
Editorial

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This special volume is devoted to a selection of papers from the many that were presented at the '*Reporting Zimbabwe: Before and After 2000 Conference*' held on 25th February 2005 at London's Stanhope Centre, as part of the Africa Media Series organized by the University of Westminster's Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI). The appetite for Zimbabwean news is demonstrated by, for example, evidence presented at the conference which showed that of 48 documentaries shown on BBC from November 2000 to January 2004, Zimbabwe received the second most attention, with 7 documentaries. Zimbabwe came after the Israel/Palestine conflict which was covered by 16 documentaries. Zimbabwe came to dominate headlines in various UK and global media. Zimbabwe had become such major global news story at the start of the new millennium, 1999-2005. The idea was to critically evaluate and investigate the ways in which local and global mass media were depicting the events in troubled Zimbabwe, a former British colony that obtained independence in 1980. Attended by over 100 delegates from different countries and continents, the conference succeeded in bringing together critical interdisciplinary analyses of the role of the mass media in the ongoing democratic and social-justice struggles in today's Zimbabwe. The various papers presented at the conference, and those in this volume, dealt with diverse themes ranging from the rise of patriotic journalism in Zimbabwe and media freedom struggles to the definition, character and representation of the 'land issue', and more broadly the 'Zimbabwe crisis' in African and international media. The participants included British and Zimbabwean politicians, government officials, students, journalists, academics, activists, civic groups and members of the Britain-Zimbabwe Society (BZS).

The conference was held a month before the March 2005 parliamentary elections in Zimbabwe, at a time of heightened media attention on Zimbabwe and in the background of what has generally been termed the 'Zimbabwe crisis'. Zimbabwe was by any measure facing an acute crisis that had, especially from 1999-2005, impacted on the various spheres of life in the country. That the country was facing mammoth 'challenges' or 'crises' seemed indisputable at the time of the conference. What probably was most debateable from the viewpoint of the conference was the role of the mass media in the Zimbabwe crisis, before and after

2000. The conference sought a broad debate about Zimbabwe, its politicians and events taking place in the country. As the convener, CAMRI was fully aware that events in Zimbabwe were not necessarily haphazard or meaningless. From an academic point of view there were clear paradoxes. For example, on the one hand, the country's leader Mugabe is the man who helped wrestle political control from a small white community and put the country on a relatively stable course, in the process winning many international awards for his leadership. He is also the man who helped bring to an end the deadly civil war in Mozambique and years of apartheid in South Africa. How, then did Mugabe's government's seizure of almost all white-owned commercial land, with the stated aim of benefiting black farmers trigger 'Zimbabwe's plunge'? On the other hand, Mugabe is at the head of a government that has dealt with the media in a heavy handed manner. For example, the combined evidence in the papers in this volume shows worrying incidents and instances of media harassment and intimidation of journalists in Zimbabwe under the leadership of Mugabe. The complexities of Zimbabwe deny simple explanation of Mugabe or events in the country. The conference, therefore, intentionally brought together participants with different political, theoretical and disciplinary perspectives on what was taking place in an attempt to avoid simplifications and to open wider debate about the role of the mass media in the 'Zimbabwe crisis' – however defined.

Opening the conference, Colin Sparks, the Director of CAMRI, described its objective as not to simply provide a forum to debate national and international media coverage of Zimbabwe. It did not just aim to offer open and constructive debate on Zimbabwe. Rather it was conceived out of a desire to de-Westernise research in the field of media and communications. Zimbabwe offered a popular case study that could be used by academics to question and develop interdisciplinary theories and examples in the field of media and communications. I argue that the presenters, as epitomised by the papers selected for this volume, succeeded in doing exactly that. The authors were asked to improve their conference papers prior to publication. The volume is divided into two. The first has a set of papers examining the coverage of Zimbabwe by African media, whilst the papers in the second part critically analyse the coverage of Zimbabwe abroad, particularly in the Norwegian and British media. All of the papers try to deal with the complexities of the 'Zimbabwe crisis' at home and abroad. The overall theme is the politics of mass media representation of, on the one hand the processes leading to the growing democratic deficit in Zimbabwe and on the other hand, for reasons that were both internal and external to the mass media, the bigoted reporting of Zimbabwe in the local and global mass media. The authors, I believe, effectively debate the difficult, partisan, instrumental and complex roles played by the mass media in covering Zimbabwe before and after 2000.

