeguard professional journalism and press freedom in by helping create an enabling environment. Zimbabwe media owners, both public and private, need to offer journalists a secure and stable atmosphere that engenders the development of professional journalism and democracy in Zimbabwe. Without 'media democracy' there cannot be 'democracy' in Zimbabwe. Media and democracy are not, and cannot be mutually exclusive.

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