The conference, and indeed this volume, opened with Terence Ranger's keynote paper, which examines 'The Rise of Patriotic Journalism in Zimbabwe and its Possible Implications'. In the mould of his earlier work on 'patriotic history', he critically evaluates Mugabe's ruling party's narrowed-down version of Zimbabwean journalism which criminalises different and oppositional viewpoints. His aim is not to advocate the opposite - unpatriotic history or unpatriotic journalism. He deplores how the current Zimbabwean government through its media is oversimplifying national history through the language of 'patriots' and 'sell-outs'. The problem is that in such a context, difference is neither tolerated nor appreciated. Dialogue and debated become exceptions. Ranger specifically is against an extreme version of patriotic journalism that took place in Zimbabwe from 2000-2005, under Jonathan Moyo, after he was installed as the Minister of Information: "Patriotic journalism' is what had been practiced during the regime of Jonathan Moyo. This kind of history and this kind of journalism is narrow and divisive – a substitute for ideology and analysis'. Ranger argues that journalism is and has always been about selection and positioning. The fact that there is no 'perfect' form of journalism does not mean that Zimbabweans should tolerate 'hate' journalism. Zimbabweans must strive for a broader, reflective, balanced and more inclusive form of journalism.

The effects of extreme patriotism in the Zimbabwean mass media have been all too evident in the quality of mass media coverage of recent elections in Zimbabwe. Ragnar Waldahl's 'Political journalism the Zimbabwean way: Experiences from the 2000 election campaign' evaluates media coverage of a parliamentary election campaign in which the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) parties fought against each other. The expectation then was that the election was going to be free and fair, and that the media would give even coverage to both parties. His analysis spans the period from the referendum on the new draft constitution in mid-February to one week after the election on 24 and 25 June 2000. He analyses *News@eight*, the main TV news programme from the state monopoly Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), as well as the main newspapers in Zimbabwe. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of all relevant items in ZBC's *News@eight*, and of election-related articles in public and privately-owned newspapers. The campaign strategies put forward by two main opponents and their media allies led to an election campaign marked by two different agendas. The Zimbabwean voters were thus given a broader set of criteria on which to base their choice between the parties, although the campaign itself had resulted in a situation where the two parties did not in any real sense confront each other, and where the main politicians from the two parties did not debate with each other either in the media or any other public space.

In 'Media Games and Shifting of Spaces for Political Communication in Zimbabwe' Eric Mazango evaluates what he termed the "media games" that have been played to restrain growing political opposition, and to maintain ZANU supremacy in Zimbabwe. His focuses on specific linkages between media control, politics and elections in the country and examines how this undermines democracy. More interestingly, the games, actors and politics of communication regulation in Zimbabwe are analysed in terms of a dynamic model of regulation that sees states responding to complex information flows. Firstly, by protecting their own information spaces and, secondly, by attempting to influence or alter media structures and media impacts outside their borders. Mazango, like Ranger above, compares the current dispensation in Zimbabwe to what obtained in the colonial era. This history of government containment of a critical media laid the foundation for post-independence control of freedom of expression, something that has proved an effective instrument for blocking the envisaged transition to an alternative democracy today. Since 2000, new restrictive laws have shut down four newspapers and several media workers have been arrested, deported or detained for various transgressions. This can be explained by the way the state chose to respond to perceived 'hostility' in national and international media's coverage of the 'Zimbabwean crisis'. A large part of the international community/media perceived the 'Zimbabwe crisis' in terms of human rights abuses and poor governance. The Zimbabwean government differed.

Under Jonathan Moyo, then a cabinet Minister responsible of the Ministry of Information and Publicity, the state responded to the "negative publicity" which was proving to be damaging to the country. The Zimbabwe government attempted to influence or alter media structures by enacting a battery of laws that have been used to reorganise the media, setting up of a Media Ethics Committee in 2002 to investigate the rating of media products and practitioners by the public and the setting up of a Media and Information Commission (MIC) to register all media organisations and journalists. The MIC banned *The Daily News* in 2003. Extralegal tactics included bombing of presses, deportation of foreign journalists and the arrests of local ones. Outside its borders, the Zimbabwean government put its public broadcaster, the ZBC, on the regional direct to home satellite bouquet and has also established a joint project with Namibia and Tanzania to launch a regional satellite station. Both Mazango and Waldahl conclude that the ability to control the media has played a crucial role in maintaining ZANU-PF power in Zimbabwe.

My contribution, "Press freedom, Professionalism and Proprietorship: Behind the Zimbabwean Media Divide", examines the practice and professional role of journalists in Zimbabwe. Amongst other things, I discuss accounts of newsroom

control and responses from Zimbabwean journalists. Sociology of news debates about social control in the newsroom indicate that professionalism is negotiated by a complex set of factors. I investigate how journalists 'cooperated', 'resisted' or 'conformed' to existing newsroom policies in Zimbabwe and also the interplay between press freedom, professionalism and proprietorship in Zimbabwe. Like Mazango, I seek to unpick the manner in which the domestic media was becoming a crucial setting and a tool for internal and external power struggles. I illustrate how different media ownerships result in different types and levels of control. Zimbabwean newsrooms emerge as theatres for political, economic and professional fights among journalists. The public and private media owners in Zimbabwe, both knowingly and unknowingly, stifle professional and ethical roles of Zimbabwean journalists. Self-censorship and conformity are the norm. My conclusions, albeit based on a limited number of interviews with Zimbabwean journalists, show that the journalists were not enjoying media freedom as is expected in a democracy because of problems internal and external to their profession. The presentation concludes that, given the plethora of challenges faced by Zimbabwean journalists (low pay, dismissals and victimisation), it is very difficult for them and their profession to play a meaningful role in the country's democratic processes. If Zimbabwean journalists prove to be 'biased' or 'extremely patriotic' because of the political and economic constraints in which they are embedded, how does one expect foreign journalists to report Zimbabwe?

Nkosinathi Ndlela's presentation, 'The African Paradigm: The coverage of the Zimbabwean crisis in the Norwegian media' is the first of the second set of papers that critically analyse the coverage of Zimbabwe abroad. Ndlela evaluates the problematic associated with coverage of the 'Zimbabwean crisis' in three Norwegian mainstream newspapers, *Aftenposten*, *VG* and *Dagbladet*, in the period 2000-2004. The study qualitatively discusses representations and interpretations of the 'Zimbabwe crisis'. The sources of the news stories are critiqued. He questions whether the coverage provided any meaningful insights into the political and historical forces in Zimbabwe. He investigates 'bias' in the coverage given to Zimbabwe, as manifested through the selection of sources and in the focusing of the narrative devices of frames in the stories. The prime device through which representations of Africa have been circulated in the Western media is 'stereotyping'. News of the Zimbabwean crisis filtered into the Norwegian mainstream media mainly through secondary sources, such as international news agencies, freelancers and non-governmental organisations. News agencies were primarily driven by the desire to retail their stories and to disseminate that which sells easily. The Norwegian media reduced the complex Zimbabwean issue into a 'typical' African story of tragedy and despair, which in itself is bad for the Norwegian public and a disadvantage to Africa. If there was an element of bias in

the Norwegian media, how then did media in Britain, a former colonial power cover events in Zimbabwe?

Unlike most other Western countries, such as Norway discussed above, the British press have always maintained long-term correspondents in Zimbabwe. This is one of the reasons why Zimbabwe, a former colony, remains a major topic in the British media. Wendy Willems' "Remnants of Empire? British Media Reporting on Zimbabwe" critically discusses how Zimbabwe was represented in the British media. She discovers that even *Hello!* magazine devoted a five-page special to Zimbabwe, mainly reporting the death of David Stevens, a Zimbabwean white farmer. Her work involves interviews with journalists, farmers' organisations, analysis of pictures, documents and news stories. In a way similar to Ndlela's presentation above, she discovers that the British media has sought to frame recent events in Zimbabwe in terms of racial conflict between black and white. Simplification, personalisation, marginalisation and ethnicisation in British news reports on Zimbabwe have clouded the coverage of the issues involved. More importantly, the skewed reporting has played into the hands of the Zimbabwean government, enabling it to present and frame the crisis in Zimbabwe as a bilateral disagreement over land with former imperial power Britain. The stance has won a significant amount of solidarity and support from neighbouring countries and black movements in the Diaspora. Willems' contribution effectively illustrated the local-global dynamic of the Zimbabwe story, showing how this has been reduced to an international neo-colonial war of signs and images. While most British and other foreign journalists have been deported and banned from reporting from Zimbabwe, locals have moved to fill the gap by wiring sellable stories about Zimbabwe, which then invites the ire of the state. However, until the Conference, the story of exactly why and how local newspapers and journalists came to be banned in Zimbabwe had yet to be told. Dumisani Moyo's presentation, discussed below, controversially shows how one of the daily papers may have 'contributed' to its own closure.

On 12 September 2003, police in Harare stormed the offices of *The Daily News* and shut the newspaper, acting on a Supreme Court ruling issued on the previous day, declared that the paper was operating outside the law. Dumisani Moyo's paper, "The 'independent' Press and the Fight for Democracy in Zimbabwe: A critical analysis of the banned *Daily News*" investigates the circumstances surrounding the closure of *The Daily News*. Although the paper was ostensibly banned for refusing to register with the government appointed Media Information Committee (MIC), as required by the law, to a great degree and in various ways it also contributed to its own closure, not least because of the hidden motives and ineptitude of its management. Despite an immense contribution to opening up the democratic

space in Zimbabwe, *The Daily News* had, right from the beginning, inherent problems that conspired with the political environment lead to its closure in 2003. The banning of *The Daily News* triggered local and worldwide condemnation of the Zimbabwe government, but close analysis shows the critics' tendency to ignore both the complexity of the issue and the context of the paper's closure. Moyo broadens his arguments by discussing foreign ownership and foreign funding of media in developing countries. Altogether it shows that the independent press in Africa has the mistaken tendency to equate press freedom with unrelenting criticism of the government, muckraking, or being in the service of the state itself.

Suzanne Franks' "Reporting Africa: Problems and Perspectives" is a good basis for revisiting themes in this volume. She, for example, argues that although 2005 is billed as Africa's year, politicians' and media's attitudes have not changed. The papers in this volume show that media coverage of the 'Zimbabwe crisis' is far from satisfactory. Stereotypes, oversimplifications and ignorance abound in local and global media accounts of Zimbabwe and, as Franks' illustrates, this applies to Africa as a whole. Issues are avoided or doctored to suit certain interests. Important events that could benefit Africa, including the G8 Summit hosted by Britain in July 2005 and the September 2005 UN Millennium Summit have had little result, nor have they been reported on critically. The stereotypes of a continent in despair and hopelessness are far more attractive to the media, as evidenced by the papers presented at the conference. The "Zimbabwe crisis" in the mass media was a story about Africa itself. As Franks insightfully concluded in her presentation, if 2005 is to bring about lasting transformation in Africa, then the media will have to be embedded in that change. If politicians are seeking to reinvent our perceptions of Africa, and the way that the West engages with it, then media have a pivotal role in that process. Altogether, the papers bring a new case study to the field of media and communications, showing how local and global mass media mediate realities in a troubled, newly established African democracy.